

# Secrets of the App Store

The most valuable lessons from my 5-year obsession with the App Store.



Stuart Hall  
*1st Edition*

appbot

# Secrets of the App Store

*"Over the past 5 years I've been fortunate to have built some apps that achieved over 6 million downloads. Understanding how the App Store works has been a major factor in ensuring the success of these apps so I've spent hundreds of hours researching, experimenting and blogging about it. Secrets of the App Store compiles the most valuable lessons I've learnt - I hope it helps with your apps too." - Stuart Hall*

**1st Edition**

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# Introduction

I've been obsessed with the App Store since Steve Jobs announced it back in 2008.

Over the past 7 years I have made so many apps for myself and others I've lost count. I made a fitness app that was downloaded 2.3 million times called 7 Minute Workout which I sold to Wahoo Fitness. I was also co-founder of Discover Music which was downloaded over 4 million times.

These experiences taught me how important reviews and ratings are, so I started Appbot to take the pain out of managing app store reviews across multiple platforms and countries.

This eBook is a collection of the research and learnings I have made over my time as a developer on the App Store. Many of these posts appeared on <http://stuartkhal.com> or <http://blog.appbot.co> initially.

Send me feedback or just say hello at [stuarth@appbot.co](mailto:stuarth@appbot.co), or tweet me at [@stuartkhal](https://twitter.com/stuartkhal).

## PART 1

# Improving your App Store presence



As an app developer there are a lot of factors that determine how successful your app will be. In this section I'm going to share with you the information I've gathered about one of the simplest things you can do to stack the deck in your favor: improve your app store presence. We'll focus on choosing icon colors, your description, screenshots and, finally, the choice of a strong name for your app.

Wherever possible I've included data from the App Store to support my conclusions. I hope you'll learn as much from reading these posts as I did from writing them.

# The Colors Of An App Icon

At Appbot we get to see a lot of app icons while providing insights into app reviews.

In the past I have studied everything from app descriptions, to screenshots, to names, to countries. The one that has always really interested me most was app icons, but I never came up with an idea on how to really study what is effective.

Recently I stumbled across a cool Ruby library called Miro that extracts the dominant colors from an image.









Finding the dominant colors of apps shows some really interesting results.

## The Method

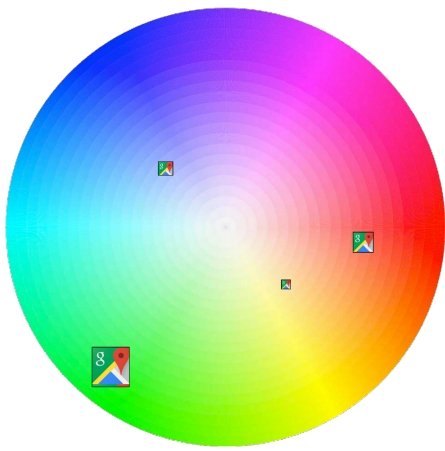
Next I took the standard Web Colors (plus added yellow) and matched each web color to the closest. This grouped them into approximate names.



For Google Maps we get:

34.1%	—	#02601e	
18.6%	—	#a8120c	
12.4%	—	#0c44de	
12.1%	—	#bdbfc0	
9.9%	—	#f4b510	
8.6%	—	#717973	
2.3%	—	#24721b	
2.0%	—	#2d0d0e	

#02601e	->	Green
#a8120c	->	Maroon
#0c44de	->	Blue
#bdbfc0	->	Silver
#f4b510	->	Yellow
#717973	->	Gray
#24721b	->	Green
#2d0d0e	->	Black



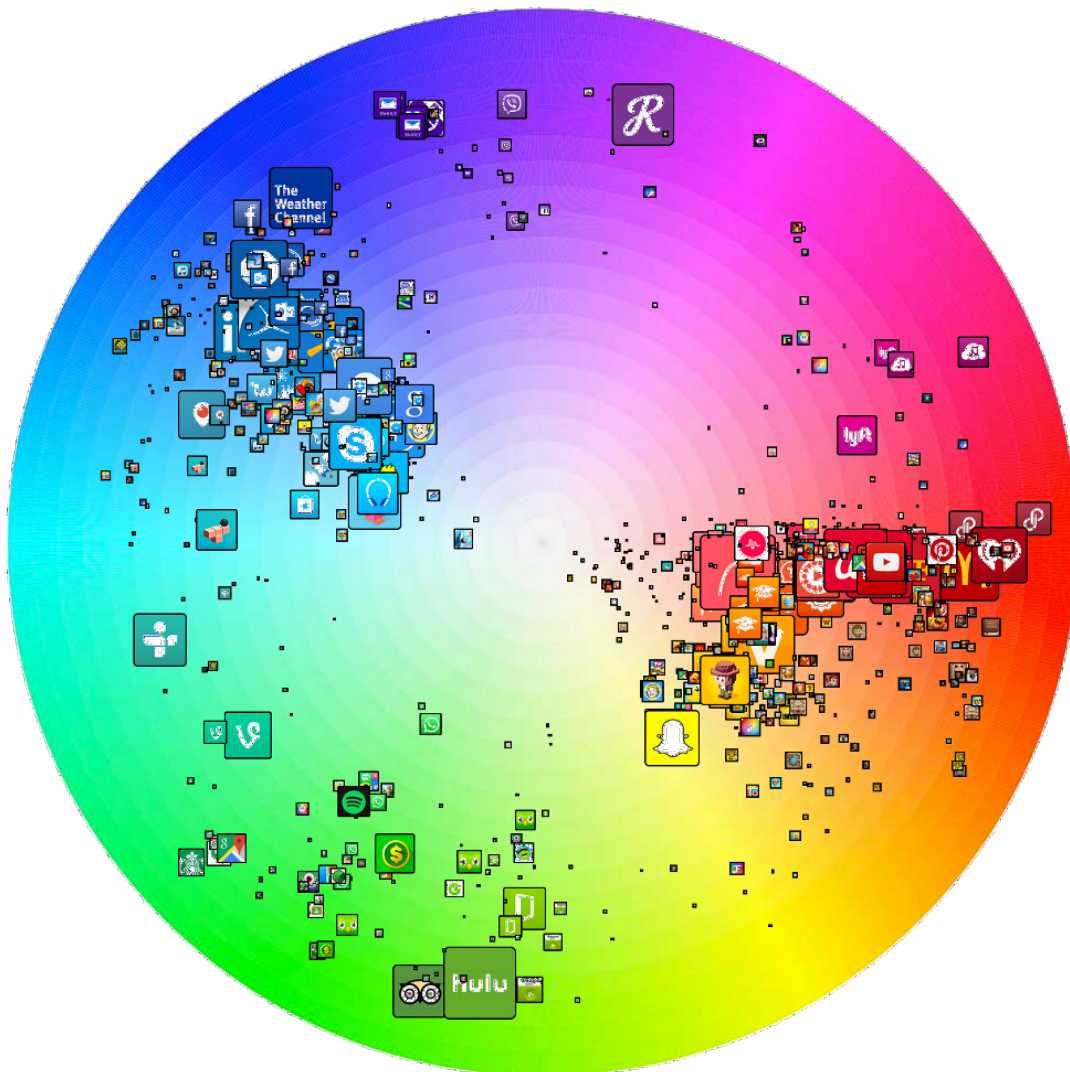
Ignoring black, white & grey and taking the four most common colors I plotted them on the a 'Color Wheel'.

The larger the icon, the more of that particular color it contains.

## Top 200 Free iOS Apps

Plotting the top 200 free apps on the Color Wheel gives us this below.

We find large clusters of blue and red app icons, with a scattering of green. Pink and purple is under represented, with Snapchat owning yellow.

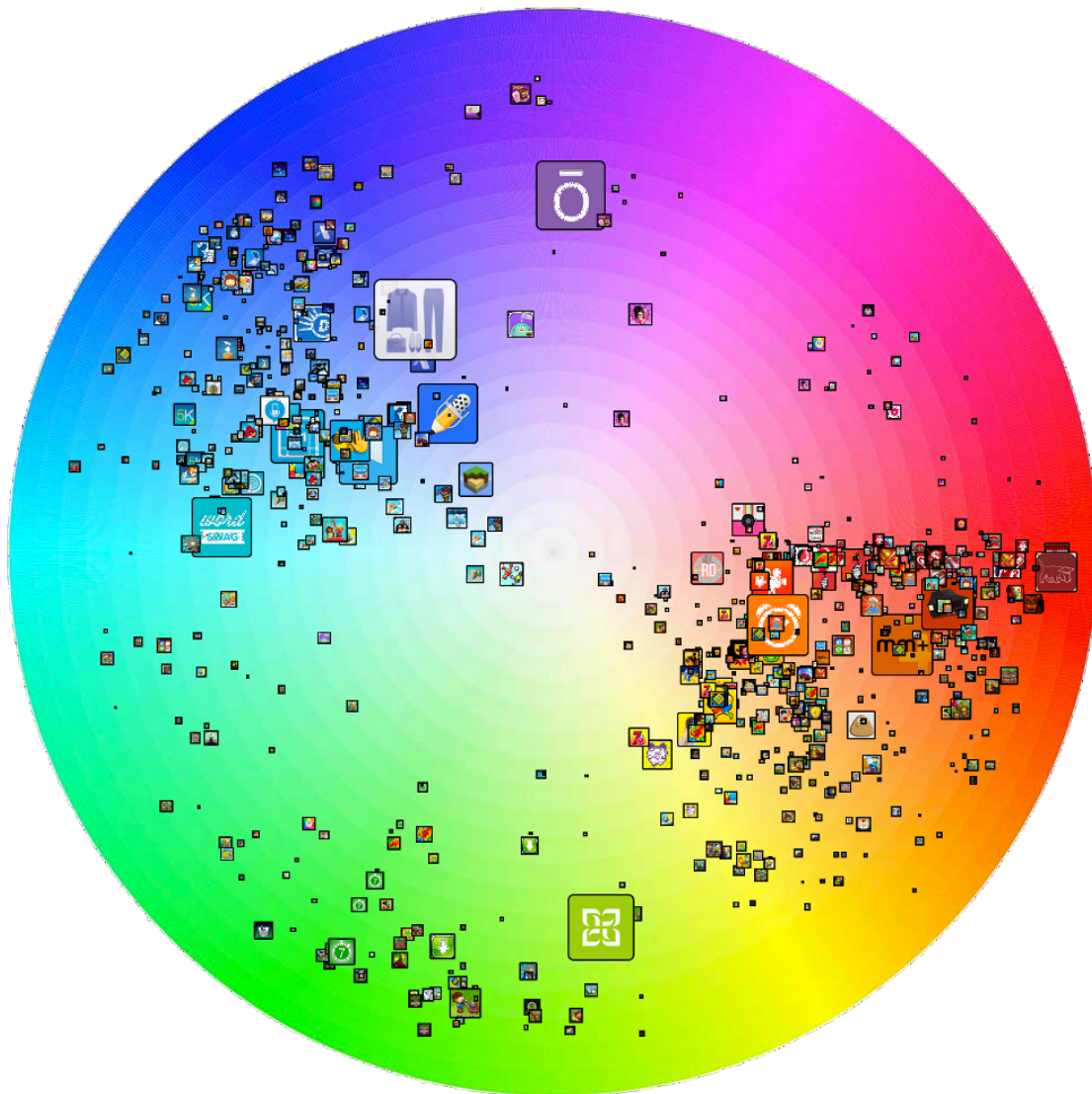




## Top 200 Paid iOS Apps

The top 200 paid iOS apps differ slightly from free.

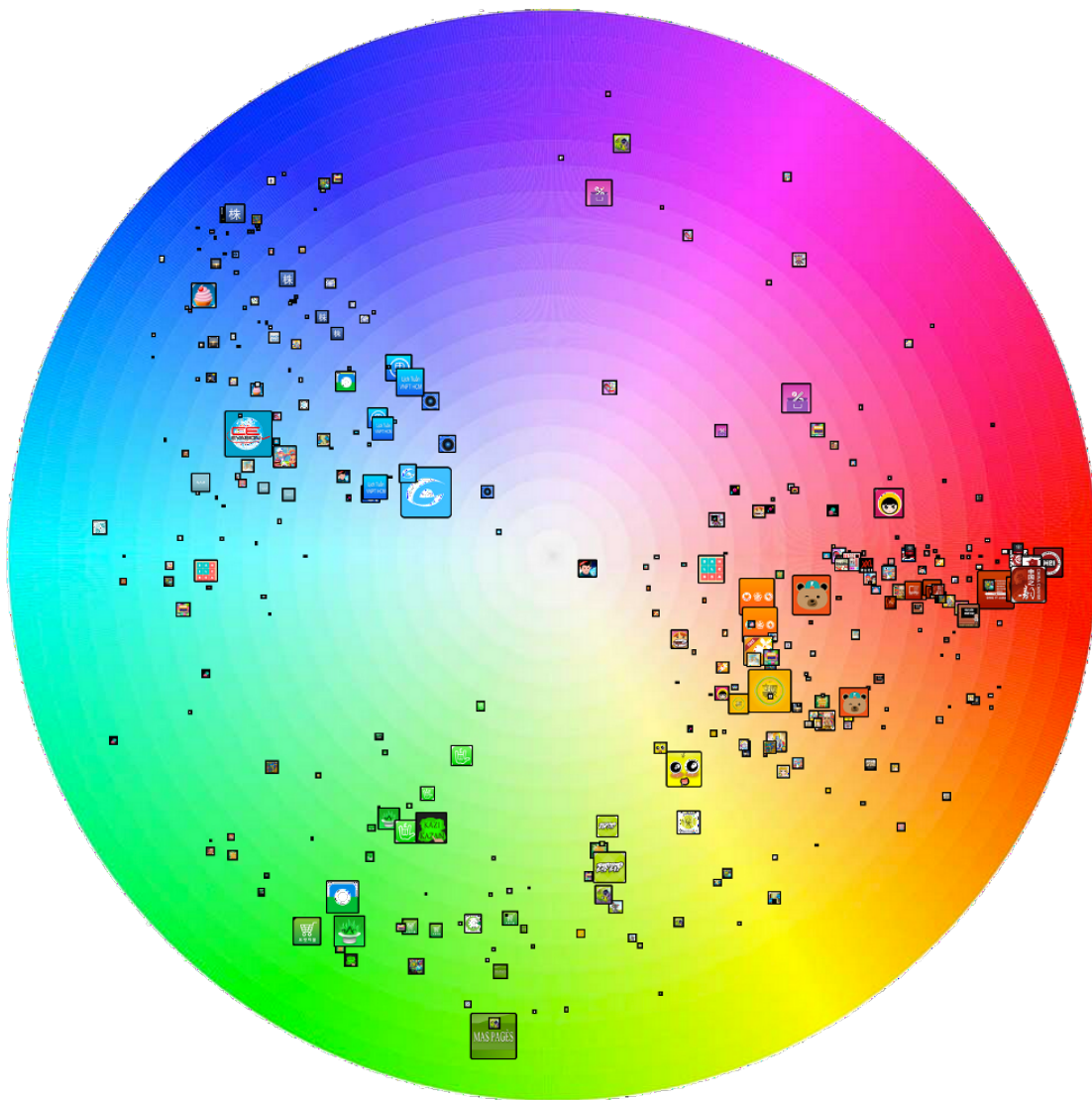
Although there are similar groupings of blue, red and green to that of free, paid apps generally appear to use more colors with fewer paid apps having one color on the majority of the icon. This results in more of a spread and generally smaller icons on our Color Wheel.



## 100 Newest iOS Apps

Next I plotted the newest 100 iOS apps released to the App Store at the time of writing. The assumption was that this would give a more general representation of the overall store than the top charts.

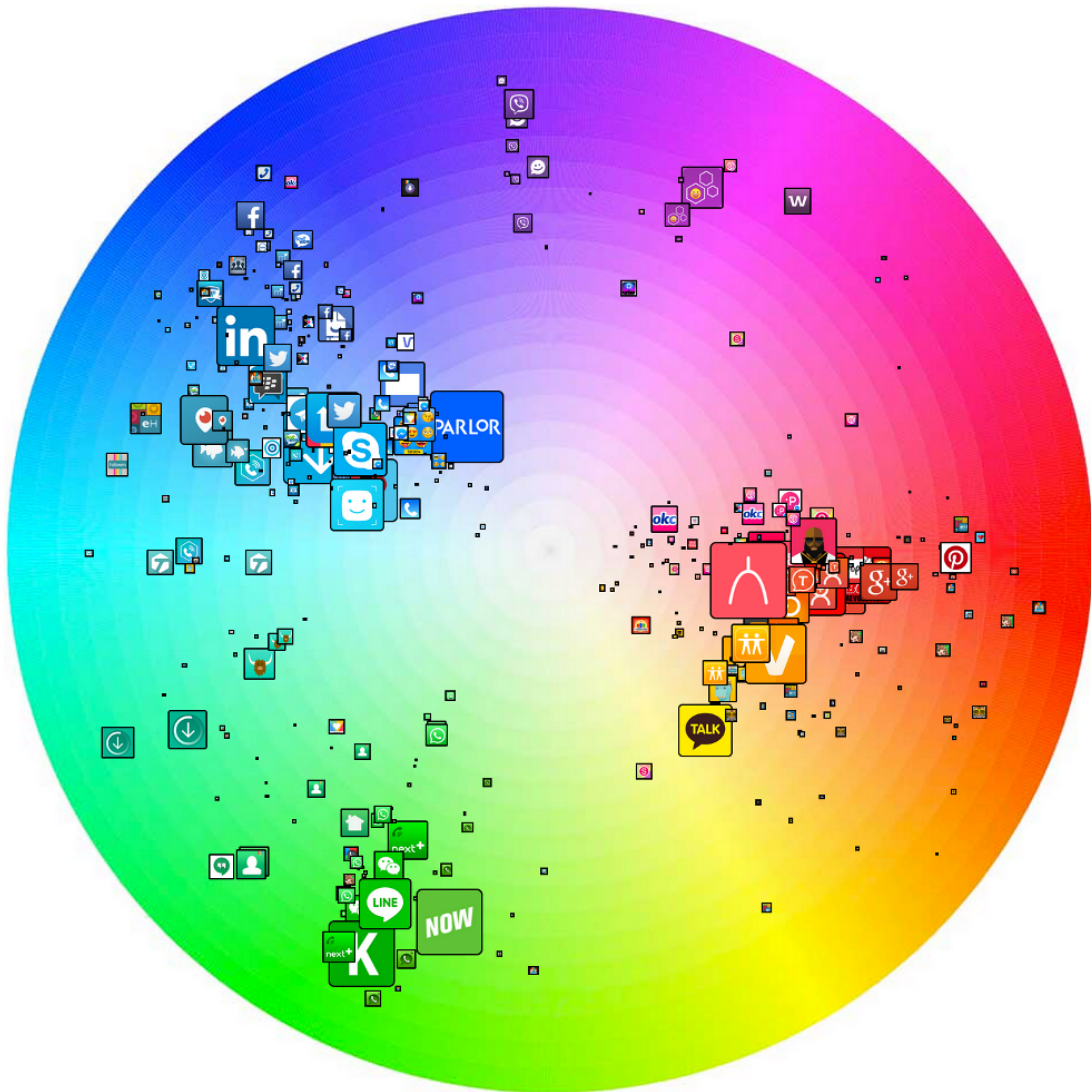
This gave very similar results to that of the top paid charts.



## Top 200 iOS Social

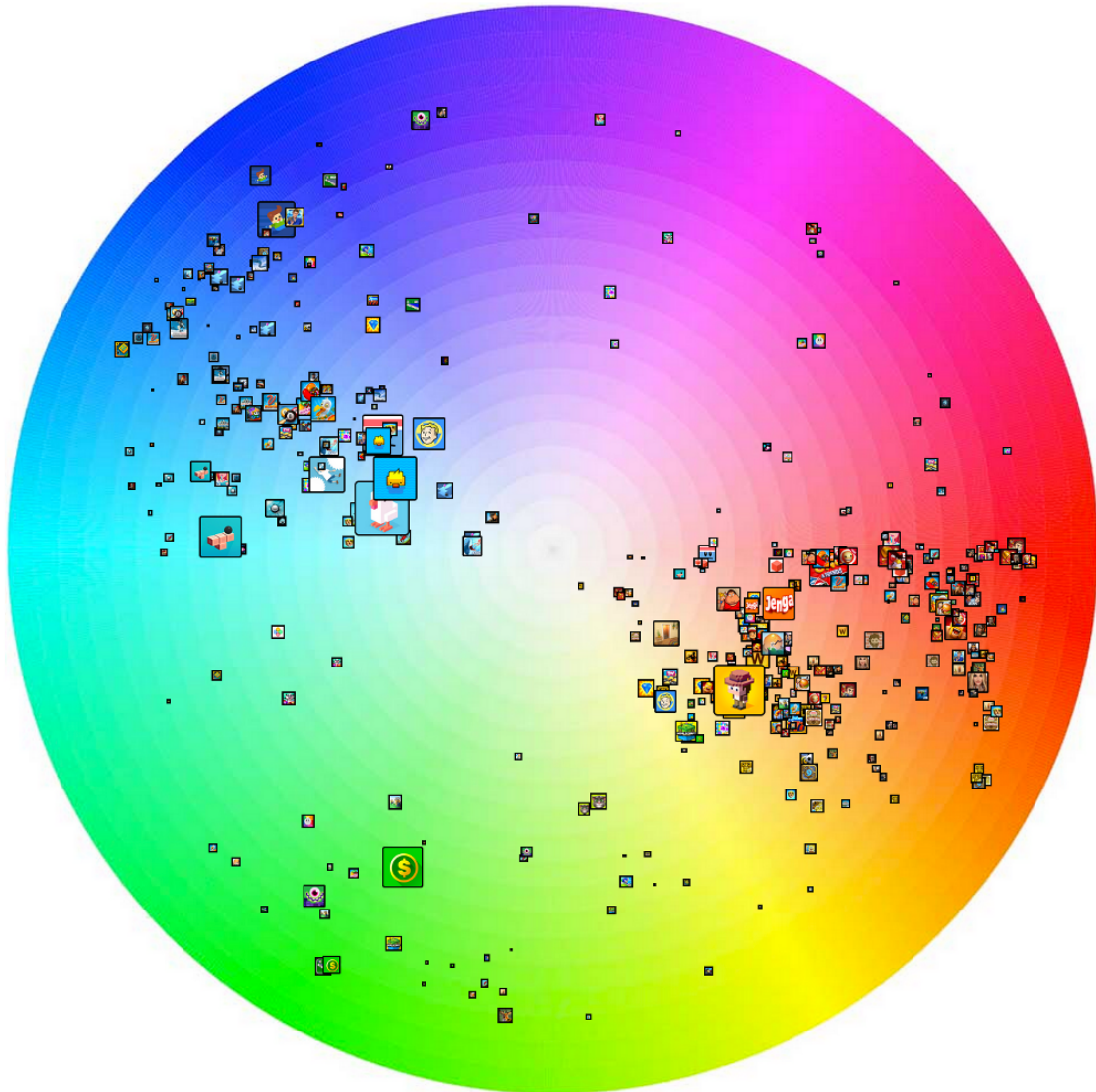
All social networking apps are blue aren't they? Twitter, Facebook etc.

Turns out the clusters are similar to all categories, if anything green is more represented.



## Top 200 iOS Games

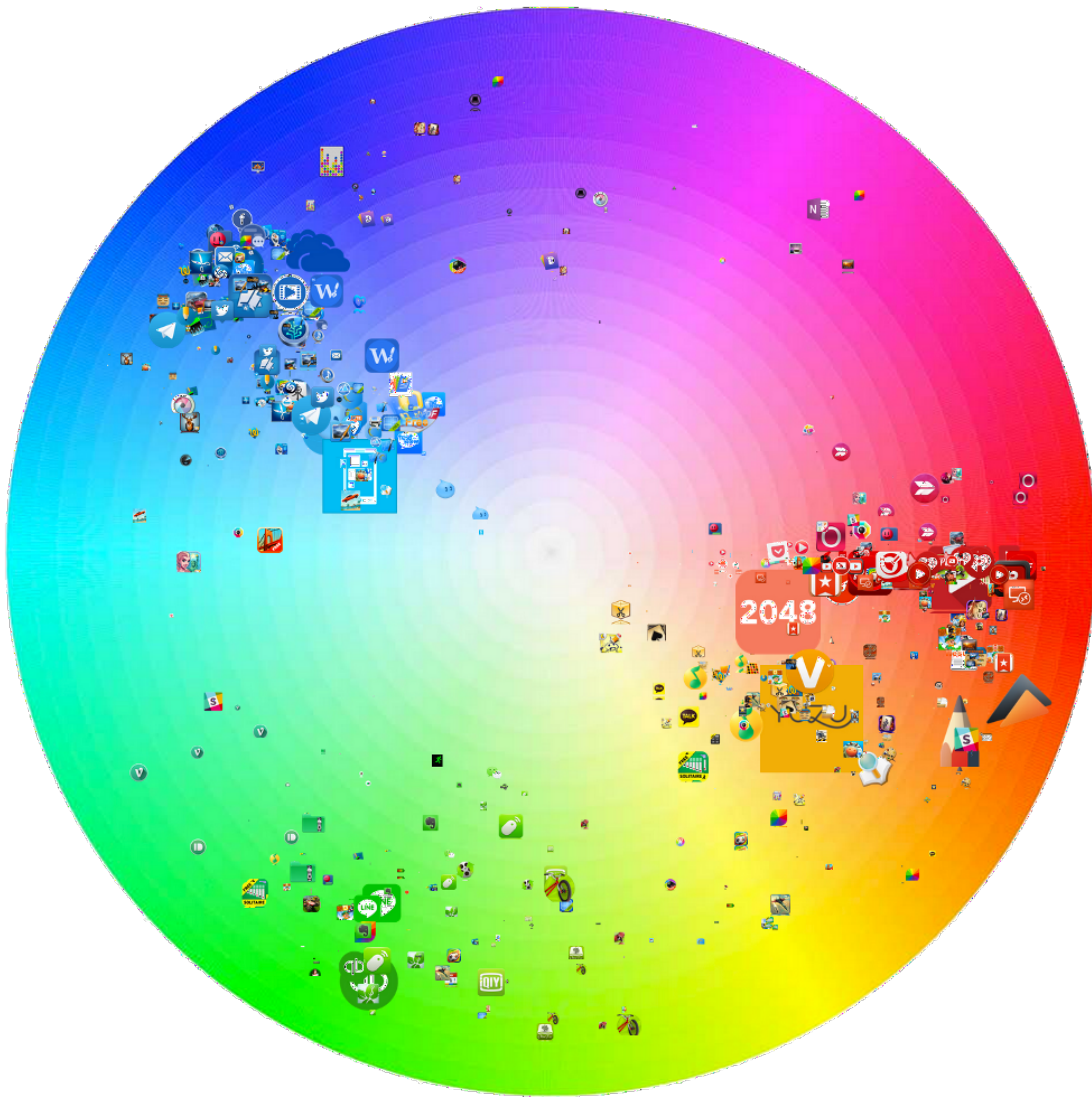
Many games tend to have more complex icons than other applications. This results in more of a spread in colors used.



## Top 200 Free Mac Apps

It's always felt that 90% of the apps in my OS X dock are blue, but is that the way it turns out in the top charts for Mac?

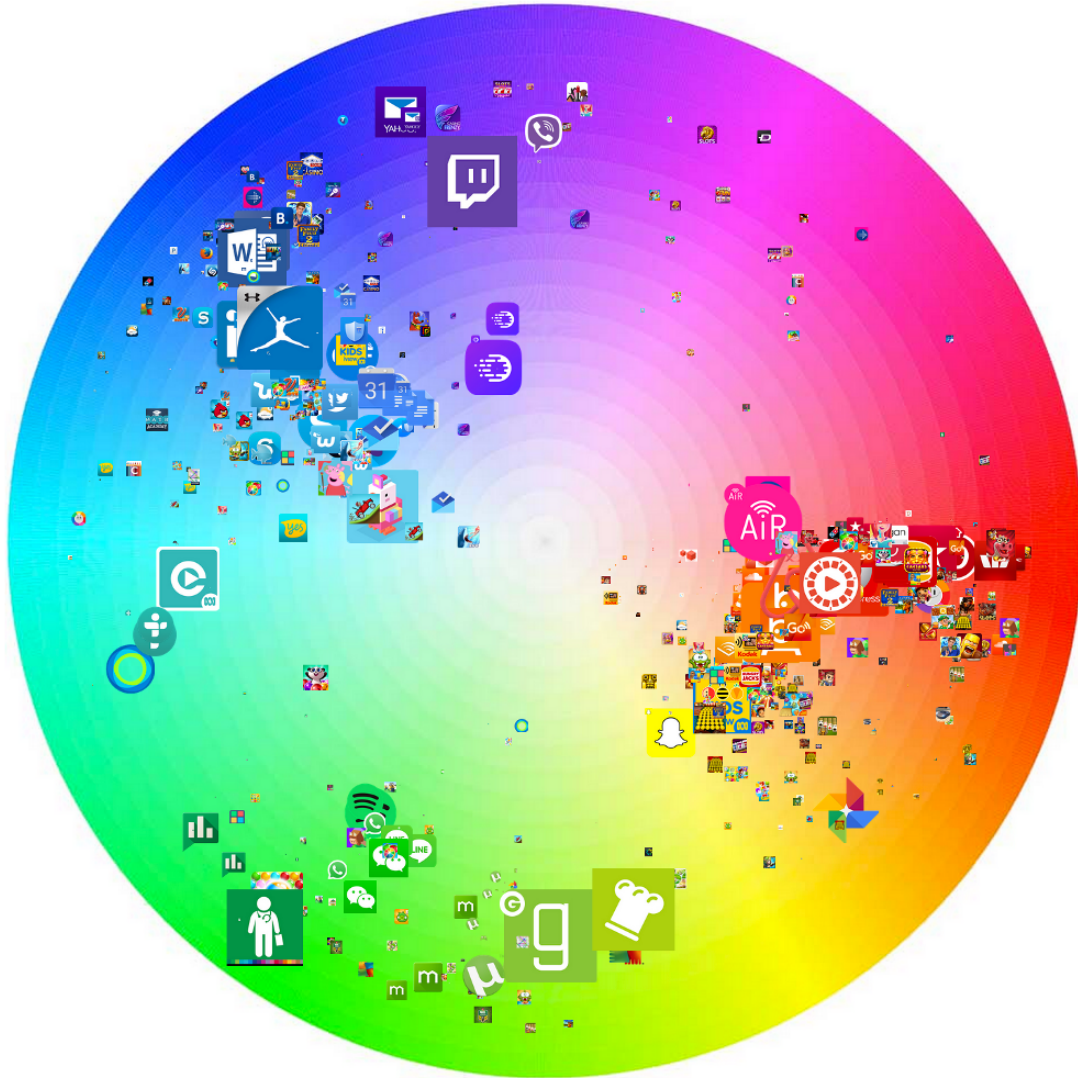
Turns out blue is similarly represented as it is on iOS, with also a lot of icon using red and green.



## Top Free On Google Play

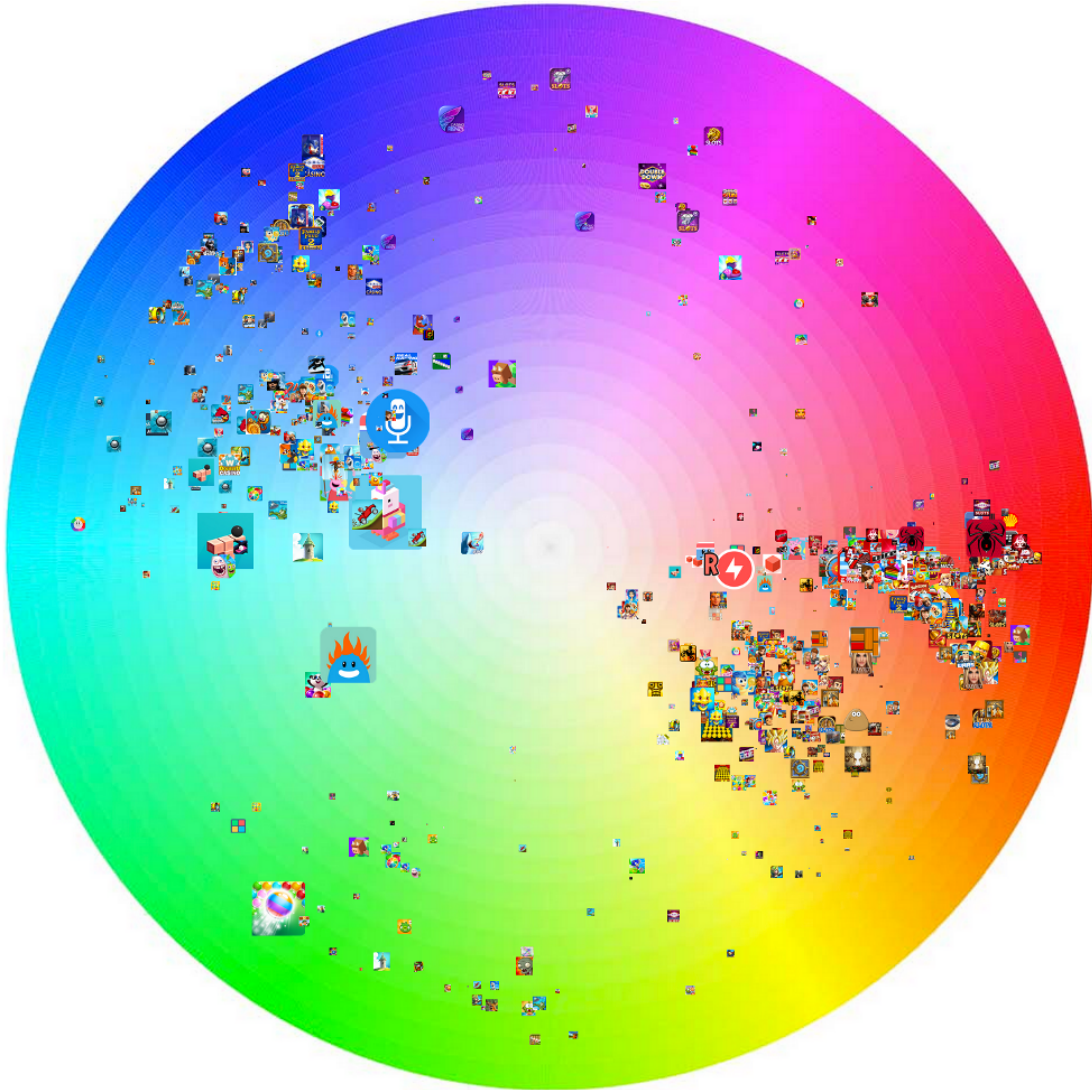
After posting the original copy of this article I had a bunch of requests for Google Play comparisons. My results are from the Australian store.

Looks pretty similar to me :)



## Top Free Games on Google Play

For comparison to iOS.



## Ordering By Chart Position

Graham from MacStories had a great suggestion on plotting the major color of an app against its chart position. I tried it for the top 100 free apps.

The larger the icon the higher up the charts the app was.





## What Color Should You Choose For Your Icon?

This should really come down to your app, what it does and your target audience. However, maybe you fit into one of these three categories.

**The Conformist:** You like to follow the crowd, so go for blue or red.

**I Like To Be Different:** Maybe you can go green, not the most popular, but you still aren't being too risqué.

**The Rebel:** You laugh at the conformists, scoff at those who think they are different. Go for pink or purple and wear it like you own it.

# Writing A Great App Store Description

Picture this:

A potential customer has liked your icon enough to tap through, they've checked out your screenshots and are still interested, until they come to your drab App Store description when they hit the back button and go to download your competitor's app. Sad trombone.

It doesn't have to be this way though.

In this chapter I'm going to share the tips I've learnt for increasing your chances that a user will download your app after reading your description, so the tragic tale above becomes a distant memory...

## Social proof is really, really important

Sure this is a chicken and egg problem, but if you have any stats to brag about don't hold back! Have you had millions of downloads? Has Apple featured you? Have you had awesome press? Does your mum love you? Brag away!

## Tell a story, don't rattle off features

Selling a story of the person your potential customers want to be is what you are trying to achieve. Are they going to be awesomely productive? Are they going to save money? Are they going to get fit in just 7 minutes? Tell me about the super human I will become using your app.

## You only get a few lines, most people won't read the rest

The App Store will only show a few lines unless the user decides to click on the more link (which they most likely won't). So make sure you cram all the good stuff at the top.

## Localize!

The majority of the world don't speak English, so you have to speak their language! Start with English and Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Japanese, Spanish, French, German, Russian, Portuguese and Korean.

There are a bunch of services out there that will localize for you, ask a friend or try out a site like Fiverr.

## Experiment

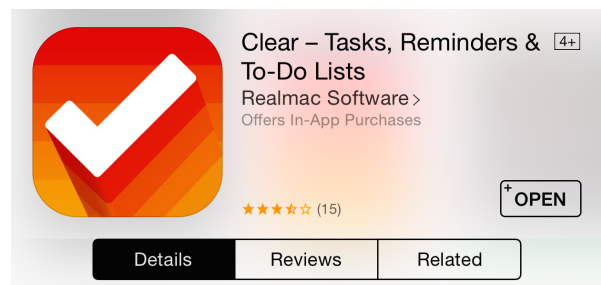
The only way you are going to know what works is by experimenting - try different wording and numbers. If your sales go backwards you can always revert.

## Some awesome examples

### Clear App

What's great about it?

Social proof is right up front. It makes me feel like it will make me a super-organized powerhouse of productivity.



#### Description

Over 2.5 million people de-clutter their lives with Clear, so stop stalling and start organising your daily routine.

Clear is the revolutionary to-do and reminders app that makes you more productive. It's as easy to use as pen and paper, and o...[more](#)

### Airbnb App

What's great about it?

They make the most of their awesome numbers - with coverage of 34,000 cities you really feel like you'll be able to find an Airbnb anywhere. The value proposition is clear both for the guest and the host too.



#### Description

Make travel planning as mobile as you are with the Airbnb iPhone App! Airbnb opens the door to the world's most interesting places to stay and is the simplest way to earn money from your extra space. With over 600,000 listings in more than 34,000 cities, Airbnb connects you with the experience that's right for you...[more](#)

# App Store Screenshots Of The Rich And Famous

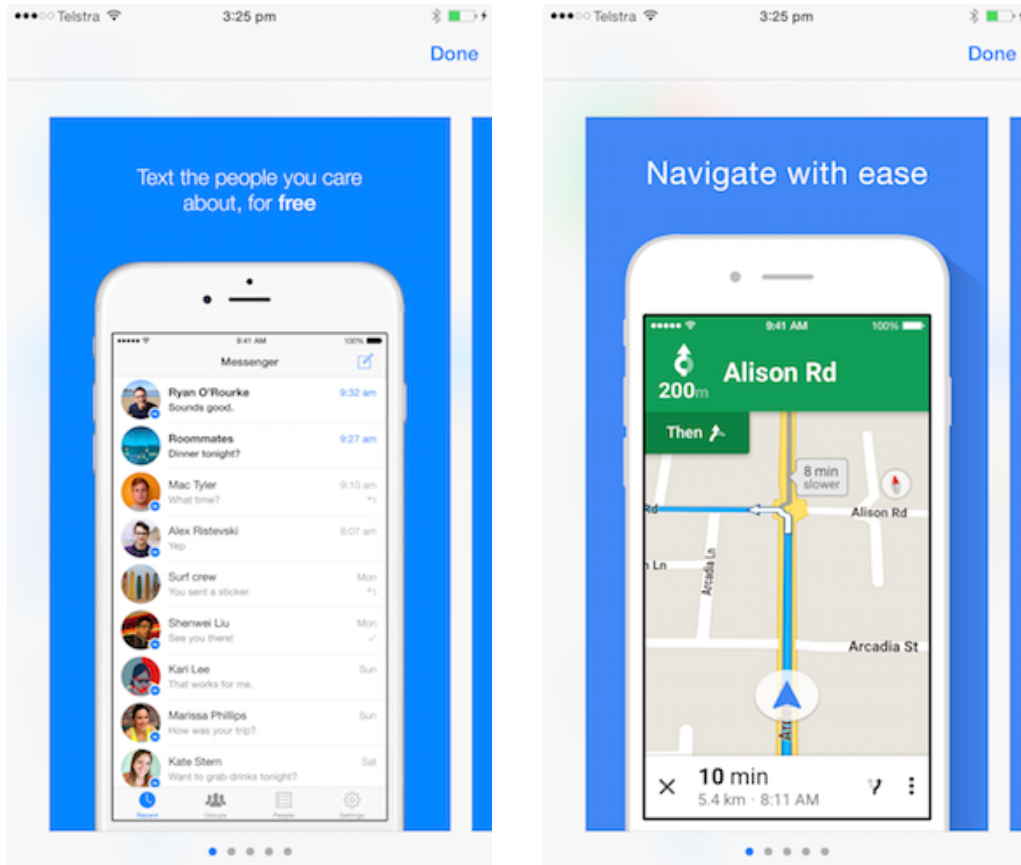
Like your description, your screenshots are an opportunity to catch the attention of someone who has been interested enough to tap on your icon. Getting these right is obviously important, so whenever I release an app and get to the screenshots I wonder:

- Should I make the screenshots portrait or landscape?
- Should I use iPhone frames? Black or white?
- Should I annotate the screenshots?
- And if I do any of these will it have any influence on Apple giving me a feature?

So I dug into both the top 100 iPhone free and paid charts and the apps that Apple had featured in the USA to find out whether there were any obvious patterns. Obviously this was taking a snapshot at a particular time, as the App Store is continually changing.

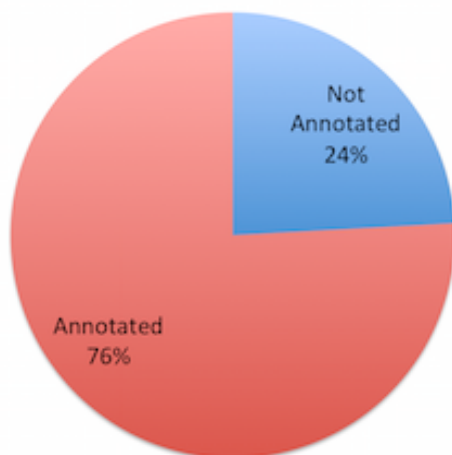
# Annotations

Annotating your screenshots is a great way to help tell your story and show off your features.

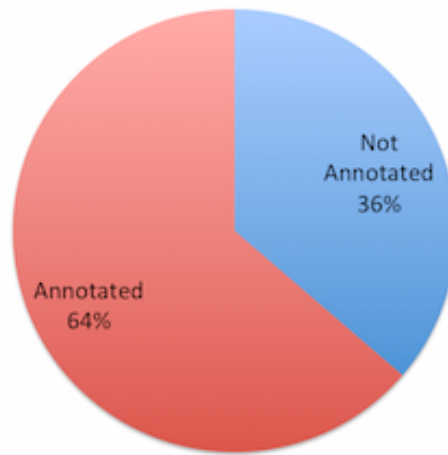


How popular is it? Extremely popular.

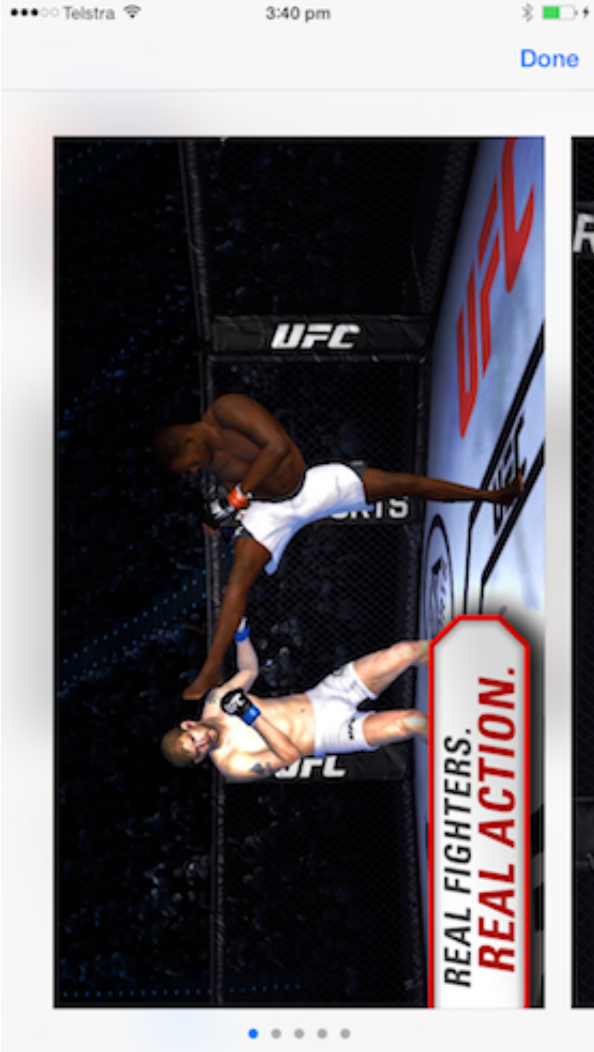
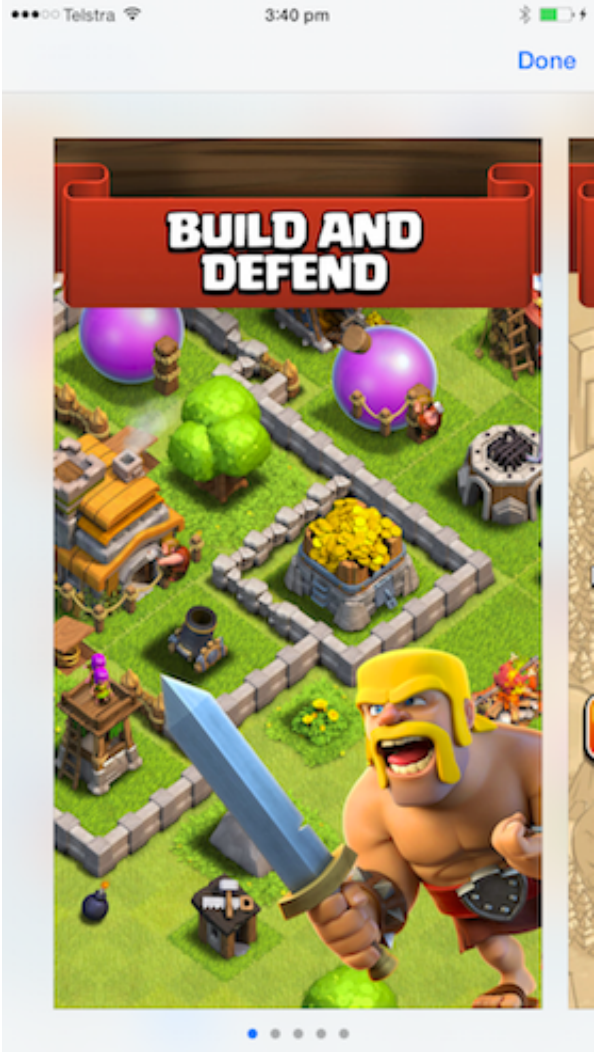
**Annotations - Featured**



**Annotated Screenshots - Top Charts**

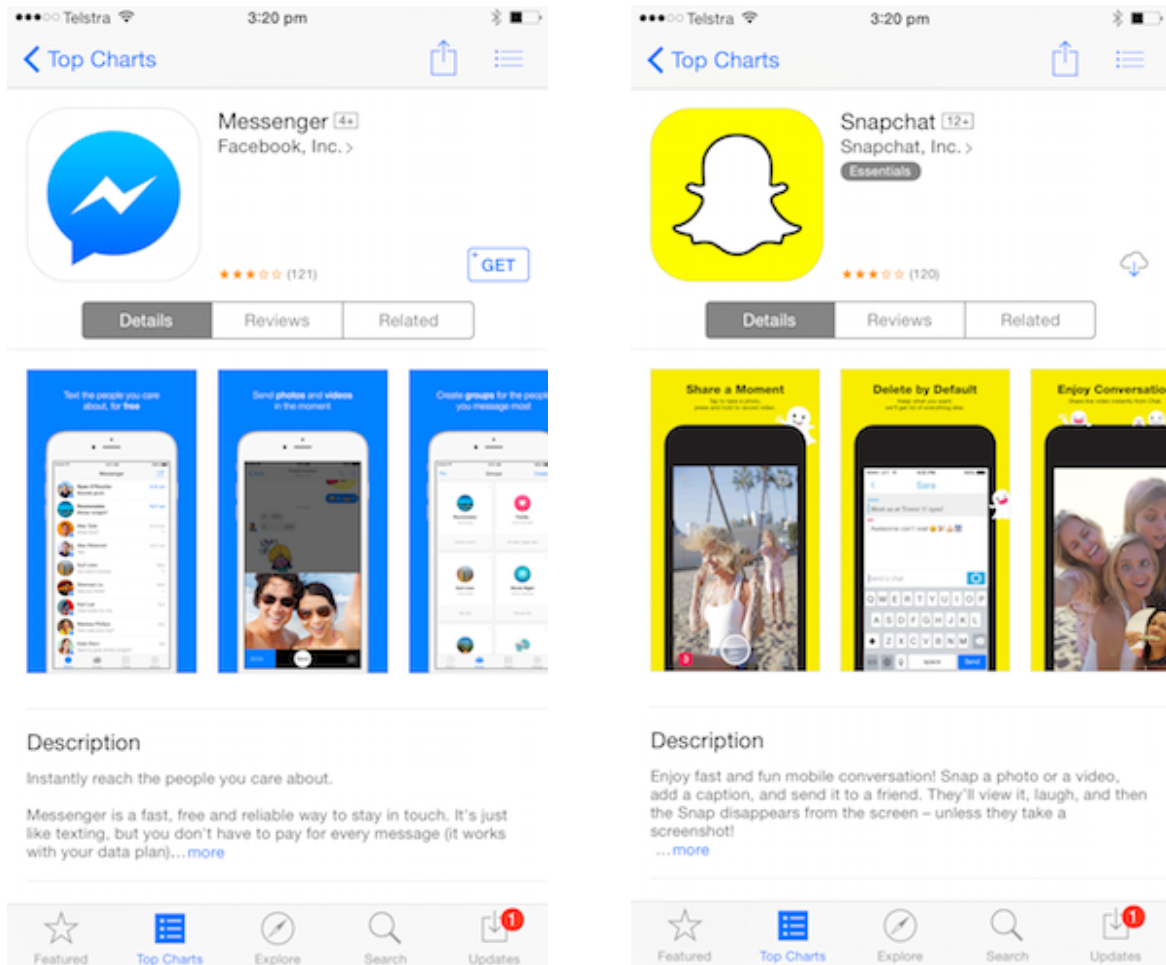


The majority of successful apps do annotate in some way, either by inseting the screenshot and using the space around it, or using an overlay. Given the high proportion of charting and featured apps using annotations Apple seem to be quite happy for you to annotate away. Here are a couple of good examples, where the annotation has been incorporated into the overall design of the screenshot:



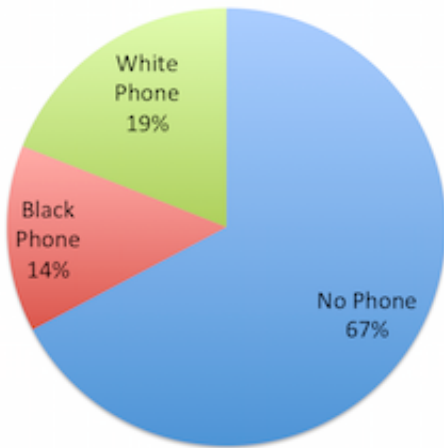
# iPhones frames

Designers love to use iPhones in their screenshots.

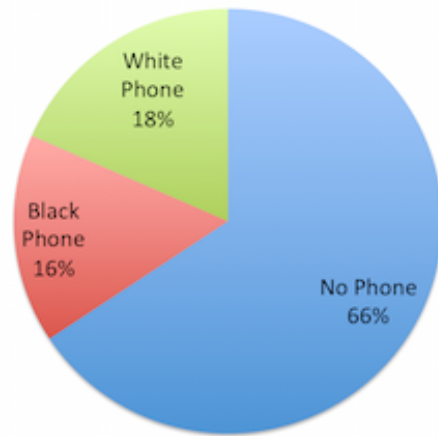


It wasn't long ago that Apple didn't want you to use white iPhones at all in marketing material. So how many apps use iPhone frames, what colors do they use and do Apple penalize app that use iPhone frames when they look for apps to feature on the App Store?

Phone - Featured



Phone - Top Charts

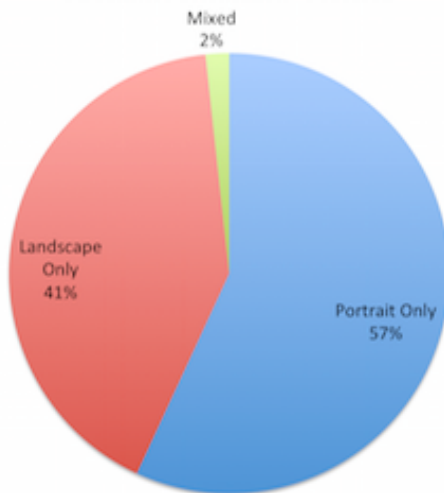


White iPhones are slightly more popular than black iPhones and about 1/3 of apps use one or the other in their screenshots. The good news is Apple seems totally fine with you doing this.

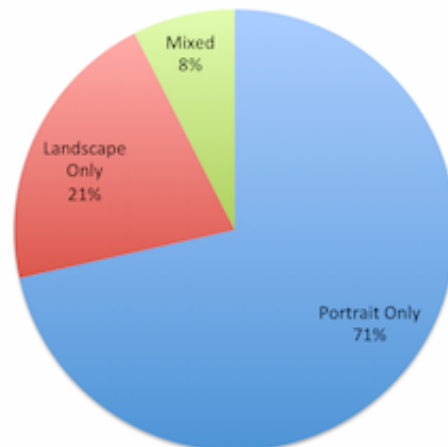
## Orientation

Interestingly the featured apps tended to have more landscape screenshots than those that appeared in the top charts.

Screenshot Orientation - Featured



Screenshot Orientation - Top Charts



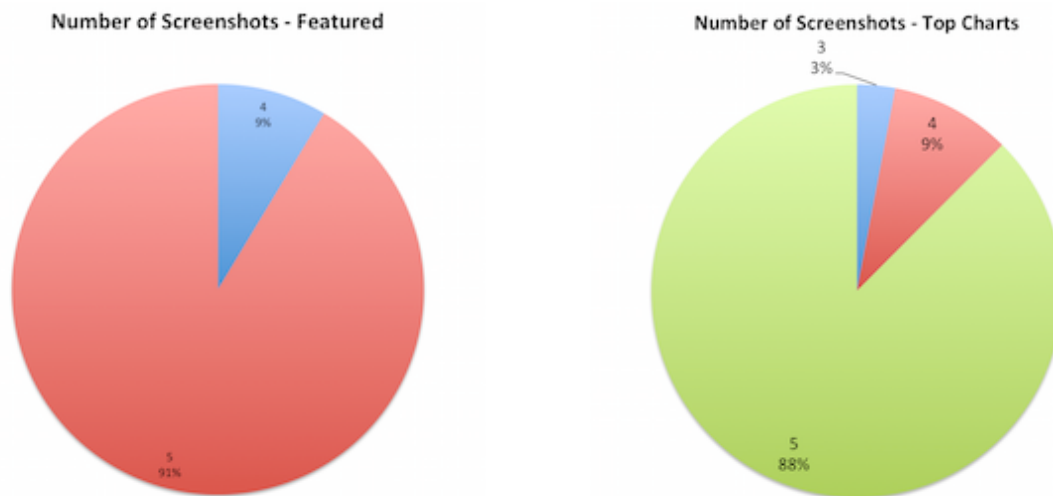


Games only make up 30-40% of the top free and paid charts, but make up a higher percentage of the featured apps. Games tend to use landscape screenshots more often than other apps, which explains why we see a bias towards landscape in the featured apps.

So it appears there's no strong preference on screenshot orientation; pick whichever option suits your apps best, but don't mix portrait and landscape.

## Number of Screenshots

Amazingly 3% of the top apps (like Snapchat) only have 3 screenshots - it's only a small number but I expected it to be 0.



Definitely look to use 5, or at the very least 4, of your available screenshots to showcase your app.

## What Apple Do

Apple stick with plain screenshots, and I'm not sure how to read that. I guess that's what they'd prefer everyone did :)

## Conclusion

Apple have become much more flexible on what they allow, and feature, in regards to App Store screenshots. Annotate and use iPhone frames without worrying if it's affecting your chance of getting some Apple love.

Most importantly, experiment with your screenshots and see what works for you.

# What Makes A Successful App Store Name?

Back in July 2014 I was discussing app names in the App Store with a fellow app developer. I'm not talking about that awesome 4 letter name with no vowels that you spent three weeks debating and looking up domain names for. I'm talking about the name you choose to show at the top of your app's page on the app store.

Only Apple knows exactly how the search algorithms work, but it's widely agreed that the app name gives us the opportunity to sneak in a few more keywords to help sell our app.

## Some examples are:

- Flipboard: Your Social News Magazine
- Minecraft - Pocket Edition
- SoundCloud: music & audio - discover and stream songs, artists, podcasts and news
- TracknShare - A universal life management diary tracker to journal, track, analyze, improve & share chronic health symptoms, such as pain and sleep, my work life, food, weight, wellness & the Quantified Self.

## Top Chart App Name Stats (USA)

Total Apps Surveyed	8400
Max Words	49
Median Words	4
Average Words	5.4
Maximum Characters	255
Minimum Characters	2
Median Characters	24
Average Characters	35.2

You get up to 255 characters on iTunes and some developers manage to use every last one of them, a skill in itself.

However, many products are big enough to just use their name like Twitter, Vine, Facebook, Pinterest etc.

Some products choose to just add their main keyword Spotify Music, Pandora Radio etc.

So what do the top ranking apps do?

## Names

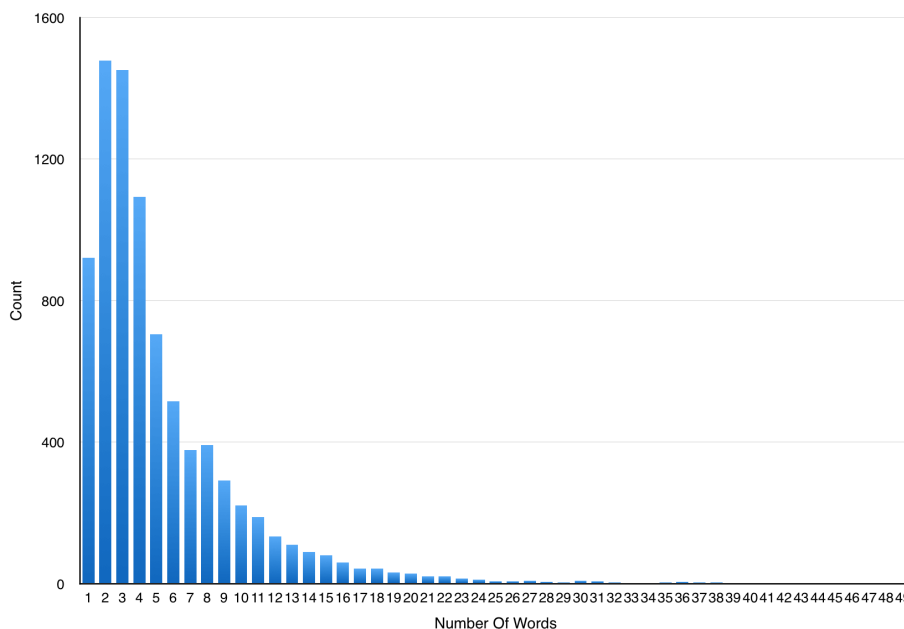
I looked at the top 200 apps in each category for both paid and free iPhone apps, 8400 apps in total.

Although some developers use up to 49 words (and all 255 characters), the majority are around 5-6 words (24-35 characters).

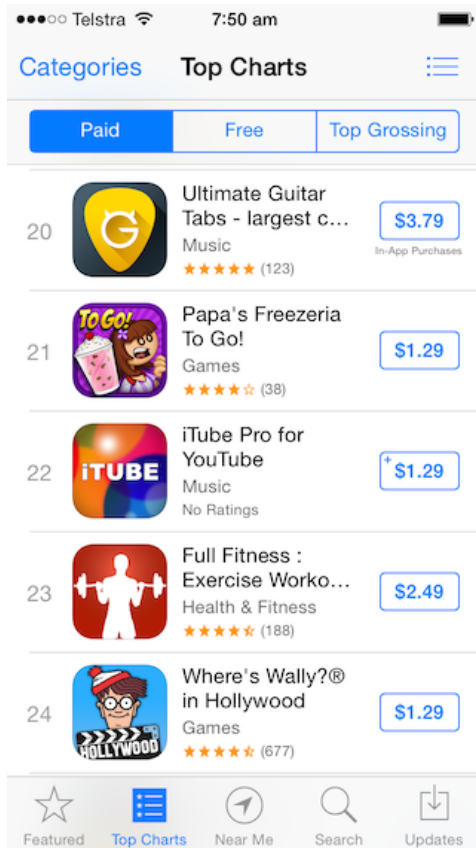
Around one third of apps use a delimiter / separator like 'Flipboard: Your Social News Magazine'.

## Word Count

Looking at the distribution of word counts it looks similar to what our median revealed above, most apps are using 1-5 words.

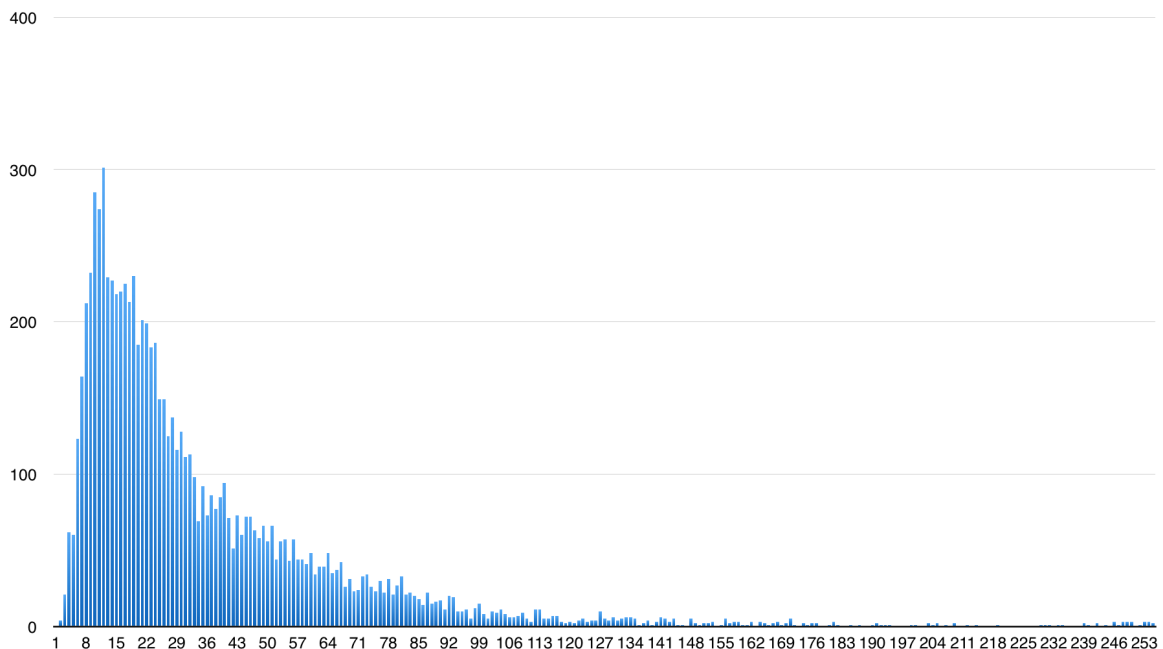


# Character Count



As you can see on the left most people will only see up to ~30 characters in your name when viewing it on an iPhone, depending on the wrapping, so it's not surprising that most apps try and stay within this limit. You only get a maximum of 30 characters on Google Play.

Here's how the character count data looked below:



## Keywords

Next I looked to see which words were most commonly used in the names.

Words you would expect like Free, Pro, Weather, Calculator etc appear often, but there were a few surprises. The one that jumped out at me as surprising was 'tracker', but sure enough there are a lot of tracker apps in the top charts.

and	1216	editor	113	all	68	day	52	texting	42
for	1134	edition	108	phone	67	personal	52	play	42
free	633	lite	101	game	66	find	52	finder	42
the	517	more	95	bible	66	lock	52	log	41
pro	476	plus	89	facebook	65	effects	51	noaa	41
with	363	new	87	7	65	go	50	travel	41
to	360	live	87	ipad	63	card	50	remote	41
app	318	from	83	workout	61	you	49	friends	41
your	297	radio	83	iOS	61	home	49	counter	41
tracker	262	player	82	minecraft	60	calls	49	5	40
mobile	229	videos	82	weight	60	picture	49	pic	40
weather	228	camera	81	sleep	59	sports	48	up	40
video	225	photos	81	real	59	pdf	47	3d	40
by	220	voice	80	pocket	59	wallpapers	46	shopping	40
photo	215	daily	79	followers	59	books	46	list	40
iphone	193	maps	78	book	58	one	46	track	40
music	186	baby	77	learn	58	trainer	45	secret	40
of	186	reader	76	dictionary	58	save	45	forecast	40
a	169	emoji	76	tracking	57	recorder	44	times	39
news	169	downloader	74	radar	57	ultimate	44	call	39
guide	169	scanner	74	search	56	clock	44	car	39
my	160	games	73	youtube	56	sounds	44	cool	38
gps	159	maker	73	chat	55	official	44	colour	38
instagram	150	time	73	screen	55	fun	43	touch	38
on	147	get	73	2014	55	browser	43	diary	38

calculator	137	calendar	73	or	54	alarm	43	disney	37
in	135	world	72	fitness	54	timer	42	scan	37
best	120	corn	70	private	54	offline	42	navigation	37
text	119	map	70	twitter	53	fishing	42	1	37
hd	118	kids	69	golf	53	business	42	easy	37
manager	118	download	69	collage	53	english	42	tv	37
2	116	google	69	audio	52	monitor	42	messages	37

Shoeboxed Receipt and Mileage Tracker  
 Worktime Tracker - Time Tracking, Timesheet & Billing Manager  
 NOAA World Radar - Free Rain & Weather Forecast - Hurricane Tracker  
 WeatherCaster - Weather radar, forecast, alerts, and hurricane tracker  
 Local Weather App: Radar Tracker, Severe Forecasts, News Alerts & Traffic Channels - Free for iPhone & iPad  
 Storm Distance Tracker - My Outdoor Thunder, Lightning & Severe Weather Alert Calculator  
 6abc StormTracker  
 Hurricane Tracker - Tracking the Tropics  
 myWeather - Live Local Weather Alerts, Forecast & Radar Tracker for Storms, Snow, Fires & Earthquakes App for iPhone & iPad  
 Hurricane Tracker WESH 2 - Orlando, Central Florida  
 Hurricane Tracker By HurricaneSoftware.com's - iHurricane Free  
 FOX19 Storm Tracker Weather  
 KELOLAND Storm Tracker  
 Max Mayfield's Hurricane Tracker - WPLG Local 10  
 FlightView Free - Real-Time Flight Tracker and Airport Delay Status  
 FlightAware Flight Tracker  
 AllTrails Hiking & Mountain Biking Trails, GPS Tracker, & Offline Topo Maps  
 GPS TRACKER (Follow family/friends with your phone)  
 Flight Tracker Free  
 Phone Tracker!  
 Airport (ALL) +Live Flight Tracker -all airports and flights in the world  
 TripTracker - Live Flight Status Tracker  
 Flightwise Flight Tracker Free  
 Miami-Dade Transit Tracker  
 TheGrint | GPS, Stats and Golf Handicap Tracker App  
 Golf Pad: Free Golf GPS Range Finder, Scorecard and Club Tracker  
 CyclingNews Tour Tracker • 2014 Tour de France Edition  
 MyAthlete Live Tracker  
 Golf Handicap Tracker & Calculator (US)  
 USA Pro Cycling Challenge Tour Tracker  
 Followers For Instagram - Followers and Unfollowers Tracker  
 Followers on Instagram - Get a Free Follow and Unfollow Tracker for My Follower and Unfollowers on iPad and iPhone  
 GPS Phone Tracker - GPS Tracking

*Hundreds of apps using the keywords "Tracker"*

Another one that surprised me was just how many third party Instagram apps there are.

Instagrab - Save, Repost, Share and Shoutout Photos and Videos on Instagram  
Textizer Fonts - Fun Looking Text Font for Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter and Telegram  
Like4Like - get more Likes on Instagram like on 1000Likes & Instaliker  
FastFollow - Get Followers for Instagram  
Monogram Wallpapers for iOS 7 • Custom Design for iPhone, iPod and iPad • Pimp Backgrounds by Adding Monograms to Lock and Home Screeer 7 and iOS 6 • Custom Monogram Designs Look Amazing on Facebook, Tumblr, Craigslist and Instagram  
Like Potion: Get Likes for Instagram (similar to InstaLikes, WOWLikes, LikeBooster, 1000Likes etc)  
1000 Likes for Instagram Free - Get insta like on Instagram app & boost ig followers  
1000Followers - Get more followers on Instagram  
LikeDike - Likes and followers for Instagram  
FancyMessage-Pimp Text with New Color Bubble, Emoji, Textart, Keyboard for WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram FREE  
InstaFollow Booster - Boost Followers and Likes for Instagram + Wow Gram wowLikes  
Tweegram - Text message and quotes to Instagram pictures, photos, pics + Make awesome effect + Vintage fonts for love dedication  
MoreLikes For Instagram  
Text2Pic - Musical Text On Photo + Caption Pictures + Video Quote Marker for Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, Flickr, Twitter, Facebook and  
Instaliker 1000 - Get Likes and Followers on Instagram for Free!  
Picture Blur - Hide face, wipe skin, erase pimple from portrait, intensity adjusting. Share on facebook, instagram and Photoshop for 1  
Followers + for Instagram - Follow Management Tool for iPhone, iPad, iPod  
RepostWhiz - Repost Videos, Save Instagram Videos, & Photos  
Followers For Instagram - Followers and Unfollowers Tracker  
Get Followers - Get more Instagram followers  
Repost for Instagram  
Followers on Instagram - Get a Free Follow and Unfollow Tracker for My Follower and Unfollowers on iPad and iPhone  
InstaTrack for Instagram - The Most Powerful InstaFollow Tool for Tracking Instagram Followers, Unfollowers, Best Friends, Ghost Users Pl  
Followers for Instagram - Get thousands of Instagram followers and track unfollowers  
Get Followers For Instagram - More Followers  
Repost & Regram for Instagram Free - Photo and Video Reposter Instarepost Whiz App - Shoutout, Download, Instagrab, and Search Your Pf  
Videos on Downloader!  
GramFamous - Get followers for Instagram  
JustUnfollow for Twitter & Instagram Management  
InstaMessage - Chat with Instagram users. Send private text messages, photos, voices and stickers to your ig followers and friends. S  
res and get likes and much more!  
InstaGhost - Ghost Follower Analytics for Instagram Lite  
Font Keyboard Free - Cool New Text Styles & Emoji Art Font for iMessage, Twitter, Kik, Facebook Messenger, Instagram Comments & More!  
GramFamous - Get likes for Instagram  
Get Likes for Instagram - WowLikes & 1000Likes For Instagram  
Followers For Instagram - Followers / Unfollowers  
FollowAnalysis for Instagram - The best follower analysis & tracking tool  
Followers BOOM: Get a followers explosion for Instagram  
LikeBooster - Get more Instagram likes & Followers Plus Wow Gram wowlikes  
My Followers On Instagram Free  
Followers on Instagram Free - Who Unfollow and Follow for My UnFollowers to Get and Gain Ghost Unfollower Tracker  
SaveGram - Videos and Photos Downloader for Instagram FREE

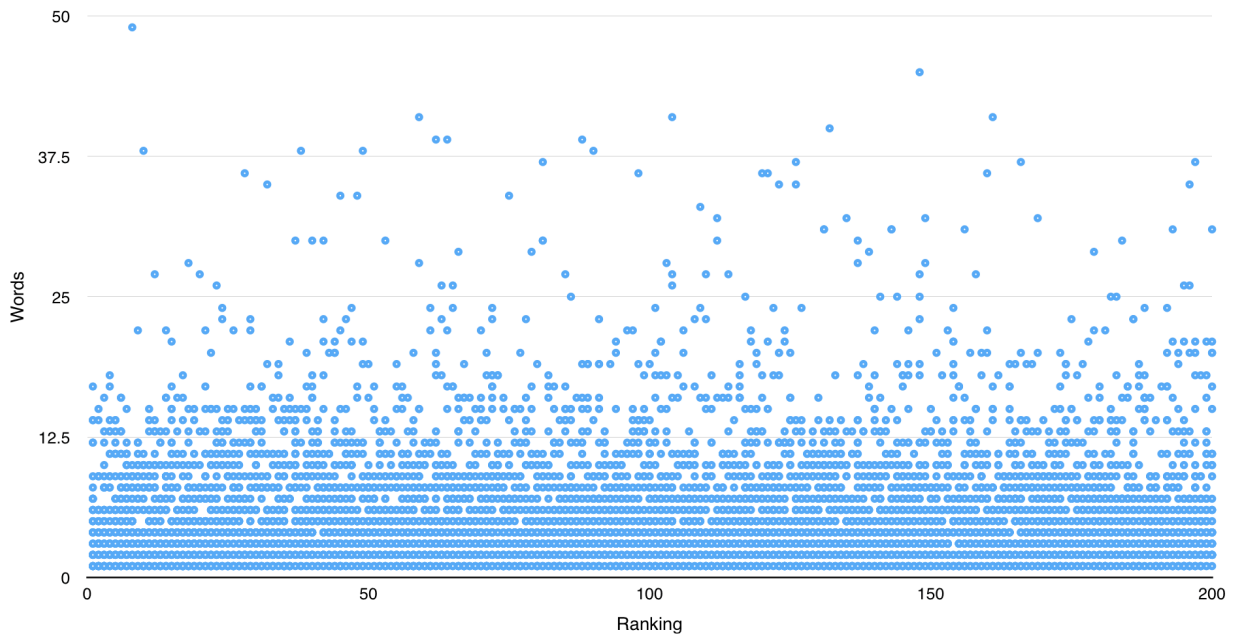
*Gramming... so much gramming*

Other popular apps like Minecraft (my son has probably downloaded all of these), Facebook and Youtube are also heavily targeted.



# Words vs Ranking

Unfortunately there is no magic bullet, there's no clear stand out about what works when you look at the number of words against ratings.



## My Tips

As expected there are no easy ways to the top of the charts. However, using a name around 4-5 words long gives us the opportunity to sell our story, not look too spammy and sneak in a few more keywords.

Pick a name that looks authoritative. Using 255 characters doesn't make me think you are the number one app for the job.

- Don't add too many words, stick with 2-7.
- Use your name to tell us your story, why should I download it?
- Pick a name that grabs my attention without seeing the icon or screenshots.
- Looking through the top charts I picked out a few apps I thought were named really well.
- Wish - Shopping Made Fun

- Videoshop - Video Editor
- POF - Free Online Dating
- Badoo - Meet New People, Chat, Socialize

Lastly, try mentioning your app name to a stranger and ask if they know what it does. If they look at you like you're a complete idiot because it's so obvious you're on a winner.

# Next Steps to look awesome in the App Store

In this section we've looked at how successful apps use their App Store page to best effect. You've probably gathered that I think the key to optimizing my App Store presence is to test, test and test again, but I found knowing how the world's most successful apps optimized theirs helped me identify a good starting point.

Before we get into what I've learnt about how Apple's Features & Top Charts work here's a quick checklist of recommendations to help you review your App Store pages and decide what to try next. You may also like to try running the [App Store Health Check](#) for your apps (and your competitors).

## **Description:**

- Include social proof if you have it
- put important points first, most people only read the first few lines
- tell a story rather than listing features
- Localize into English, Chinese (traditional & simplified), Japanese, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian & Korean.

## **Screenshots:**

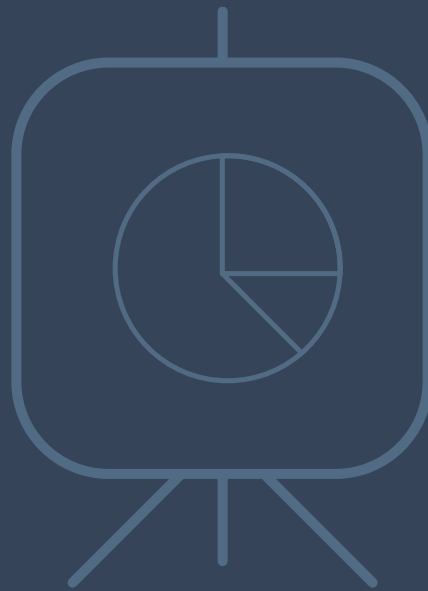
- Feel free to annotate
- test using iPhone frames
- make sure you use all 5 screenshots

## **Name:**

- 2-7 words is best
- use your name to tell the user why they should download it
- choose an attention grabbing name - it's as important as your icon

## PART 2

# Features, Charts & Countries

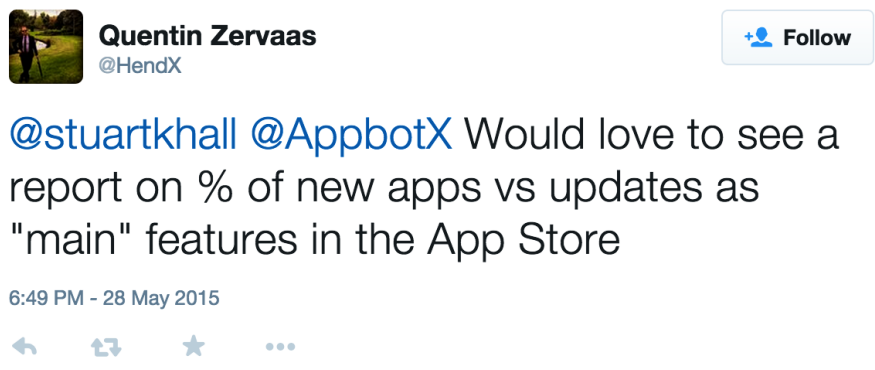


Getting featured and reaching the Top Charts in one or more countries is hard. Really hard. The value of getting some love from Apple is very well known, but the path to Apple glory remains highly mysterious.

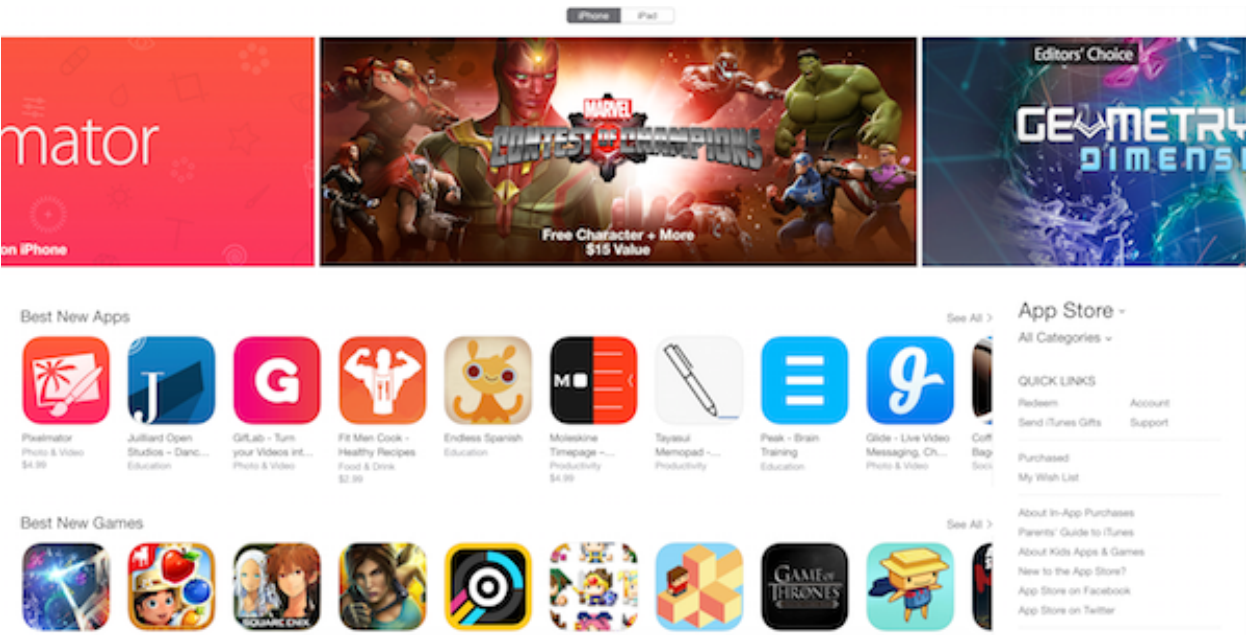
In this section I'll share information about how star rating, age and choice of category affect your chances of being featured or reaching the charts. I'm also going to look at data that will help you decide whether to build an app for one market or many, and which markets to focus on.

# Featured Apps: The Influence of Star Rating, Price, Age & Category

Thanks must go to @Hendx for prompting this chapter via Twitter. When he reached out I thought it sounded like an interesting report to run, and started investigating.



I know personally when I have had an app featured it hasn't been straight away, so on Wednesday June 3, 2015 I took a snapshot of the featured apps for iPhone on the homepage of the US store and ran the numbers.



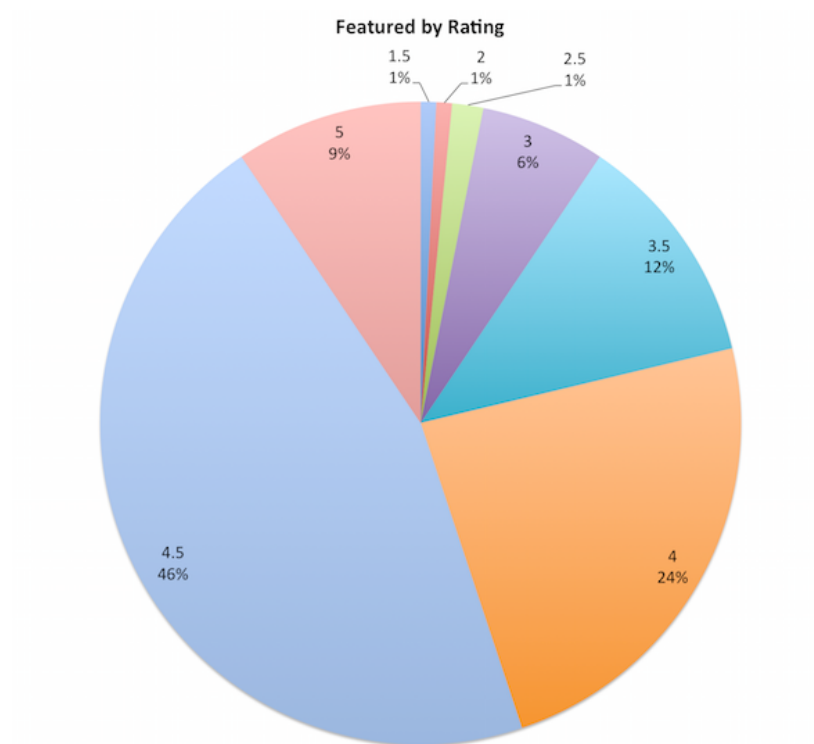
There were 129 apps featured on the front page, here's what I found.

## Rating

Unsurprisingly the rating / how users feel about the app was extremely important.

Over 50% of apps featured were 4.5 or 5 star apps.

Making an app people love is the most important thing to concentrate on.

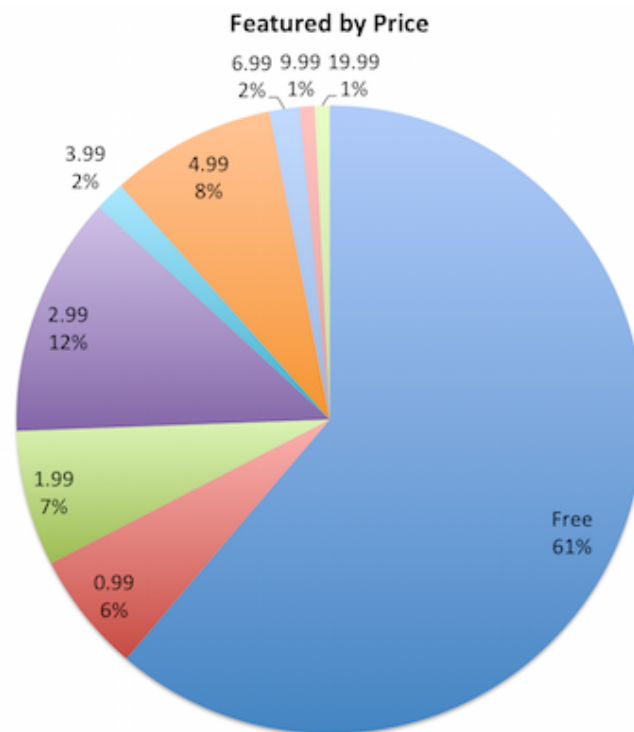


# Price

As with most apps on the App Store the majority of apps featured were free to download.

Surprisingly, of the apps that did charge, \$2.99 and \$4.99 were the most well represented prices featured apps.

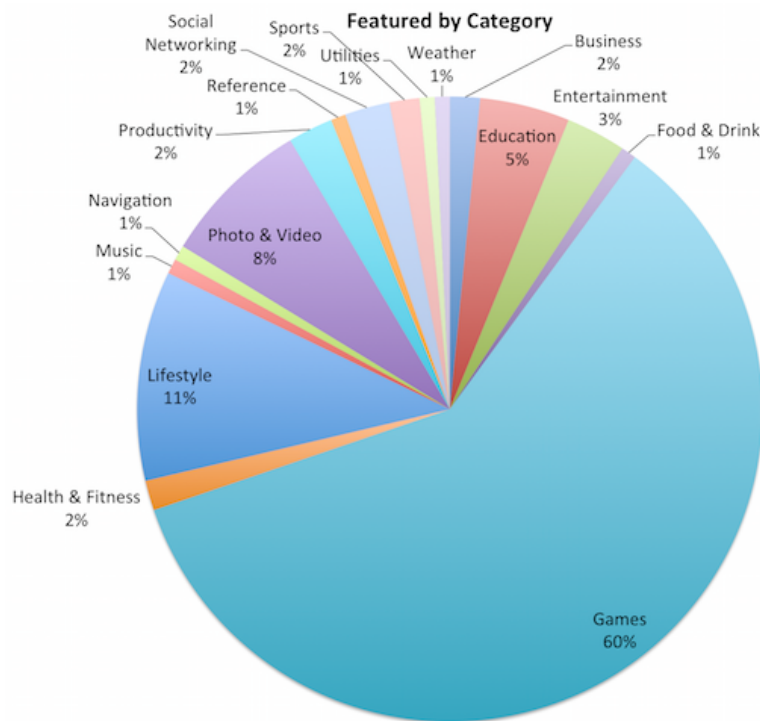
Don't be afraid to charge a fair price for a quality app if you decide to not go freemium.



# Category

As expected games dominated the apps featured, making up 60% of the total. This isn't surprising when games are given their own sections like 'Best New Games'.

Interestingly, for this particular week, the breakdown varied a lot from what appears in the top charts with Lifestyle and Education featuring heavily.





## Age

Finally coming back to the original question around the % of new apps vs updates.

Looking over all the featured apps the age in days varied from 6 day to 2382 days, with a median of 482 days or 1.3 years old.

27 of the 129 apps (20.9%) were launched less than a month ago, leaving the vast majority of the features to older apps that have been updated recently.

This is great news for developers that miss out on a feature when their apps first launch.

## Conclusion

It's critical we make great apps that people love and leave us 5 star reviews.

Even if you don't get that big app feature when you first launch, stick at it, you are still in with a shot.

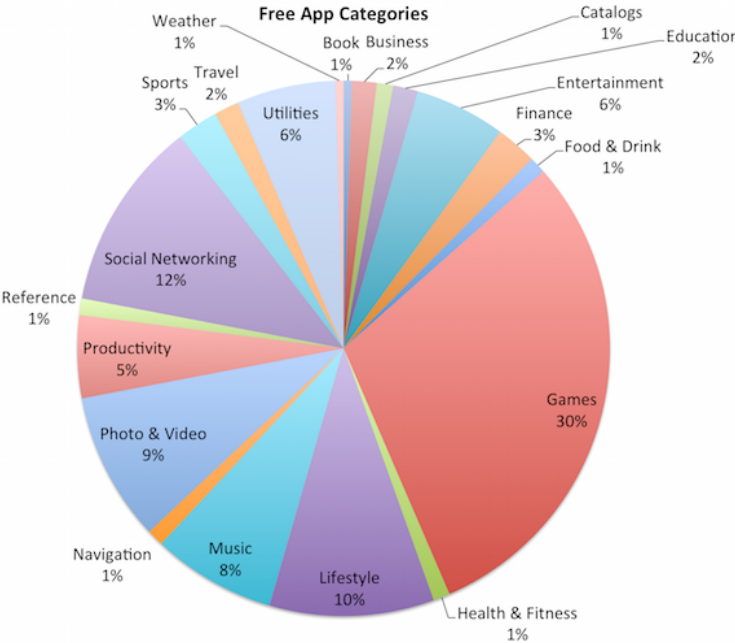
# Dissecting The App Store Top Charts

I was reading an interesting article on Forbes called "[App Discovery Nightmare And How Reliance Games Is Tackling It](#)". The article made some interesting points on breaking into the top charts for apps and how the number of games in the top charts had been slipping.

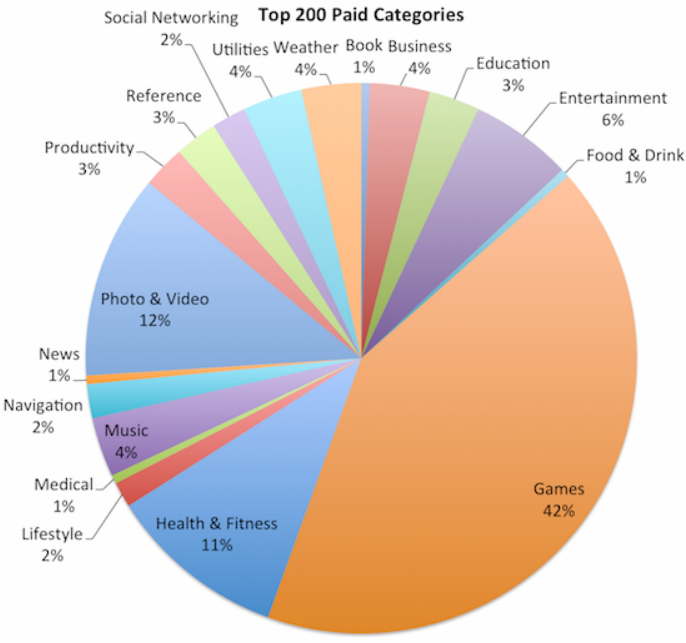
In my mind games have always dominated the App Store, both in downloads and revenue, but what is the truth?

This inspired me to dig into the US top 200 charts (free, paid and grossing) to check out how the categories and age of the apps compared. The data is a snapshot taken on April 8 2015.

## Categories

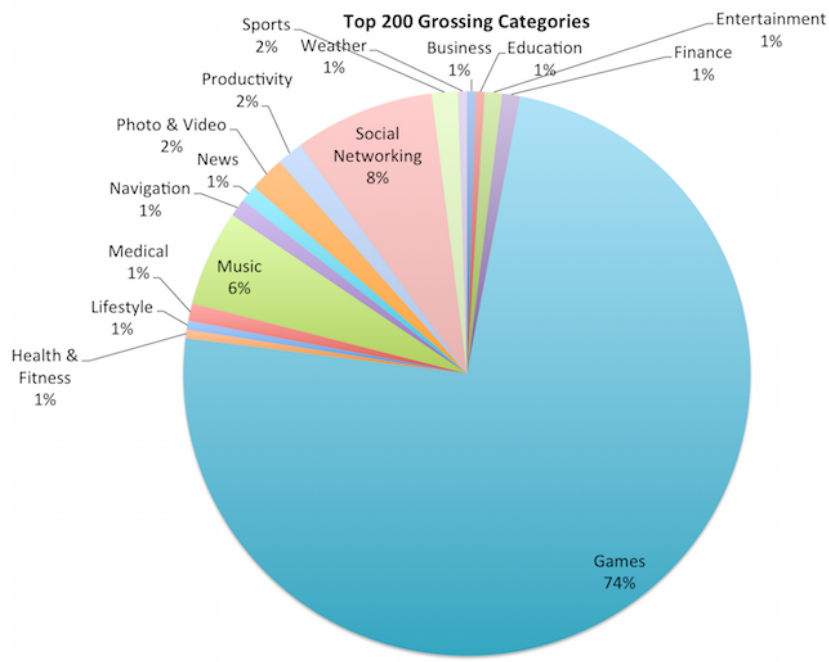


See raw image [here](#).



See raw image [here](#).

Interestingly (to me at least) games don't dominate the free charts to the extent I thought they did.



See raw image [here](#).

This almost looks like a big blue games Pac-Man is eating everyone else up.

**Games:** Games dominate the grossing charts, with almost three quarters of the entries, but on actual free downloads it falls to 30%. Other categories are competing on downloads, but have a long way to go to catch up to the effectiveness of games to convert freemium users via in app purchase.

**Photo & Video:** Interestingly photo & video apps have a strong showing in both the free and paid download charts, but fall away significantly in the top grossing charts.

**Health & Fitness:** Health & Fitness is extremely small (1%) on both the free and grossing charts, but performs much better (11%) in the paid charts. This surprised me because I found that I generated much more revenue with my fitness app being free with In-app purchases than it did being paid up front.

**Social Networking:** Although very small in the paid charts Social Networking performs well both on free and grossing charts, mainly thanks to dating apps.

It appears that a really significant amount of the money (> 80% by grossing) is generated by games and social networking / dating apps, no big news to us all there.

# App Age

How sticky are the apps in the top charts? I had a look across free, paid and grossing charts. Age is defined here as the time since the app was released, not when it was last updated.

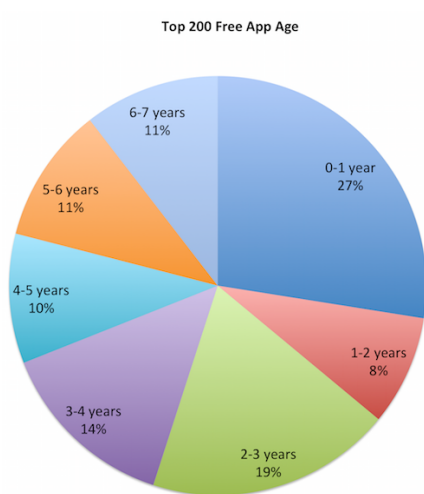
	Free	Paid	Grossing
Median Age (days)	1013	887	658
Median Age (years)	2.8	2.4	1.8

The median age of an app in the top free charts is almost 3 years!

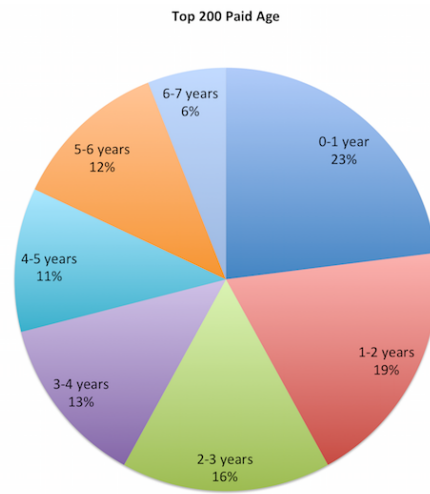
If we look at the breakdown of the charts:

In the free charts 11% of the apps were launched over 6 years ago, while only 35% of apps were made in the last 2 years. Pretty tough to break into that one.

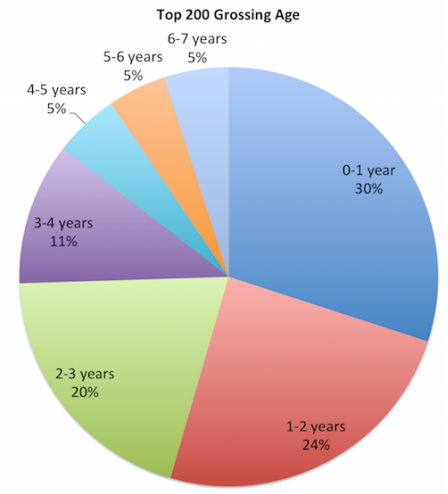
The paid charts has the most balanced age of apps.



See raw image [here](#).



See raw image [here](#).



See raw image [here](#).

Top grossing has the majority of apps under 2 years old. I'd say this is more of an indication of the move to freemium / IAP over the last few years.

## Conclusion

The common thinking around apps being big at launch and fading away definitely doesn't hold true for the top charts. A significant portion of the apps have been around for many years, the same old faces.

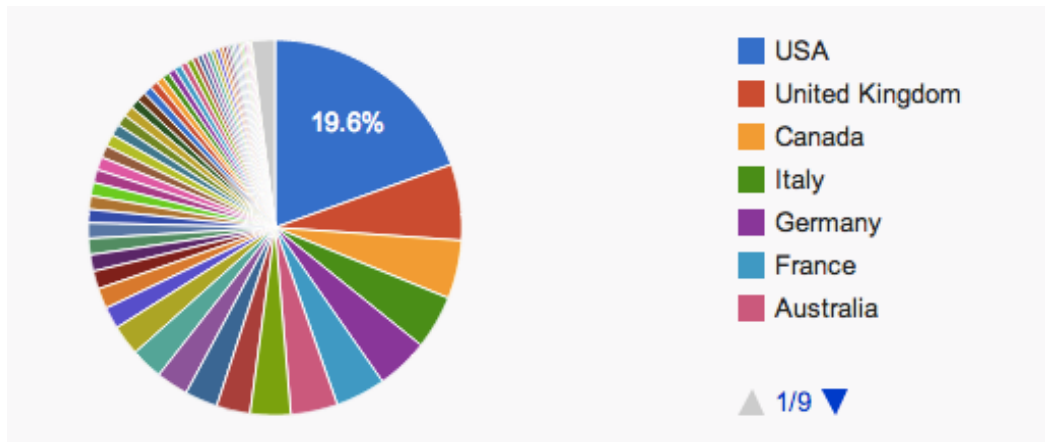
What keeps them there? Historical downloads? Recent downloads? Total reviews? I suspect it's a combination of these factors that cause Apple's algorithms to keep these apps at the top of the charts.

Again it points towards the app discovery problem. How do new apps compete with these apps that have lodged themselves at the top for almost 7 years?

I think this gives us hope, even if we don't have the big launch we can listen to our users, keep reading those app reviews and improving our products. Maybe in another 7 years time your app will be at the top, or the top 3 like Facebook.

# App Store Reviews For All Countries – Who Has The Most?

Ever been curious what countries produce the most app store reviews?



- USA
- United Kingdom
- Canada
- Italy
- Germany
- France
- Australia

This gives us all a pretty good guide of what countries to aim at.

You can see the latest live stats below:

[Live App Store Reviews By Country.](#)

# Which Languages Should I Localize My App Into?

A question I wanted the answer for AppbotX recently was : "Which languages should I localize apps into?".

After a bit of Googling I couldn't find answers with data to back it up, nor could I find much good data around where apps are being used.

## The Data

So I turned to the Appbot data to see where reviews are coming from. I believed there would be a good correlation between usage and number of app reviews left.

Looking at data for one month (approximately 1 million reviews for 34,000 iOS apps) here are the top countries and their major languages:

Country	Major Language(s)	% Of Reviews
USA	English	21.64%
China	Chinese	17.38%
Japan	Japanese	6.00%
United Kingdom	English	5.30%
Russia	Russian	4.06%
Germany	German	3.90%
Canada	English & French (21%)	3.62%
France	French	3.32%
Italy	Italian	3.05%
Brazil	Portuguese	2.70%
Australia	English	2.56%
Mexico	Spanish	2.38%
Korea, Republic Of	Korean	2.04%
Taiwan	Chinese	1.59%
Spain	Spanish	1.56%
Thailand	Thai	1.42%
Turkey	Turkish	1.40%
Netherlands	Dutch	1.31%
Indonesia	Indonesian	1.00%
Sweden	Swedish	0.80%
India	“mind blown” - see wikipedia	0.79%
Switzerland	German (64%), French (20%), Italian (7%)	0.71%



# The Results

Collating from countries into languages I got:

<b>Languages</b>	<b>% of Reviews</b>
English	33.33%
Chinese	19.64%
Japanese	6.00%
Spanish	5.03%
French	4.41%
German	4.36%
Russian	4.06%
Italian	3.10%
Portugese	2.70%
Korean	2.04%

# Conclusion

## Languages You Must Do

You really should localise to English and Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), this will get you 53% coverage by my numbers.

## Second Round

Next look at Japanese, Spanish, French, German, Russian, Portuguese and Korean, this will get you to almost 85% (probably even higher, I didn't look at all the countries of in long tail countries, many more of them probably also speak these languages).

## The Long Tail

I didn't take the time to look beyond these top languages, but some other languages like Thai, Turkish, Dutch, Swedish, Malay, Danish, Vietnamese etc (this list could get really long) will help you get closer to 100%.

# Can you be successful with an app that's available in only one market?

I've always focused on the USA charts as the main source of rankings and income, but I also know a number of developers who make a good living from making apps specifically for the Australian market.

But how do the charts vary from the USA to Australia? And how do they differ from a completely different market like China?

We took a snapshot of the top charts in the US, Australia and China on Monday May 18th, 2015 to see what the difference really is. Do the same apps dominate everywhere, or is making an app for a specific region a valid approach?

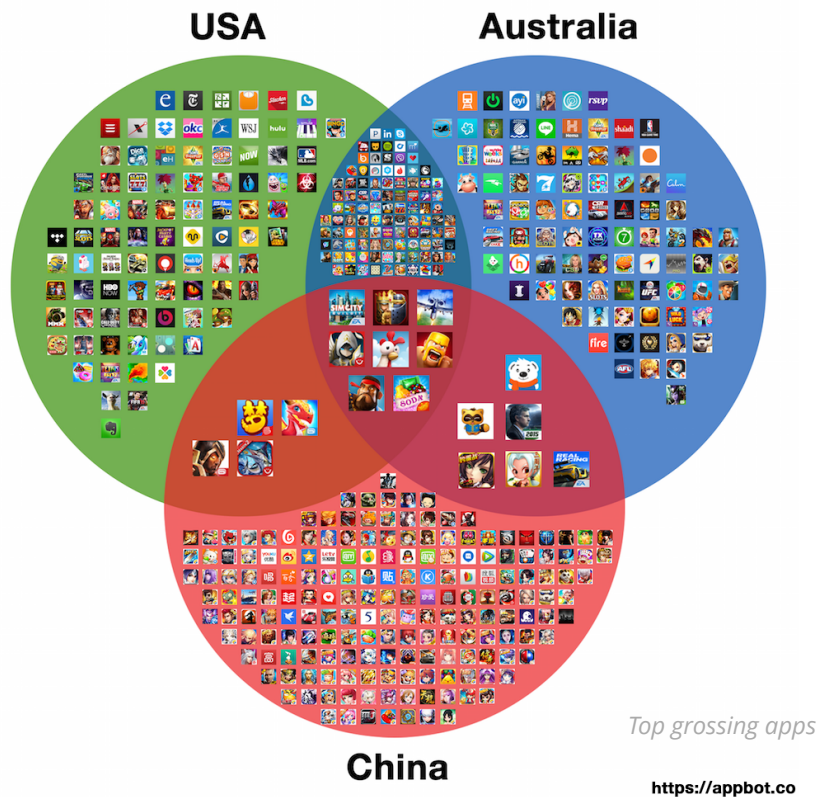
An app has been defined as one with a unique identifier. There are a couple of apps that break this rule and are submitted as different apps in the US and other countries, such as Real Racing 3.

## Grossing Top 200

Surprisingly (to me at least), only 8 top grossing apps appeared in all 3 countries.

- [Clash of Clans](#)
- [Candy Crush Soda Saga](#)
- [Boom Beach](#)
- [Hay Day](#)
- [Summoners War](#)
- [SimCity BuildIt](#)
- [Empires & Allies](#)
- [Clash of Kings – Last Empire](#)

I plotted the icons on a Venn diagram to get a visual representation of the data:



US & Australia had the biggest crossover with another 103 apps appearing in both countries. While the USA and China only shared another 4 apps and Australia and China 6.

This means a whopping 182 apps, or 91%, of apps in China only weren't top in the top 200 grossing in Australia, or the US

Australia had 83 (41.5%) and the USA 85 (42.5%) apps that were specific to the charts in their country.

	Count	%
All Countries	8	4%
USA & China (Excluding All)	4	2%
USA & Australia (Excluding All)	103	52%
China & Australia (Excluding All)	6	3%
USA Only	85	43%
China Only	182	91%
Australia Only	83	42%

## Paid Top 200

15 apps appeared in the Paid Top 200 in all three countries - almost double the number of apps that appeared in Top Grossing in all three markets. They were:

- [Minecraft Pocket Edition](#)
- [Plague Inc.](#)
- [Facetune](#)
- [Toca Lab](#)
- [Enlight](#)
- [Afterlight](#)
- [Sky Guide: View Stars Night or Day](#)
- [Mickey's Shapes Sing-Along by Disney Imagicademy](#)
- [Monument Valley](#)
- [Camera+](#)
- [Angry Birds](#)
- [Knights of Pen & Paper 2](#)
- [Sleep Cycle alarm clock](#)
- [Runtastic PRO GPS Running, Walking, Jogging, Fitness Distance Tracker and Marathon Training](#)
- [Infinity Blade III](#)

Still, 171 (85.5%) of apps in China didn't appear in the top apps in the USA or Australia.

USA & Australia shared another 82 apps, so almost half were the same for both countries.

	Count	%
All Countries	15	8%
USA & China (Excluding All)	8	4%
USA & Australia (Excluding All)	82	41%
China & Australia (Excluding All)	6	3%
USA Only	95	48%
China Only	171	86%
Australia Only	97	49%

## Free Top 200

Just like top grossing, top free shared 8 apps over all 3 countries. Two of them are Apple's own apps.

- [iTunes U](#)
- [Find My iPhone](#)
- [Uber](#)
- [Quetzalcoatl](#)
- [Candy Crush Soda Saga](#)
- [Boom Beach](#)
- [Despicable Me: Minion Rush](#)
- [Nom Cat – Endless feeding frenzy arcade game](#)

Over 50% of apps were unique in Australia, 94.5% (!! ) unique to China and 50% unique in the USA.

	Count	%
All Countries	8	4%
USA & China (Excluding All)	2	1%
USA & Australia (Excluding All)	90	45%
China & Australia (Excluding All)	1	1%
USA Only	100	50%
China Only	189	95%
Australia Only	101	51%

## Conclusion

My eyes have definitely been opened to the uniqueness of the top charts in different countries. Many of these apps are weather apps, TV guides, banking apps, tourism and recipe apps specific to the countries they are charting in.

For your next app it's worth considering an app specific to a single market.

# Features, Charts & Countries in brief

## Are you set to top the charts or be featured?

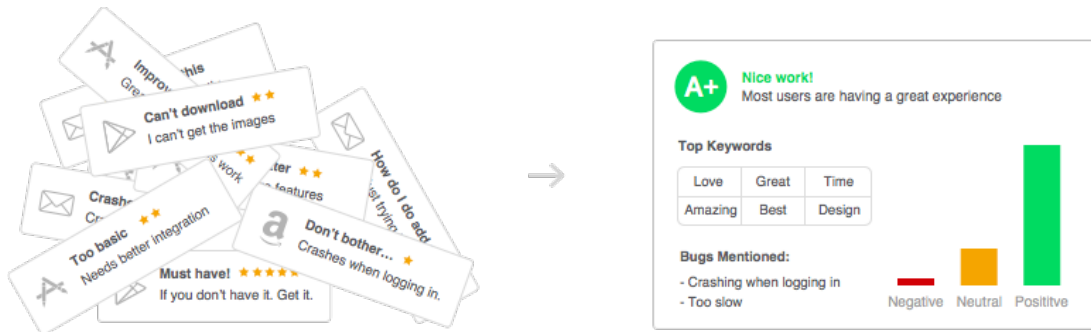
It's not an easy task to break into Apple's charts. Apple have a bias toward tried-and-tested apps with a high average star rating, but don't be discouraged. Here are some practical tips to bear in mind as you work towards an app that makes number 1 :)

- Star rating matters, and matters a lot. Focus on getting good reviews and ratings and your chances of both being featured and reaching the charts improve a lot.
- Apple don't exhibit a clear preference toward a specific price point in the paid charts. You can afford to charge a reasonable price.
- Games have a higher chance of being featured, but many other categories are well represented.
- Apple tends to feature older apps. The good news is that your app will likely be sticky in the charts if it makes it there.

## Choosing markets for your app

It's possible to be successful with an app that's made for a single market. However, if you decide to make your app widely available you need to make sure your app is well localized. At a minimum you need to localize into English and Chinese (Simplified & Traditional) - this will give you about 53% coverage. Languages worth considering after those two are Japanese, Spanish, French, German, Russian, Portuguese and Korean. Adding these will give you approximately 85% coverage.

# About Appbot



Appbot's mission is to help companies build mobile apps that users love. We do this by taking the pain out of monitoring, managing and analysing mobile app reviews.

As app reviews become an increasingly important customer feedback and support channel, Appbot's tools make it easy for teams to stay in touch with their app users in several ways:

- We help **Social Media** and **Customer Support Teams** to manage their reviews via their existing CRM tools, making it easier to respond to customer questions and issues quickly.
- **Product Teams** use Appbot to understand how users are responding to their apps and, more importantly, why they're responding that way. Appbot tools facilitate fast, data-driven decisions about your product roadmap.
- **Business Intelligence Teams** use Appbot to correlate trends in app reviews against other business KPIs via our native reporting tools, or via our API.
- Appbot automatically identifies and groups performance and stability issues that users are reporting. We make it easy to share this data directly with **Technical Teams**.

Appbot offers plans to suit organizations of any size, from independent developers to enterprise. Head to [appbot.co](http://appbot.co) to start a 14-day free trial or learn more about how we could help you improve your apps.

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