

How To Build The Ultimate Go-To-Market Strategy For Your App



Whether you're the founder of a startup or part of a large enterprise, an app idea will only go so far. The majority of apps fail, regardless of the type of app, the company that releases it, or how good the idea behind it is. In fact, Gartner predicts that *less than 1% of consumer mobile apps will be considered a financial success by their developers through 2018.*

The reasons for failure vary, but somewhere along the way there are typically mistakes in the market strategy behind the app. Sometimes the failure begins with a lack of product definition or market viability; sometimes there is a lack of a clear business, monetization or marketing strategy; other times there isn't a strong product release plan in place.

This whitepaper will discuss the fundamentals of a go-to-market strategy for your mobile app, so you can avoid common failures and best set yourself up for success in the competitive app ecosystem. It will dive into four important areas that are essential facets in the process of building and releasing an app: product discovery; defining a monetization and business plan; user acquisition and marketing strategy; and finally, going to market.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- *How to define your product, your users, and market viability to ensure your product can solve user pain points and has an opportunity in the market*
- *Choosing a monetization/business strategy that matches your business objectives and the type of product you are releasing*
- *Marketing and user acquisition strategies to generate interest and drive downloads*
- *Determining the best launch strategy to bring your product to market*

Section 1: Product Discovery

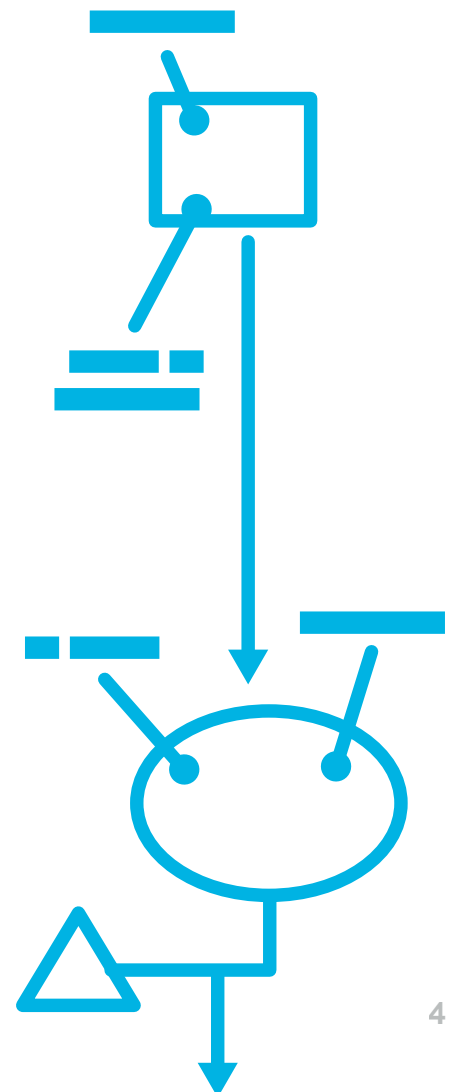
Many apps are bound to fail from the get-go due to a fundamental lack of product direction. Often, people don't ask the right questions or take the time to truly consider the viability of the product itself. Product discovery, while it doesn't guarantee a product will enjoy success in the market, does set the basis for the product to be impactful. It tackles essential questions including the why, the what, the how, and the when.

Is there an opportunity in the market?

This would seem obvious, but you may be surprised how many times a project is given the green light without market viability being considered. If there is no desire or need for the product, nobody will use it.

Why are you building the product?

This question should be central to your project, expressing the purpose and goal of your app. What is the problem (or problems) you are trying to fix? What is the value you are adding for potential users? What are your short-term goals? What are your long-term goals? Just because you have an idea for an app that you think is good, doesn't mean it is.



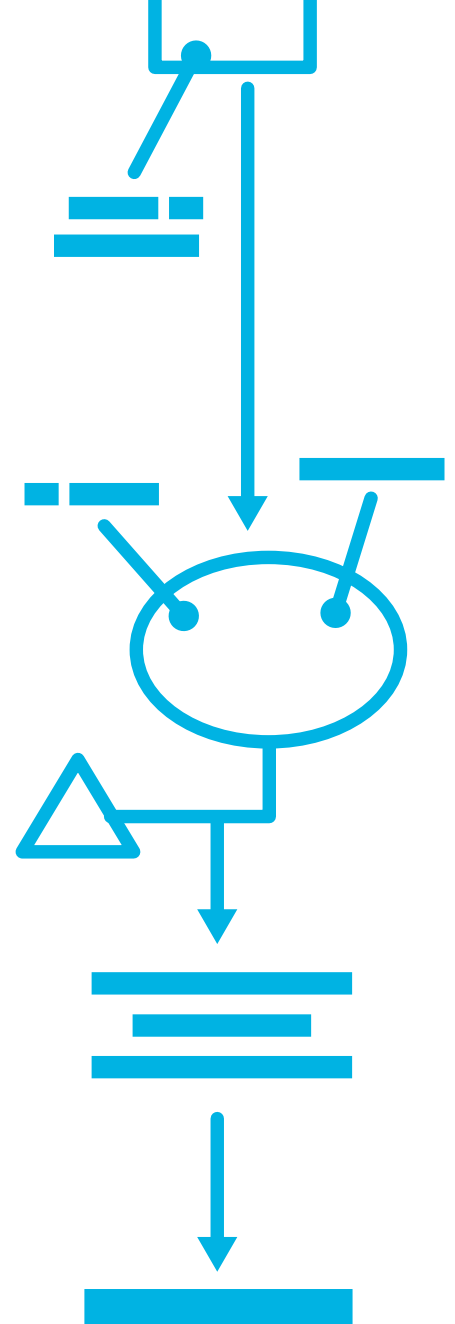
Who are you building it for?

Products are built for users, and thus product direction should be driven by understanding their needs and motivations. User personas should be created in order to understand who you are building your product for, including their demographic information, age, desires, pain points, needs, and more. It is also important to map the customer journey so you can determine how users might interact in order to offer the optimal user experience.

Who are your competitors?

It's important to research competition in the market and gain a thorough understanding of your competitors' products. What have they done right? Where are their weaknesses? How will your solution be different and add value to potential users? You should be able to clearly identify and communicate your unique value proposition.

Ideally, you want to include key stakeholders, the product owner, designer, developer, customer, and business expert; with experts from a variety of disciplines, you are able to better understand what is feasible and what is not when it comes to developing the product. At the conclusion of product discovery, you should understand the user needs, projects goals, project scope, expected outcomes, and the resources and budget needed for development.



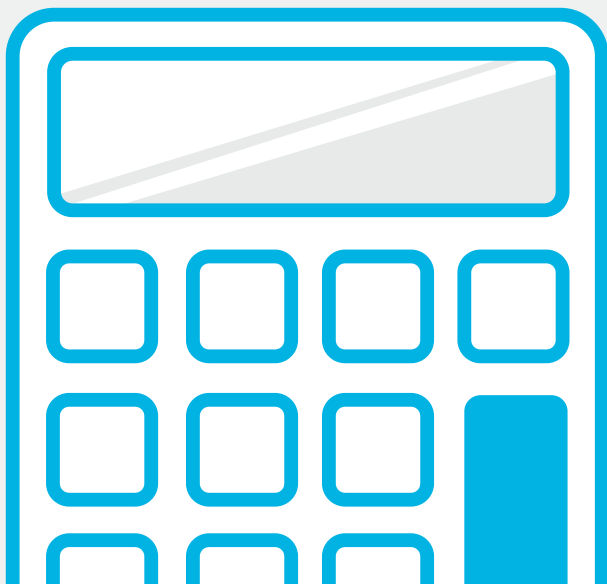
Section 2: Defining a Monetization & Business Plan

There are a variety of monetization strategies that exist in the app ecosystem; the right route depends on the nature of the app, the goals and expected outcomes, and a variety of other factors. There will be a much different approach if the product is meant to be the main source of revenue, versus a product that provides an ancillary service to another service or product and isn't meant to directly generate revenue (for example, an appointment booking app for a field service company).

Main Revenue Source

If the product is a standalone revenue generation source, a solid app monetization strategy is a necessity. The reality of the app market is that users have a ton of choice, and the majority of apps don't make a lot of money: in fact, 19% of mobile apps don't generate any revenue whatsoever, and more than half of mobile apps are below the "app poverty line," generating less than \$500 in monthly revenue. Monetization is an important part of market strategy and should not be an afterthought.

Here are the most common app monetization strategies and how to determine which model will best suit your app.



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Advertising Based

Free download of the app with advertising the method of revenue generation. Often used in a mixed monetization model.

Works best when:

- *You don't plan to monetize directly from users*
- *In-app purchases would interrupt user experience or not fit organically within the app*
- *The nature of your app results in frequent visits, long sessions*
- *You collect demographic & behavioral data*

Paid Download

Users pay a one-time fee for downloading the product. This model can be challenging because it's difficult to convince users to pay without having tried the product, especially with so many free options available.

Works best when:

- *You have a strong marketing & PR presence*
- *The app offers added value over free, similar options*
- *Value is commensurate with price*
- *You want to tie revenue directly to downloads*

In-App Purchases

Users purchase items within the app, whether physical or virtual in nature (for example, extra lives in games or items from retail apps).

Works best when:

- *You have a retail, gaming, or services app*
- *Can profit despite app store fees*
- *In-app purchases add real value to users*
- *User experience is good enough to encourage repeat use even without purchases*

Freemium

The freemium model offers free downloads of the app that include additional premium features that users have to pay for to access. This model works on the ability to attract free users, and entice them enough that they are willing to pay to access premium features.

Works best when:

- *You want mixed revenue from ads and users*
- *Premium features add notable value to users*
- *Free version is enticing enough to attract users and encourage purchase of extra features*
- *Large user base/long app sessions*

Subscription

Subscription focuses on gating access, but to content rather than features. Examples include apps like Netflix or Spotify.

Works best when:

- *Your app is content driven (news, music, video, etc.)*
- *The nature of the app encourages frequent, repeat use*

Ancillary Product

If the purpose of the product is to support another product or facilitate a service rather than generate revenue, your approach will be vastly different. In this type of situation, you are going to focus on aligning your app with business objectives rather than monetization of the app itself. Namely, how does the application fit within your larger business plan or organizational objectives? The purpose is not to directly generate revenue, but rather to support key revenue generation activities.



Section 3: Marketing & User Acquisition

A marketing and user acquisition plan for an application can be extremely varied and complex. For the purposes of this whitepaper, we will focus on best practices on a high level. Much like your monetization/business plan, your user acquisition strategy is going to differ based on the nature of your application, your target market, and many other factors. The appointment booking app example we used above, for instance, would target existing customers; a new app expected to generate revenue would require a vastly different approach.

Here are some of the areas you need to consider when drafting an app marketing and user acquisition strategy; some are better suited for hard launches, but many can be used for soft launches as well (more on this in the next section on going to market).

Early Outreach

You should have a plan in place to engage your core group of ideal users and potential customers, as well as partners and press, early on. You want to create hype prior to the launch of your app.

Create a media list - find a number of journalists and publications to reach out to. Provide product demos or early access to your product to elicit more interest and hopefully, media coverage.

Create a targeting list - create a segmented list of potential users and early adopters based on the user personas you created during product discovery. This is important because when the time comes, you can target these individuals for beta releases and soft launches, gain an understanding of how these core users are interacting with your product, and gather feedback to improve your product for future iterations and wider releases.

Develop partnerships - put in some research and find companies or people that you can develop a mutually beneficial partnership with. This strategy can help generate buzz, increase promotional reach via co-marketing initiatives, and even reduce marketing and sales costs through dividing budgets among partners.



Teasers & Early Sign-ups Pages

A tried and tested method for app marketing and user acquisition is offering teasers and/or pre-launch sign-up pages. Creating awareness for your product prior to its availability can generate excitement and anticipation, particularly when you add a sense of exclusivity to the mix; for example, having people sign up for a closed beta list to get early access to the beta version as soon as it's available. Another benefit of this is that you now have a list of potential users that have shown interest in your product that you can now market to and encourage to share your product with their networks.

Typically, early sign up pages will include "teasers" in order to drive more conversions. They may communicate benefits of the product, include screenshots of the app, have a promotional video, and more. And, they are very easy to create, particularly with tools like Launchrock available.

Press Kits & Collateral

It's important to have press kits and other necessary collateral prepared prior to the launch of your product. Even if you have already created a list of journalists and publications to reach out to, making sure you have your app press kit prepared gives them a centralized place to find everything they need and makes their job easier. Press kits may include screenshots, review guides, promotional videos, press releases, and more.



Product Curation Sites

There are a number of sites that curate new products and startups that can help you create some hype. Many, like Product Hunt, have an upvote/downvote or review section, so you want to be sure that you are ready with at least a minimum viable product when this kind of rating system is in place. Here is a collection of these kinds of sites that you should explore:

- *Product Hunt*
- *Beta List*
- *Hacker News - Y Combinator*
- *CrunchBase*
- *PreApps*
- *Launching Next*
- *Springwise*
- *The Startup Pitch*

There are a number of other similar sites, and many of them have special categorizations or interests. Some may not be right for your product, but with some quick research you can compile a list that properly fits your target market and product type.

App Store Optimization & Discoverability

Despite the variety of app marketing tactics you can use, the majority of users still discover apps by searching on app stores; **63% of iOS apps and 58% of Android apps are discovered by users browsing the app stores.** This means that for discoverability, search is still king. In order to boost your ranking (show up higher in search results), there is a practice called App Store Optimization. Tactics that will help you achieve a more prominent listing, and thus greater discoverability potential, include:

- *Keyword research*
- *Title optimization (including keywords in title)*
- *Optimized descriptions*
- *Icons and Screenshots*

For a more in-depth explanation of App Store Optimization best practices, check out **[How To Drive Downloads With App Store Optimization.](#)**



Section 4: Going to Market

Once you have all the pieces in place, you will need to focus on finally getting to market. “Launch and pray” is a terrible strategy, but if you’ve followed the practices described throughout this whitepaper so far, you should be prepared to make the decisions needed for a successful launch.

Most importantly, you need to consider which go-to-market strategy will best set up the product for success. This means making decisions between going to market with a minimum viable product or a more mature product, and deciding on a soft or hard launch.

Minimum Viable Product

A minimum viable product (MVP) is a product that has enough features to provide value and gather validated learning with the least amount of effort. Launching a MVP with a core set of features allows you to test and validate key concepts early so you can improve your product with each iteration, while also reducing time to launch and development costs.

The product discovery phase should include your prioritized product roadmap, which will allow you to determine what is needed for your MVP. What a MVP entails will differ from company to company based on business needs, industry, the nature of the solution, and what the competition is doing. During your product discovery, these questions should be answered so you have an outline of what version one of the product will look like.

The Advantages of a MVP

- *Validated learning and early testing of key business concepts*
- *Win over stakeholders and strengthen business cases*
- *Iterative, agile process allows for product evolution*
- *Cost efficiency and quicker time-to-market*

Soft Launch

A soft launch is when you release your product to a restricted audience or market prior to launching it fully. Soft launches are often limited to a particular area or a small segment of ideal users and customers. This is a common practice employed by startups and enterprises alike, and for good reason; soft launches help you gather feedback and product acceptance before you release to a broader market, meaning you can use learnings to improve the product before a full-fledged launch.

A MVP and a soft launch are not mutually exclusive; in fact, it's not uncommon to soft launch a MVP as it's understood to be the first iteration of a continually evolving product. While a soft launch refers to the size of the market being released to, MVP refers to the scope of the product being launched.

The Advantages of Soft Launching

- *Identify bugs and feature improvements early in a smaller market*
- *User feedback can be used for future iterations/hard launch*
- *Market acceptance*
- *Better preparation for a hard launch*

Hard Launch

A hard launch is when you release your product fully to the market, with the corresponding marketing push to match. Hard launches are more expensive and typically used by larger companies with the necessary budgets or more mature products (ie. not a MVP).

Generally, hard launches are best suited for established companies or mature, feature-rich products that have already gone through MVP and soft launch stages. Additionally, successful hard launches will need to have adequate PR and marketing support to generate buzz in their target market and encourage user acquisition.

The soft launch strategy is more in line with agile development practices, and thus recommended. Soft launching with a MVP allows for iterative product releases that use feedback and learnings to improve the product with each release. While it may take longer to generate buzz, the product is fully polished and proven to add value to your ideal users by the time you are ready to hard launch.

We recommend not using the hard launch approach immediately, unless you have the brand clout and marketing/PR support necessary to facilitate it successfully. Even then, a soft launch should still be considered given the benefits gained, such as user feedback, testing, and feature enhancements.

The Advantages of Hard Launching

- *Hard launching can make it harder for competitors to keep up or replicate your ideas, giving you a competitive advantage*
- *More feature-rich, developed product to users*
- *Generate more buzz around the product for rapid adoption*

CONCLUSION

Preparing a go-to-market app strategy may not guarantee that your app will be successful, but it does significantly increase the chances. At the very least, it helps you to avoid common pitfalls that result in apps failing.

Product discovery helps you define short and long term product goals, determine the product direction, understand your ideal users and their pain points, and identify market viability and opportunity.

Determining and outlining the right app monetization and business strategy ensures that you have a plan for generating revenue or achieving the goals and objectives you set out during the product discovery phase.

Marketing and user acquisition strategies are important to create awareness of your product in the marketplace and help drive the downloads you need to hit your goals.

Finally, thinking about the right launch strategy and how to execute it will ensure that you are using the best method based on the nature of your product, how mature your product is, and your current position in the marketplace.



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