

**Tip 1: Lead the User Toward the Next Step**

One of the biggest mistakes an app can make is to lose the user, failing to take him or her along smoothly from one step to the next. Your work won't get much attention if users are left lost and alone soon after opening the app. In any app store on any mobile platform, if your app doesn't meet a user's needs quickly or easily enough, someone else's will.

Acquiring an app involves little time or money, so users have little incentive to make the effort of figuring out how it works.

Digital software must be intuitive. It must carefully alert the user to each phase of the app experience. Use contrasting colours to indicate where important buttons are located, bold typography to explain things when words are necessary and visual cues to point the user in the direction of what he or she wants.

**Tip 2: Match Your Interactions to Your Platform**

Application designers frequently get tripped up when they decide to create an interface on one platform and then attempt to mirror its exact interaction design and visual strategy on a different platform.

This approach seems like an easy route; it unifies design and resources, allowing a team to build once but deploy many versions of the app. The design might be produced in half the time—but that attempt to save hours will ultimately cost users any enjoyment in and appreciation of your app.

If you plan to take your app across devices on multiple platforms—Android, Apple, Windows, or other mobile operating systems—keep in mind that users selected their specific operating system for a reason. They might prefer the visual style used on Windows Phone. Perhaps they like the tinkering and customization available on an Android device. It could be the simplicity of the iPhone or iPad that caught their attention.

Each operating system maker has created a distinct set of human interface and interaction design guidelines which they strongly encourage designers to follow when building apps for their platform. These interfaces and guidelines were created for a reason, and not everyone is following the same rulebook.

Take time to study and research the specific interface conventions in the operating systems you're targeting, and then modify your app's design to best take advantage of that specific platform. Your users will thank you.

**Tip 3: Use Clear, Simple Icons**

A picture is worth 1,000 words, and a visual interface icon is worth 10,000 lines of code. When designing a mobile app, pictures are your friends. Create or find strong, simple icons that articulate what the buttons or other items inside the app will help users achieve. For example, you could use a checkmark to indicate that a task has been completed, a heart to show that something has been selected as a user's favorite, or the familiar volume iconography to indicate when sound has been

turned on or off. Icons take up less space than the text that would be required to explain a function, giving you more room onscreen.

#### **Tip 4: Reduce, Reduce, Reduce**

Mobile apps are at an awkward point in their development. They've quickly become the most frequently used, most user-friendly piece of technology people have ever owned, but they also have very small screens that can't display much information at a time, and they have difficulty with advanced computing tasks, especially multitasking.

As a designer, you need to keep these limitations in mind as you work. The best way to alleviate any pains that come with such drawbacks is by removing as much unnecessary clutter and as many overbearing features as possible.

Rather than adding confusing elements that make for an interaction mess, look instead to build an app that does one or two things extraordinarily well, with only the options or features that are absolutely required to get the job done. If it's not essential, take it out. In the end, that simplicity will help the user to focus on the purpose and effectiveness of your app, making it functional for users of all skill levels.

#### **Tip 5: Make Life Easier for International Users**

Native speakers of English aren't the only people who have fallen head over heels for mobile devices. Users worldwide, speaking hundreds of languages, are an increasing segment of the smartphone and tablet software marketplace. They're valuable consumers to target as potential customers, so it's imperative to do all you can to make your app work for them.

Icons don't require text, which means they're not only easier for your neighbor or grandmother to understand, but they're also more likely to be comprehended by someone halfway around the world. For the most part, photos and digital images are universally understood. In almost any language, a plus sign will be accepted as meaning "add" or "create."

Sometimes, though, text will be necessary. Translating it can be expensive, but many translation services strive to make the process simple and affordable for app developers.

Whenever possible, push to eliminate text from your design, and focus on elements that don't require words. By making sure your app is usable for people of any language, you increase your reach exponentially—something that should make both your development team and potential advertisers very, very happy.