



HOW TO CREATE AN APP FOR BEGINNERS

by Steve Lamattina

About this ebook

Hi, my name is Steve and I wrote this ebook for people like you, who are interested in creating their very own app, but have no idea how to code or where to start.

Perhaps you have your own small business, or a community group you're apart of, or maybe you run a radio station, or even a podcast that you want to get out to more people. These are just a few of the options that are available to you, and within reach...or will be, after reading through this!

So why listen to me?

I started from the same place as you, without much knowledge of app building, simply just which apps I liked and which ones were annoying. Obviously I had a few other skills in my pocket, such as a background in writing and media, yet I began my app-making journey from square one.

This is important because it means that I can relate to the app makers I review from a newcomer's perspective, and hopefully convey the experience in a way that's easy to understand.

Plus now it's my job to try out app makers, which means I've tried out all the major ones so you don't have to!

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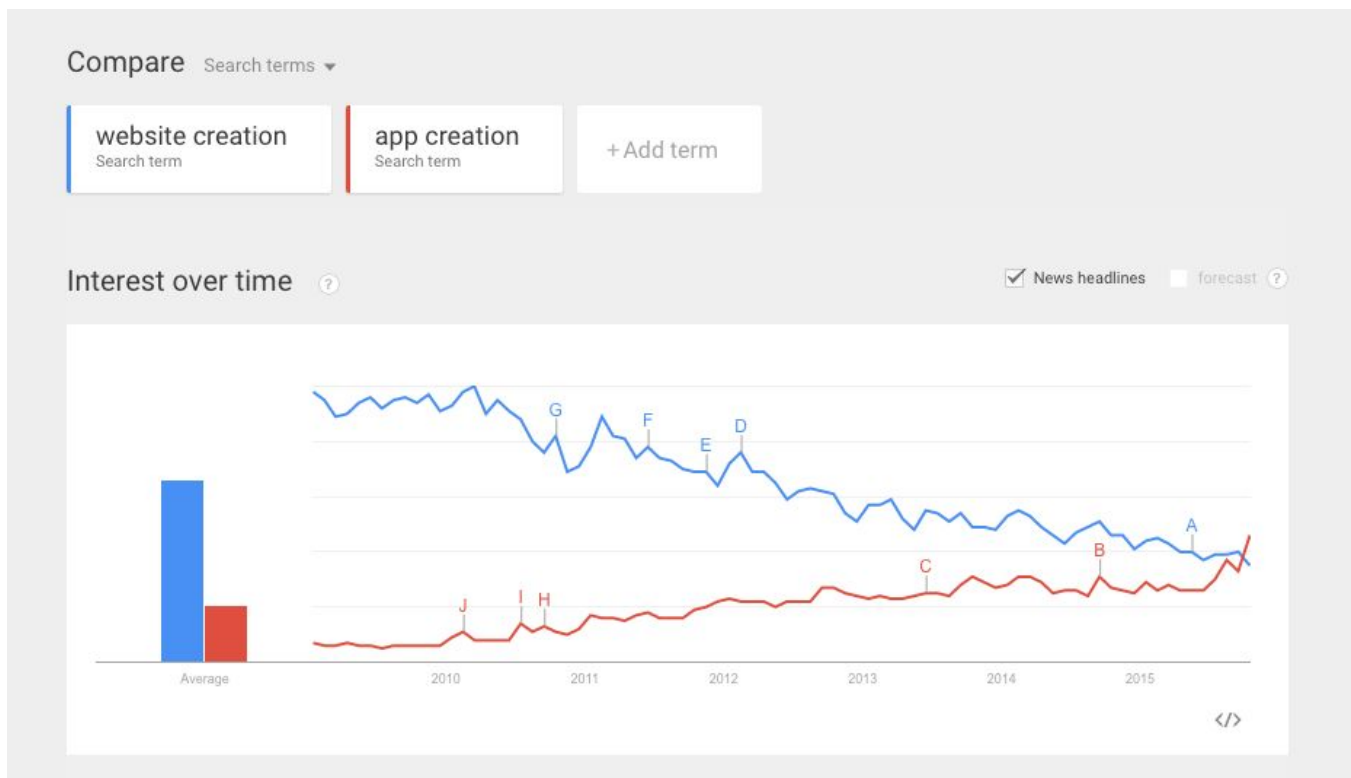
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1. The Basics

Do I Need an App?

These days it's pretty easy to make your own website, but what about going mobile?

'Going mobile' can mean a couple of things, from simply optimising your website for mobile devices, to creating a native application for Apple's and Android's app stores. According to Google statistics (shown in the graph below), there has been a steady incline in the number of people searching for app creation over the last five years, while website creation searches have declined. What does this mean though? It shows that more and more people are turning to native apps to promote what they do.



Is it right for you though? Perhaps if your website is solely a blog with your daily musings, a native app might not be the most useful platform, but for other projects there are definitely advantages in having one.

- **Direct interaction:** you have an immediate way to communicate with your customers via push notifications, straight to their mobile devices.
- **Offline capability:** whilst people will always need to be connected to view your website, apps have the capability to run offline on a mobile device.
- **Location-based services:** Websites don't always have access to a user's location due to VPNs and proxies. On a mobile device though, whether a via a native, or web, app, user's locations can be roughly triangulated via GPS when using an app. This is useful especially for location-based apps.
- **Ecommerce reach:** having an app for your mobile business allows you to take advantage of loyalty features such as reward programs and coupons. You can even combine that with location-based push notifications.
- **Visibility:** according to a Nielson report, people on smartphones spend 89% of their time on apps, as opposed to browsers. Also, just by being listed in the app stores you will naturally increase your organic reach in search engines, which complements your SEO efforts.
- **User experience:** compared to websites, native apps can provide a much smoother and immersive user experience by utilising, for



example, touch and geolocation capabilities, or simply for the fact that you're usually logged in automatically on your app.

- **Monetisation:** with an app you have the unique option to have it both as a product itself (if you decide to charge people to download) as well as a sales channel for your products.
- **Hardware utilisation:** there are so many ways you can integrate mobile devices' advanced features within an app, using things like the accelerometer, barometer, or microphone. It's worth noting, though, that these will often require specific programming, and are really only options if you have a bit of money to splash around.

What even is a native app?

To explain this it's best to compare these with the two other outlets for mobile web users:

Firstly, let's start off with **responsive websites:** these are basically when a website is opened on your phone, and it resizes its content to fit your screen. Usually these run well on modern mobile devices, but don't have different functions specifically for the mobile experience.

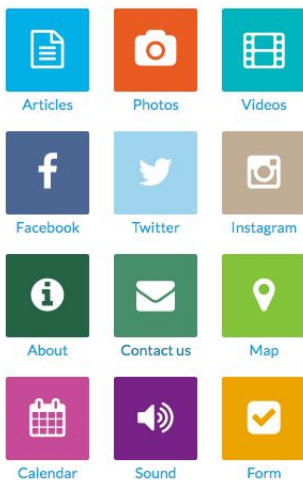
Next up we have **web apps:** these are a step up from responsive websites, in that they often offer extra features for your phone (e.g. location-based features). The Facebook mobile site is a good example of this. They run well on your phone, but can be a bit slow as they use web-based code, and aren't made for specific phone operating systems.

Then we have **native apps:** these are self-contained apps that are built with custom code, made to work specifically with one type of mobile operating system (e.g. iOS and Android). This means that they are much faster and can have unique features that aren't possible using websites, or web-based coding. The Facebook app that you download from the app store, to continue the analogy, is an example. of a native app, and can send you push notifications and receive a general permission to use your location.

Now that you've heard about the advantages of apps, one important disadvantage is worth mentioning: **cost**.

It can often cost five figure amounts to get a native app developed, and of course this restricts app development to a small percentage of people out there who can afford it. For complex projects going down the developer route is the only viable option, unfortunately. For smaller apps, however, there is an affordable alternative.

What is an App Maker?

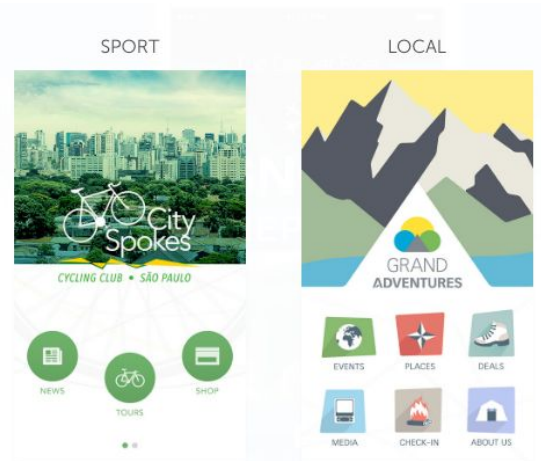


App maker 'modules'

App makers offer an online, drag-and-drop framework, which allows you to create an app by adding 'features' or 'modules' to a menu. And this is done all without the need for any coding abilities at all. They also work via subscription, so you pay either a monthly, or yearly, fee to use their service and get your app into the stores. This is generally a lot cheaper than getting your app developed by a programmer or studio.

Apart from these modules, which often have further customisation options, you also have the option of specific templates to base your app design on.

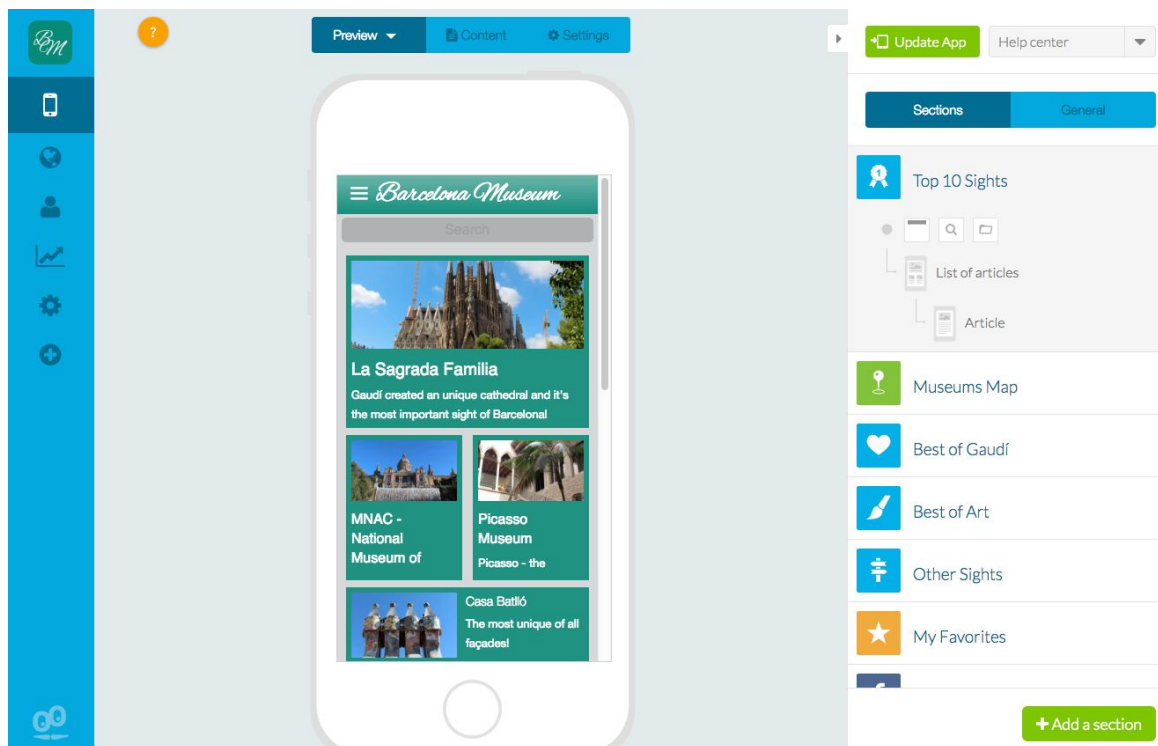
You can often customise menus, both the design and content, as well as background and start-up screen images.



App maker 'templates'

And, of course, you can also upload your logo to further personalise your app.

Another thing all app makers have in common is an editor (see below), which is the space in which you organise and edit all your modules and content. Often there is a previewer inbuilt too, so you can see what your app looks like while you build it.



App maker editor

Developer vs. App Maker

So what are the pros and cons of using an app maker over a developer?

PROS of an app maker

- **Cost-effective:** even when using one of the best app makers, you'll only be spending, around \$400 a year. That's a lot less than the five figure amount needed to get your app off the ground when using a developer.
- **Fast:** you can create your online app much faster than it would take to build one professionally. Instead of months, it could be weeks, due to pre-built features that are ready to use.
- **Control:** being at the mercy of a programmer can sometimes get complicated when you don't have the specific knowledge to communicate your ideas easily. With an app builder, you're in charge from day one.
- **Multi-platform:** most app makers allow you to create a native app for more than one platform (generally iOS and Android) all at the same time. Most of the time this needs to be done separately if using a programmer, and comes with extra money and time for each.



- **Support for app updates:** it's necessary, and useful, to update your app often once it's live in the stores. Issues can arise, though, such as incompatibilities between operating systems or phone models. These issues will often be taken care of by the app makers, and you'll also have their support channels available to you at no extra cost.

CONS

- **Lack of customisation:** although there is a degree of customisation within app makers, there's still a lot of things that are just out of reach without creating specific coding and having a knowledgeable programmer handy. This also applies to the design of your app, you may hit some roadblocks with template and design restrictions of some app makers.
- **Relying on one provider:** it's important to go with a well-established app builder, because you really are relying on just one provider and if things go south, this also means it'll likely go the same way for your app.

- **Multilingual apps:** if your project requires multilingual content, you may have a difficult time creating an app that caters for this via app builders. At present, no builders have an elegant solution for this just yet.

App maker limitations

App makers are a cheaper, non-coding based, alternative for making apps. But less coding ultimately means less flexibility.

The major limitations of app makers come down to complexity and size. With the drag-and-drop style builders on offer, you're often restricted to the features that each app maker has on offer. For most people, though, this will be enough. This is also true for size: whilst you can add quite a number of features, if you need to create something large enough for a multinational corporation, you're probably going to struggle with an app maker.

For a good run-down of just what you can and can't do with an app maker, have a read of our comprehensive article:

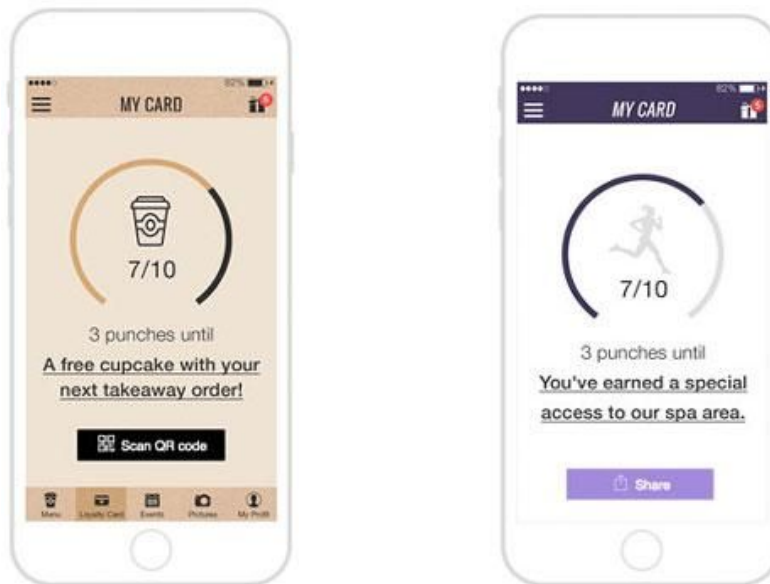
<https://apptooltester.com/limits>

2. Planning Your App

What do you want to Achieve with your App?

Perhaps you already have a website. But even if you don't, you need to ask yourself what your app will offer to people that they need, keeping in mind the mobile nature of your app. If you have a website, it needs to be an extension of this, not a copy, as people can easily just look at a mobile-optimised version of your site for that.

Perhaps you want people to easily order from your restaurant. Of course they can go to your website, see all the menu items and find a number to call. But with an app you can make it even easier: your details would already be stored, and you could offer a loyalty feature that allows people who visit your store to 'check-in', giving them access to discounts.



Loyalty Features

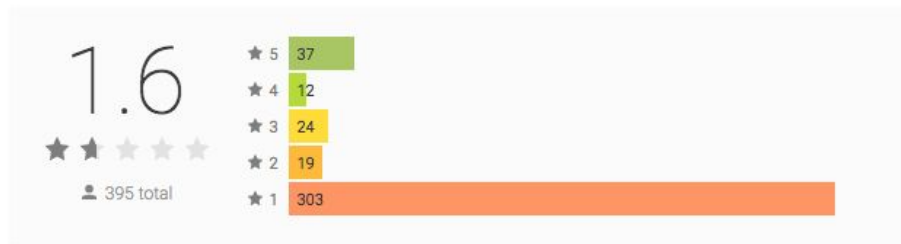
The point is, if users don't find something novel or useful with an app, they'll just end up deleting it.

You're probably already an app user, so think about your own experiences. Which ones do you use often? Which ones did you recently delete? Why? Most of us are already app experts, we're just not aware of it. And if you're not an app user, then you better get downloading!

Review Other Apps

A great way to get ideas about your own app is to have a look at what others are doing. If it's your first app, don't be scared to emulate an app that is already popular, usually they're popular for a reason. And it can be good practice for dipping your toes into the world of apps!


Once you've decided on your concept, you need to figure out how to improve upon what is already in the market. A great way of doing this is reading user comments; this will help you get a better idea of what people like about these apps and, more importantly, what they don't like.





Helpfulness ▾ All Versions ▾


User reviews

 [Redacted] June 3, 2016
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
What those guys said. Seems like these douches would fix the app, or put out a firmware fix so we can use the wristband on someone else's app that actually works.

 [Redacted] June 6, 2016
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Fix it. The app won't sync the data from my wristband, wristband won't stay in the paired devices list even though it is paired with my phone and my blue tooth is turned on. Fix the bugs.

 [Redacted] June 9, 2016
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Would give 0 stars Won't stay paired. Won't even sync info to the app. Can't even use a different app!! Ugh. So disappointed.

 [Redacted] June 14, 2016
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Sync issue Will someone please fix the app so they sync?

 [Redacted] May 25, 2016
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Wont stay paired Wont stay paired and doesnt update on device cant see it in the paired devices list

 [Redacted] June 10, 2016
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Doesn't work, will not sync data from band!!

 [Redacted] June 10, 2016
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Would give it -0 It just doesn't work, completely useless

It's probably time the app publisher here made some changes!

Let's use an example: now that you've decided to create your restaurant app, you've done some research and find people complaining that other local food apps make them enter their information every time they want to order. How can you make this process better? Maybe you could implement a social login section to combat this.

A good way to keep track of your ideas/issues is a simple spreadsheet, perhaps something like the below:

Issue	Feature	Goal	Notes
User has to enter their details every time they use app	Add social media login for app	Increase ease of use for customer, increase returning customers	Research most used social media logins

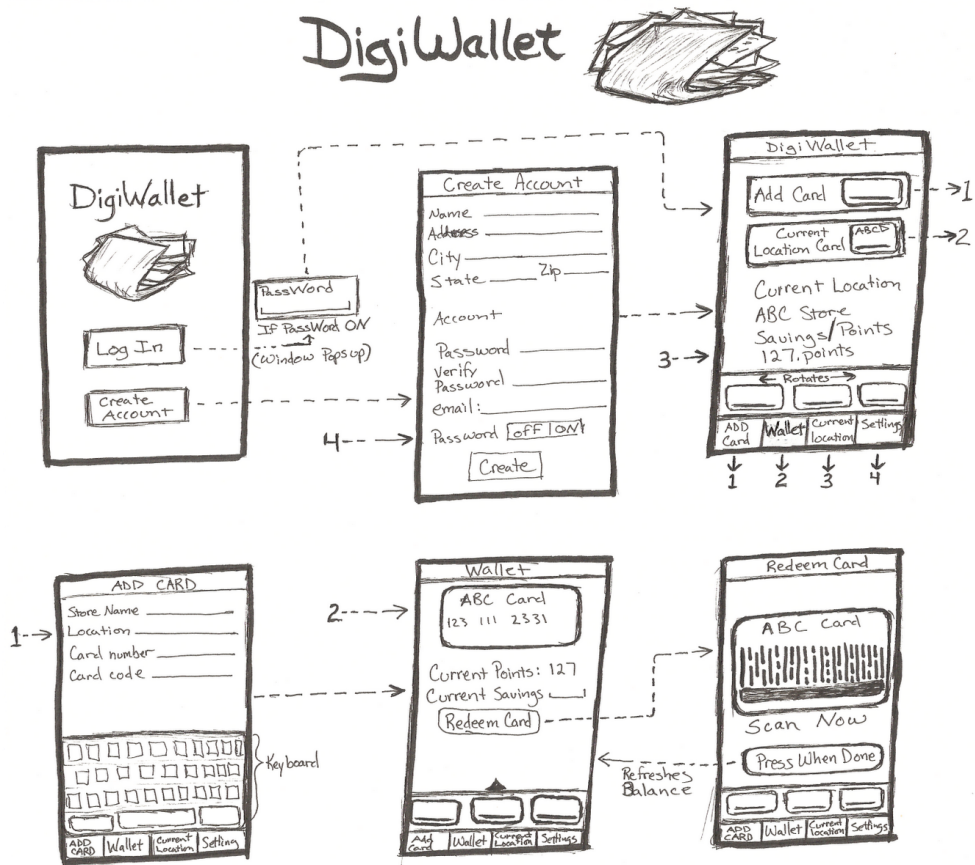
Apart from the above, it's also worth investigating the categories that similar apps put themselves under within the app stores, such as 'Lifestyle' or 'Education'. You can get ideas about these either at TopAppCharts.com or AppAnnie.com. It might be tempting to go for the most obvious category in the beginning, but if there is strong competition (for example the top spots are filled by app giants like Tinder or Instagram), then perhaps try using a different category with less competition.

Get It Down

Once you've thought about the above, then it's a good idea to get your app down on paper (or screen) using a **wireframe**.

A wireframe is basically a skeleton of your app, drawn or designed, that explains things like what type of content will be on each page, where each button will take the user etc. You can use MockFlow.com or JustInMind.com to do this...or just a simple pencil and paper!

You then need to get a little more detailed, by creating **specs**, which is basically a more detailed description of each section of your app. Doing both of these will help you a LOT when getting down to actually building your app.



Example app wireframe (source: aliasapps.com)

The Geeky Stuff

I won't get too into it just yet, but it's worth keeping in mind a little term called ASO.

ASO stands for “app store optimisation”, and it means optimising different factors related to your app so that it performs well within the app stores. And I'm guessing that's what you want, yeah?

What does 'well' mean? If done correctly, ASO will help people discover your app by increasing its ranking and visibility through app store searches, which in turn leads to more downloads, which in turn increases visibility...and on it goes! This kind of discovery is called 'organic'.

App store 101

When you're at this early stage of your app, the main ASO concept to keep in mind are **Keywords**. These are words (or phrases) that you will use within your title and app store descriptions, and also what search engines use to help people discover your app!

When it comes to keywords, there are three main focuses: **Relevance**, **difficulty**, and **traffic**. See below for a brief summary.

- **Relevance** is the most important of the three. Think about search terms and phrases that people will use when looking for your app. It might be good to ask friends and family for ideas, as it can help having an outsider's perspective.

- **Difficulty** means how hard it is to rank for a particular keyword. This data can be found by using a tool such as [SensorTower.com](https://sensortower.com) or [App Annie.com](https://appannie.com), and often is a score between 0 and 10, with 10 being the most difficult.
- **Traffic** refers to the number of people searching for a particular keyword. This is often thought to be extremely important, but it's the least important out of the three. It makes much more sense to go for a keyword with a lower **difficulty** rating that has less **traffic**, especially if it's **relevant**, as you can then rank highly for that keyword. It's good to note, though, that you don't want a keyword that has **no traffic** at all.

There are several extra things that help your app get discovered and, more importantly, downloaded:

- **Great design**, both visually and technically (a.k.a. user experience).
- **Good reviews**, once you've published your app.
- **Creating a landing page** on a website, which can be standalone. This is good particularly when you have both iOS and Android versions, but can only use one link.
- **Localising your app** for different languages and countries.
- **Downloads**. Sounds basic, but the more downloads you get, the higher your rank within stores.

You can read more on ASO with our beginners guide series:




- Optimising your app: <https://apptooltester.com/aso>
- Selecting the best keywords: <https://apptooltester.com/keywords>
- Optimising through app design: <https://apptooltester.com/design>

3. Choosing an App Maker

Features

Now that it's all planned out, it's time to start choosing which app maker is right for your project... or even if app makers are right for your project.

Instead of going through all of the features, the easiest way to figure out which one is right for you is to [use our comparison tool](#)...that's what it's there for right! Just keep in mind what kind of things you're going to need. Ecommerce? Social functions? Localisation features? All these categories are compared in our tool, and handily shown right next to each other so you can get a good overview.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Click to compare	 GoodBarber Review ★★★★★	Standard: \$16 Full: \$32 Advanced: \$48	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ slick-looking templates and design+ very easy to use+ team management+ wide range of features+ iBeacons support Read full review Try it out
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.	 AppMachine Review ★★★★★	Plus: \$49 Pro: \$69	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ powerful 'pro' blocks+ massive range of flexible templates+ native support for all mobile platforms- no ad support
<input type="checkbox"/>	3.	 Shoutem Review ★★★★★	Basic: \$19.90 Advanced: \$49 Unlimited: \$119.90	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ great social integration features+ thorough support library+ loyalty features- confusing editor interface

App maker overview

The handy thing about most app makers is that you can try them out for free, either for a limited time (15-30 days) or some even until you decide to publish! This will probably be the best way to decide which one works best for you.

Check out the comparative overview: apptooltester.com/overview

\$\$\$ - How much is it?

After the free trial, pretty much all app makers work in a similar way in relation to their payment options.

Each app maker will have two or more tiers, with the lowest giving you the basic features, and the highest including all the bells and whistles, for example iPad compatibility, personal account manager and perhaps advanced analytic options.

Something to keep in mind: make sure the tier you choose includes a native app for both Android and iOS. This is pretty much standard for most app makers, but you'd be surprised how many still just offer a HTML5 web-app on their lowest tier.

MONTHLY 1 YEAR ^{-17%}

MOST POPULAR			
Basic \$19.90/MO <small>billed annually</small> TRY IT FOR FREE	Advanced \$49.00/MO <small>billed annually</small> TRY IT FOR FREE	Unlimited \$119.90/MO <small>billed annually</small> TRY IT FOR FREE	Enterprise — You need more customization? CONTACT US
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HTML5 App No iOS acct. required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iPhone App Android App HTML5 App Push notifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iPad App iPhone App Android App HTML5 App Push notifications API access / data sync 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Custom modules Custom page layouts CMS integration On-site staff training Dedicated support person
No additional hidden fees	Unlimited usage	Unlimited updates	Free upgrades

Shoutem's pricing page

Often payment can be either monthly or yearly. The former option often costs a little more overall but has the benefit of increased flexibility.

Extra costs to keep in mind:

- One-time payment of **\$25** for a Google Developer account, needed to list your app in the Google Play Store.
- Yearly payment of **\$99** for an iTunes Developer account, needed to list your app in the iTunes App Store.
- One-time payment of **\$19** for individual or **\$99** for company account for the Windows App Store.

- Some app makers offer an app publishing service, which is when they publish it on the app stores for you. This can be included in the subscription fee, or as an extra, so worth keeping in mind. They are handy guides out there that you can follow to do this yourself too, you just need to do a quick Google search, and you could save some money.

To App Maker... or Not!

As mentioned earlier, app makers are a cost-effective option, but this means that it might not be the right choice if you want something more complicated for your business or project. So what do you do if app makers are not up to the job?

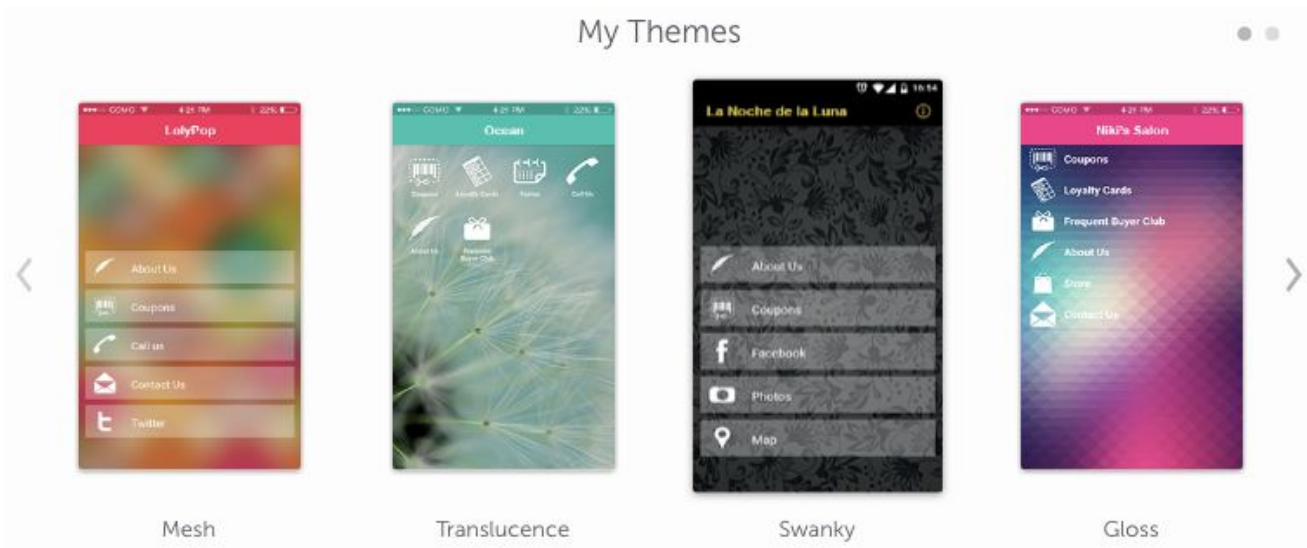
Well the next cheapest option is probably going to be hiring a developer, or even a team, from a site like [UpWork.com](https://www.upwork.com). These sites allow you to either search through profiles or post an ad and allow people to apply. You can often see their rate right from the start, but a good tip when doing a project like an app is to set a project cost instead of an hourly rate. This then gives a framework for the contractor to work within, and it's much easier to base milestones around (which you should definitely do!)

4. Creating Your App

The Look and Feel

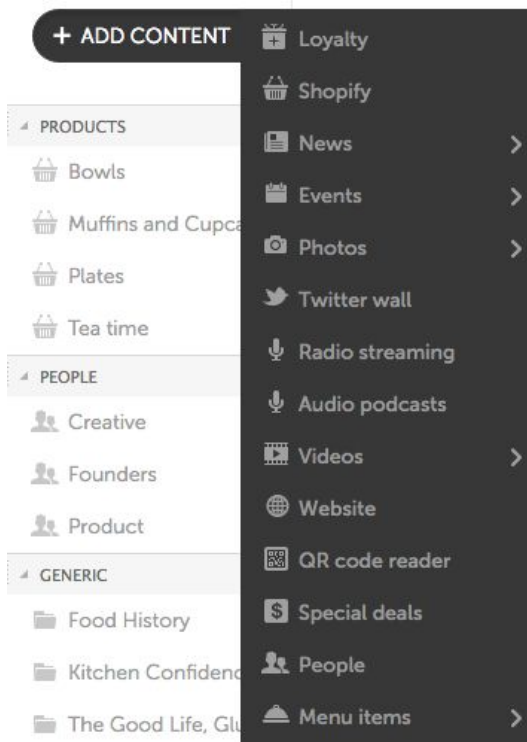
Fortunately most app makers have similar features for creating your app, so now we're going to take a look at some of these in a bit more depth, just so you've got a step-up before jumping in.

To start, you'll arrive on the app maker's website, click to create a free app account, then choose from some predetermined themes or categories (e.g. restaurant app, ecommerce, social etc.). You can also just choose to start from a blank template.



Choosing a template

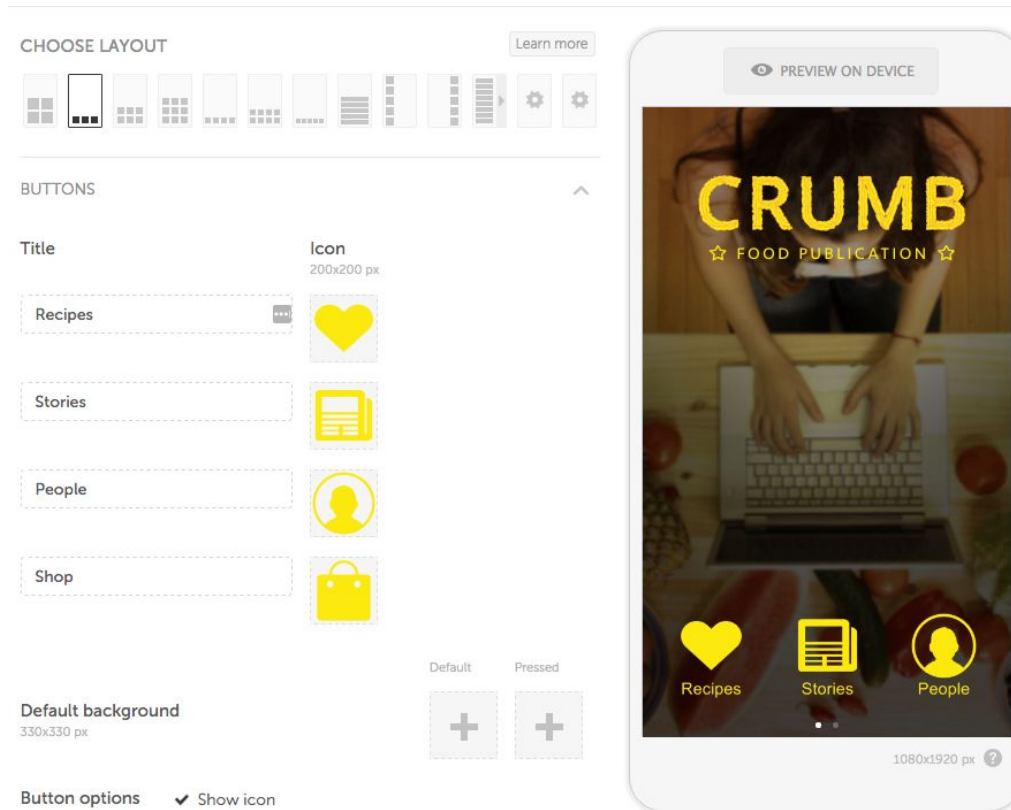
You'll now arrive in the back-end where you build your app. Apps, in general, have several sections (e.g. contact us, shop, menu etc.), or features, and these can often be placed easily through a drag-and-drop system here in the back-end.



Most app makers also have a previewer available too, which allows you to see what the app looks like and how you navigate through the sections. This can be very handy! If they don't have this, then they at least all offer a previewer app to view it on your own mobile device.

After you have added features, often you can edit these sections. The degree to which, though, depends upon the app maker you're using. Some offer alternative design options within some features, whereas others simply allow you to change the background image and icon. If you add article-style pages, you can also add content in a similar style to adding content to a webpage or blog post.

In regards to design, often app makers have an 'overall' design section, which allows you to choose things like menu and icon colour palettes, as well as logo and banner images. You may also be able to switch themes or templates here too, although it's worth noting that some app makers don't handle this too well and you may be better off starting from scratch if you want a different template.



Overall design section with previewer

Other sections you'll find here include the management section, which has your account information as well as app statistics and sometimes publishing portals which allow you to download the necessary files for app store upload. This area is most useful post-publishing.

5. After You Publish

The Wide World of Apps

Congratulations! You're now the proud owner of one of the **few million** apps available in the real world. That might sound daunting...and I guess it kind of is. Your app, out of the mountain available, needs to stand out, and be the needle in the haystack that people find. So what are you gonna do about it?

Fortunately you've already become an ASO pro by reading through our series right? Great, well that's the first step, you're already way ahead of many other app makers out there. But now isn't the time to stop.

Here are a couple of other things you can do now that you've published your app to remain relevant, and at the top of the search pile:

- **Update.** Keep your app up-to-date, but of course the interval for this varies depending on what kind of app you have. Some will rarely require it, whilst others will be changing content more often. Either way, it good practice to regularly update, paying close attention to customers and any issues or bugs they encounter. It's worth noting that when you release a new version, your previous ratings and reviews will be moved from your app store page (but still count towards your overall score).
- **Monitor keywords.** Now that you're an ASO whizz, you'll realise that the importance of ASO doesn't end when you publish your

app. It's good to keep a spreadsheet of your keywords and measure them to see which ones are performing well, and which ones are not. Feel free to change things around and perhaps you'll see a spike in downloads. It's like a recipe, mix things up to find the best combination. But it can also go stale like a loaf of bread, so be sure to refresh!

- **Listen and respond** to your users. As mentioned earlier, comments are gold in your app store rankings. So make sure that if people are complaining you're seen to be responding to them, offering support and advice. Also feel free to respond to positive reviews, just make sure these aren't the only ones you respond to! This will help build a sense of community between you and your app users, and show that you respect your users and your product.
- **Paid options.** Of course most of the things we've mentioned require little to no money, but you can of course increase your ASO results (and downloads) if you have a bit of cash too. This can be in the form of paid ads on Adwords or via social media (such as Facebook and Instagram ads). Depending on who your target audience is, it will make more sense to use one over the other (e.g. Facebook for apps targeting a younger demographic).

Thank you...

...for taking the time to read this. I hope you enjoyed the ebook and found it useful! If you would like to show your appreciation, then you can do this in a couple of ways:

- Visit the app makers via the links on AppToolTester.com. If you decide to sign up with a provider and have clicked through from our site, we get a commission. This is our only source of income since we prefer not to use banners ads. Of course, the price remains exactly the same for you.
- We'd also be delighted with a link from your new app. "Likes" on our Facebook Page and YouTube videos also make us happy! If you get lost at any point during the app-building process, feel free to contact me at help@apptooltester.com. Finally, do share this ebook with your friends or colleagues if you think they'll find it useful.

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