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BOOTSTRAPPED MOBILE STARTUP RELIES ON ADMOB FOR 90% OF REVENUES AND POSITIVE USER EXPERIENCE

Rated "G" for great

The #1 photo app on Android, PicsArt's tagline "Where everyone becomes a great artist," says it all. PicsArt was born out of a sheer frustration that no free photo app seemed to offer a robust feature set with multiple editing options (masks, clipart, graphics, frames, borders, corrections, and so on) than most photo apps. PicsArt also wanted to make this full-featured photo app readily available to a global community of photo enthusiasts.

"When we launched in November 2011, there were many great one- or two-tool apps, but there wasn't a single free app putting everything a photographer could ever want in one place. PicsArt remedied this problem. Today, we dominate the Android market for photography," says Artavazd Mehrabyan, co-founder and chief technology officer.

Marketing a global phenomenon

Today, PicsArt has a worldwide presence, with artists, animators, and development teams in far-flung places such as Armenia and Russia and legal and business offices in Mountain View, California.

PicsArt consistently ranks in the top 50 free apps from Google Play. It's also available on venues like the App Store and Amazon.com. With more than 50 million downloads and growing at more than 200,000 downloads per day for all of its apps, PicsArt's growth has only just begun. On Google Play, PicsArt has garnered over 700,000 reviews, with an average rating of 4.7.

PicsArt today has almost 3 million unique daily users. Although the app requires no registration before using it—allowing users to simply save photos locally or share them on other social networks—5 million users have registered accounts with PicsArt for sharing within the PicsArt community. The company is also offering several online video tutorials to help users become more proficient.

"We live and die by our community," says Mehrabyan. "We are very careful about how we market the PicsArt app and promote downloads. We have to ensure that what we do ensures a pleasant user experience—one that keeps people using our app while also supporting our business goals."

AdMob: a safe choice for advertising with global coverage

To begin monetizing its app, the PicsArt team began evaluating a wide variety of mobile app advertising providers. For several reasons, the company chose AdMob exclusively.

First, AdMob offered content safety. Although the technical team was able to adjust filters provided by other ad delivery networks, irrelevant content such as gambling or dating ads sometimes cropped up—an unacceptable outcome for PicsArt's prime goal of maintaining customer loyalty and community among all age groups. Using AdMob, PicsArt can filter on age-appropriateness to help ensure that younger audiences don't see inappropriate content.

Case Study | PicsArt



AT A GLANCE

What they wanted to do:

- Create full-featured yet free photo app
- Broaden distribution globally
- Ensure content safety and appropriateness
- Build loyal user base
- Support revenue goals
- Avoid any technical glitches from ad delivery network's SDK

What they did:

- Created "desktop-like" photo app for mobile with rich feature set
- Chose AdMob as exclusive in-app ad platform
- Covered global market
- Created minimally invasive ad experience and kept app free

What they accomplished:

- Garnered 50 million downloads on Google Play
- Achieved 90% of revenue from AdMob
- Maintained clickthrough rates nearing 40%
- Became #1 photo app on Android
- Sustained growth of more than 6 million new downloads per month
- Ensured positive user experience for ads
- Boosted downloads mainly through word of mouth and user loyalty
- Added staff, upgraded offices, enabled increased revenues to be reinvested back toward company growth

Second, AdMob made it easy to configure a minimally invasive user experience something PicsArt aims to achieve. Only four to five screens out of approximately 50 serve AdMob banner ads. AdMob also provides reporting transparency to ensure that ads are delivered only when PicsArt desires. And PicsArt trusts Google and its policies implicitly.

A revenue model that works

For PicsArt, AdMob provides a near 99% fill rate and low cost per thousand impressions (eCPM), providing the basis for steady revenue growth—without any surprises. Click-through rates on ads remain steady, at approximately 37–39%.

AdMob also runs smoothly from a technical standpoint, and provides global coverage that successfully reaches a massively diverse worldwide audience. This is a perfect fit for PicsArt, with its global target users. "While some other ad networks might be stronger in certain very targeted geographies, AdMob more than makes up for it in the ability to serve campaigns on a global basis to a massive number of users," Mehrabyan says.

Steady as she goes

To build a loyal global audience and encourage downloads, PicsArt uses free in-house AdMob ads within companion apps such as the company's kaleidoscope app. Mostly, however, PicsArt gains popularity through word of mouth and constant engagement with a longstanding and extremely loyal user base.

With steady and predictable growth, PicsArt has reinvested most of its revenues back into the business. The company now has dozens of artists, designers, editors, and technical development and testing teams on staff, and has invested in higher quality branding materials, as well as slightly more stylish business offices.

"It may sound corny, but we genuinely love PicsArt. It seems like the more love we give, the more comes back in terms of user loyalty and impressions," says Mehrabyan. "We're happy with our revenue, which comes about 90% from AdMob, and we have a model that's working. We get offers from other ad networks to switch every day, but we'd never do it. Our users and our business are too precious to introduce anything that would not provide the trusted consistency and global reach of AdMob."

