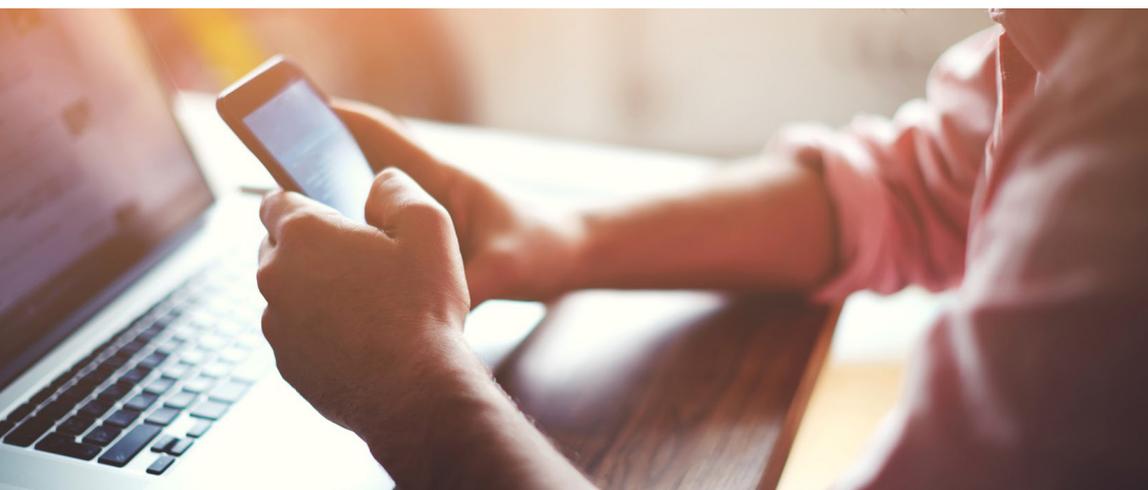


# The No-Nonsense Guide to Growing Your Mobile App



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# Chapter 1:

## The Secret to Growing Your App

What's the secret to rapid growth for your app?

Play Store or App Store optimization? A sophisticated paid advertising strategy? A viral social media campaign?

“It's better to make something a small number of people love than something a large number of people don't care about.”

-Paul Buchheit

While all of these strategies could help you grow your user base, the foundation for rapid growth is much more basic and fundamental—you need an engaging app.

Paul Buchheit, the Googler behind Gmail and now partner at Y Combinator, is famous for saying, “It's better to make something a small number of people love than something a large number of people don't care about.” This is absolutely true for your app business. Scaling something

mediocre isn't going to fare well for your business in the long run. Don't waste time fixating on broad metrics like overall downloads or traffic. You've got to dig deeper to find out who's using your app the most, what they love about it, and eventually double down on what's working well.

Before investing in spreading the word, you need to focus on user engagement.

This guide will walk you through practical ways to focus on user engagement so that you can eventually transition to growth. Specifically, you'll learn how to:

- ✔ Pick the right metric to represent user engagement
- ✔ Look at data to audit your app and find areas to fix
- ✔ Promote your app after you've reached healthy user engagement



## **NOTE ON WHO THIS EBOOK WAS WRITTEN FOR:**

*This book is crafted specifically for app developers who've already released an app. Although many of the takeaways are relevant to everyone, know that several points may not be helpful unless you've already launched.*

## Chapter 2:

# What's the Most Important Growth Metric For My App?

“User Engagement” varies from app to app—there isn’t a single, simple, all-encompassing metric. For example, an eCommerce app selling designer cufflinks may be interested in the average number of times users return to their app each month while a casual gaming app may care about the percentage of users that return to their app each day.

What’s important is that you pick a single metric that makes sense for your app and that you can prioritize for your team. Choosing the right number is going to demand deep thought. Here are two defining questions that will help you pick this number.



### QUESTION 1:

What metric proves my product “works” and solves the problem it sets out to solve for users?

It may seem obvious, but it’s essential to return to basic, first principles and clearly articulate *why* your app exists. What problem do users have that you’re trying to solve and what number indicates success? Here are a few examples:

- A flashlight app exists to conveniently provide light to users in the dark → how would you measure that people are conveniently provided light through your app?
- A casual puzzle game exists to provide addicting fun by appealing to users’ analytical itch → how could you measure that your game does that?
- A weather app exists to help users make daily decisions because of the weather → how could you measure that your weather app does that for users?

This may seem like a really simple and obvious point for us to make, but it’s very easy to oversee the obvious when busy.



## QUESTION 2:

How often should you check for progress?

Should you be looking at a metric daily, monthly, quarterly? This all depends on your app. If you're a casual game, looking at numbers weekly makes sense. If you're a travel itinerary app, a user may not use your app until they're on a trip—looking at your key metric weekly may not make sense at all. Think through your app and choose the cadence appropriately.

Together, the answers to these 2 questions help inform the user engagement metric you choose.

For example:

- ✓ **Flashlight App:** Number of users who've re-visited and used the app each month (for this example, how long users spend in the app matters less than how often they use it).
- ✓ **Casual Puzzle Game App:** Number of users who've re-visited and used the app for at least 15 minutes each week (for this example, both the duration of time a user spends in app and the frequency of use over a week matters).
- ✓ **Weather App:** Number of who've re-visited and used the app each week. (Since weather affects users daily, they should be using the app more frequently than a flashlight app).



## Common mistakes to avoid when choosing your User Engagement (UE) metric:

- **Never getting around to making a decision**

Although picking this metric should take a thoughtful approach, ultimately a decision needs to be made. Take time to evaluate your options, but be sure to place a definitive deadline on your decision making.

- **Not recognizing that the UE Metric may change over time**

It's okay that this metric changes in the future. For example, if you've built an app that thrives on user generated content, you may need to initially focus on getting more content created and then eventually switch to caring more about driving readers to that content.

- **Not picking a single metric because several numbers all are correlated with each other**

Several metrics are going to be correlated with each other. Don't get overly critical when making your decision; it's important to pick something. In these instances, choose the metric which will provide the quickest feedback loop.

## Chapter 3:

# How to Get the Right Data to Improve Your App

After choosing your UE number, what do you do? How do you decide what actions you should take to drive that number up?

Simply put: use data.

Do an audit of your app, see what users love, and do more of it. Find out what they don't love and fix it. There are three methods of collecting data that we recommend. They work together, painting a clear picture of what actions you should take.



### 1. HARD NUMBERS:

Google Analytics

First start with hard numbers from Google Analytics. In Google Analytics reports, you're looking for clear trends--hard drop-offs or spikes. These numbers won't tell you why bumps exist, but it will tell you where to probe more deeply. More on this below.



### 2. PRODUCT INSPECTION:

Dogfooding

After finding a trend in Google Analytics, explore those trends in your app yourself. Put yourself in your users' shoes and walk through your users' experience (we call this "[dogfooding](#)"). Pay close attention to areas where Google Analytics revealed a problem or high engagement.



### 3. DIRECT FEEDBACK:

User Interviews and/or surveys

Speak directly to users to learn in more detail what they liked and didn't like about your app. This is less about extracting their opinion and more about learning from their past behavior and deriving next steps.

Next, we're going to deeply dive into each of the data collection methods and provide practical tips:



# Google Analytics CHEAT SHEET

The 4 reports every app developer should pay attention to.

## BEHAVIOR FLOW REPORT



**Great for:**

Finding sticking points in your app.



**Will show you:**

- ✓ What screens users are seeing
- ✓ Which ones are most popular
- ✓ How long users stay on each screen
- ✓ How they navigate from one screen to the next



**Learn more:**

<http://developer.android.com/distribute/analyze/build-better-apps.html>

## CRASH & EXCEPTIONS REPORT



**Great for:**

Finding technical flaws in your app.



**Will show you:**

- ✓ Your app's technical performance across different situations and environments like app version, operating system, and device brand.



**Learn more:**

<https://developers.google.com/analytics/devguides/collection/android/v2/exceptions>

## LOYALTY REPORT



**Great for:**

Finding what point in your app users drop off.



**Will show you:**



The number of sessions for the nth occurrence in your app. You'll see the number of "1st interactions" with your app, then the number of "2nd interactions", then the number of "3rd interactions", and so on.



**Learn more:**

<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/2568878?hl=en>

## REGENCY REPORT



**Great for:**

Finding the best ways to segment users based on frequency of engagement.



**Will show you:**



How much time passed between app sessions



**Learn more:**

<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1012034?hl=en>

*Note: 79% of app developers\* don't have an analytics platform in their app at all. How would you, an app developer, know who your app's users are or how they perceive your app if you don't have analytics? [Click here](#) to learn more about how to get started with Google Analytics in AdMob.*

(\*VisionMobile, 2014)



# Dogfooding CHEAT SHEET

3 pitfalls to avoid when dogfooding your own app.

## 1. GETTING SIDETRACKED BY PERSONAL PET PEEVES



Dogfooding your own product will surface a lot of pain points that you're going to want to change. Remember that your personal pet peeve may not be what your users find most frustrating. Let the data found in Google Analytics and user reviews guide you.

## 2. FORGETTING TO UPDATE ONBOARDING MATERIAL



When you begin fixing bugs, a lot of times your onboarding material is the last element to change. Make sure to update your onboarding material as you make changes to your app flow. This could prevent a confusing user experience and decreased engagement.

## 3. IGNORING YOUR USERS' IDENTITY



When dogfooding, you're not trying to evaluate the product as an app developer, but as a user. If you're building a messaging app for college students, assess your app from that perspective, not your own. It may even be worth bringing in a focus group of actual users and observing them interacting with your app.



# User Interviews CHEAT SHEET

7 tips on how to get the most out of user interviews.\*

## 1. HAVE A CLEAR LEARNING GOAL



Clearly plan what you want to learn from users before contacting them. Derailed conversations and technical difficulties often shorten the amount of time you actually have on the phone—plan ahead.

## 2. REACH OUT TO THE RIGHT SAMPLE GROUP



Only reach out to the group of people who will teach you what you need to learn, not all of your users. For example, if you want to know why 30% of your users quit your app after the second level of your game, make sure to target that 30%.

When reaching out, also remember:

- ✓ Factor into your calculations that usually less than 5% of users will respond to you
- ✓ Scheduling is always tough, stagger your email sends—half one week, the second half the next

## 3. WRITE EMAILS LIKE A HUMAN



The tone of your email should match the tone of your app. Regardless of what that is, write like a human: with warmth, void of technical-speak. You do have to provide enough context for your users, but try to be as concise as possible. Remember that everyone receives tons of automated emails from businesses. A warm tone and to-the-point copy (and maybe a gift card offer) is needed to cut through the noise.

## 4. SEEK FACTS, NOT OPINIONS



You're not really looking for what opinions your users have. Asking them blatantly how to fix your company is probably a bad idea, earning you unreliable information at best. Instead, you're looking for facts about their experience that you can use to deduce actionable insights. For example, don't ask, "What's your favorite feature?" Instead ask, "Which feature of the 4 did you use the most?"

## 5. ASK WHY, OVER AND OVER AGAIN



After gathering an objective fact, ask why. Why did you use this feature often? Why did you decide to share our app with your friends? Why did you turn the game off after 20 minutes of play? The back-and-forth flow of asking a well-crafted, fact-seeking question and why will help you flesh out a profile to derive insights from.

## 6. LISTEN UP



Gauge how well you're moderating your conversation by how much you're speaking. The less you're speaking, the better you're doing. This isn't a time to defend decisions you've made in your app, it's a time to gather honest feedback from your users—don't interrupt them.

## 7. KEEP IN TOUCH



Treat your users like royalty—thank them for their time and insight, send them a small gift, and let them know exactly how their feedback has improved your product. These little details help convert casual users into die-hard fans.

*\*The above points are helpful tips, not advice. Be sure to comply with all applicable email marketing laws when engaging in such email campaigns*

## Chapter 4:

# 8 Common App Problems that Drive Users Away (and how to identify them in Google Analytics)



### UX: POOR FIRST IMPRESSION

**Behavior Flow Report:** Users spend short amounts of time on first or second screen then exit.

**Loyalty Report:** Most users never open app again.



### APP PREMISE IS OFF

*(users don't get what they thought they'd get—doesn't solve their problem)*

**Loyalty Report:** Most users never open app again.



### NOT TAILORED ENOUGH TO UNIQUE AUDIENCES

**Behavior Flow Report:** Users of a specific demographic navigate between screens then quickly drop off.

**Loyalty Report:** Most users of a specific demographic never open app again.



### TECHNICAL BUGS

**Behavior Flow Report:** Many users close app or return to previous screen at a single screen.

**Crash & Exceptions Report:** Poor technical performance.



### APP TOO SLOW

**Behavior Flow Report:** Many users close app or return to previous screen at a single screen.

**Crash & Exceptions Report:** Poor technical performance.



### GAME TOO DIFFICULT

**Behavior Flow Report:** Users exit app at a particular screen.

**Loyalty Report:** Users who've gotten to a certain screen return less frequently on average.



### TAKES TOO LONG TO GET TO THE "MAGIC MOMENT"

**Behavior Flow Report:** Users quickly navigate between screens then quickly drop off.

**Loyalty Report:** Most users never open app again.



### POOR RE-ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

**Loyalty Report:** Users rarely return after having used the app successfully.

## Chapter 5:

# Transition to Growth: 6 Top Ways to Acquire and Engage More Users

Once you've driven your user engagement number to a healthy place, it's time to tell the world. It's finally time to grow. Here are practical strategies that you can use to get users to re-engage with your winning app.



### 1. RE-TARGET USERS WITH PAID ADS

[Click here](#) to learn how Mehmet Ecevit, co-founder of [Gram Games](#) grew their user base to 20M users with AdWords.



### 2. NOTIFY USERS WISELY

[Megabit Apps](#) successfully used Google Cloud Messaging to send push notifications to users to keep them returning to their apps. They were able to acquire half a million new app users in a month and 4.2 million in 3 months. [Learn about how they did this.](#)

It's important to re-engage with past users to keep them coming back. To help you do this, Google AdWords lets you add [retargeting tags](#) to your app. These small snippets of code will allow you to target your users with remarketing ads based on their behavior in your app. For example, you can create a remarketing list of users who've gotten to the 3rd level of your game.

Notifications are an effective way to re-engage users, bringing them interesting and relevant information at just the right time. But, they can also be annoying if not done well.

Make sure to:

- ✓ Choose an appropriate priority level for your notification (only interrupt users with important behavior altering, time-sensitive information)
- ✓ Prompt specific actions from your users rather than showing generic advertisements
- ✓ Tailor messages as much as possible



### 3. FIND PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

Getting press is a great, free way to spike traffic for your app and gain the attention of potential new users. However, keep in mind that journalists are in the business of telling stories of interest – not offering a platform for free promotion. When pitching a journalist, tell a story involving your product and you'll have a much better chance of being featured.

When reaching out to the press, remember:

- ✔ It's okay to start by reaching out to small publications. Mid-sized publications often look at small publications for stories *and* large-sized publications often look at mid-sized publications for stories.
- ✔ If unsure about a story to pitch, you may look to start by guest posting on relevant blog/industry publications with a unique, strong point of view—not a sales pitch.
- ✔ Ensure that you give the links to your app in the App Store and Play Store, not just your main developer website.



### 4. LOCALIZE YOUR APP TO REACH INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES

[Learn](#) how one of the most popular mobile games of all time, Angry Birds, grew their business by creating a global brand.

Localizing your app means more than adapting the user-interface language – it's about being culturally sensitive too. A lot of your opportunity for growth may live outside of your home country. North American app developers on AdMob earn 50% of their revenue from outside North America. The [numbers are even more extreme](#) in other geographical regions.

Services that you can use to do the actual translation include:

- ✔ **Google Translate:** For simple words or phrases, Google Translate is a quick and free option.
- ✔ **Google App Translation Service:** Purchase professional translations through Google Play's Developer Console.



## 5. USE YOUR EMAIL LIST



## 6. OPTIMIZE YOUR APP FOR GOOGLE SEARCHES

- ✓ **ICanLocalize:** A paid service to get you quick, affordable translators (great for small amounts of text).
- ✓ **Crowdin:** A paid service that uses crowdsourcing to translate app files.

Email is still a powerful way to stay top of mind with users – but email needs to be read to be effective. Start with a short, compelling headline to entice users to click. Be authentic, interesting and, if possible, controversial (in a polite way, of course).

When writing emails, remember:

- ✓ In the body of your email, have a clear, singular message and a prominent call to action—potentially a button that brings users back to your app.
- ✓ Make sure to optimize your email template for mobile since 75 percent of Gmail users access their accounts on mobile devices\* (I/O developers conference - May 2015).

Guide your Google search traffic directly into your apps with [App Indexing](#). For signed-in users, 15% of Google searches on Android now return deep links to apps through App Indexing. And in the last quarter of 2014, we've seen the number of clicks on app deep links jump by 10X. Users who have already installed the app will be redirected directly into the app. Users who do not have the app installed will get prompted to install it.

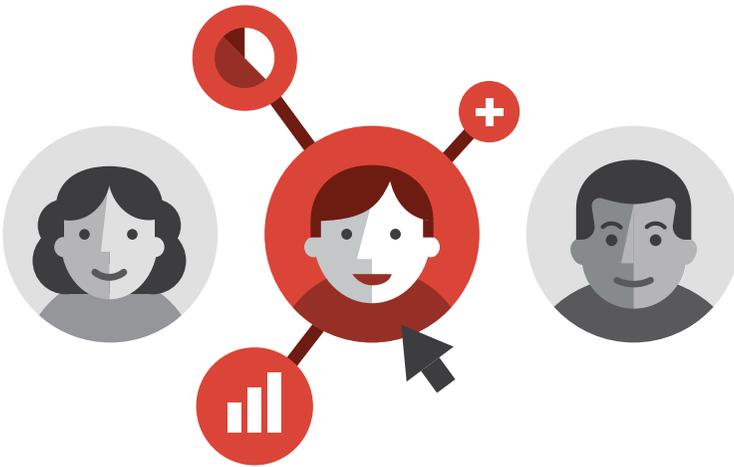
Don't forget:

- ✓ You can use app indexing to keep users coming back. Search results can link directly to the relevant content in your app. This keeps your customer base engaged even when off your platform.
- ✓ Go here to set up App Indexing for Android: <https://developers.google.com/app-indexing/android/app>
- ✓ Go here to set up App Indexing for iOS: <https://developers.google.com/app-indexing/ios/app>

## Conclusion:

# Take the first step...

We hope that you enjoyed reading this guide to user engagement and app growth. Now it's time to get to work. Be sure to fill us in with your progress on [Twitter](#) and [G+](#). For more information on user engagement and general app development, check out our [YouTube channel](#) and [blog](#). When you're ready to start making money from your app, check out our [App Monetization Playbook](#). Best of luck!



### **ABOUT ADMOB:**

AdMob is the leading mobile advertising platform, trusted by more than 650,000 apps worldwide. Since 2006, AdMob has helped developers to grow successful app businesses with rich ad formats, ad mediation and industry-leading fill rates. With Google Analytics built into AdMob directly, developers can measure app performance and segment users to monetize intelligently.