How people discover, use, and stay engaged with apps

New research by Google
In today’s mobile-first world, apps and mobile sites are essential to connect with consumers. To help marketers make the most of these channels, Google partnered with Ipsos to survey smartphone users. We wanted to understand the journey that app users take: from discovery, to download, to frequency of use, to the factors that inspire loyalty—or abandonment.

This report shares insight into how people find, use, and engage with apps so that advertisers can design the most effective mobile strategies.
## Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORMAT</th>
<th>15-minute online questionnaire</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POPULATION</td>
<td>Smartphone users in the U.S., aged 16–64. Quotas set on enumeration data per vertical for age, gender, education, and internet usage frequency</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAMPLE SIZE</td>
<td>N=999</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARKET</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
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**Key Findings**

1. **Friends help, but price matters.**
   
   Friends and family are the top way people find out about new apps, but they are less influential when it comes time to install. At that moment, price is the most important factor, followed by privacy and security. In fact, half of smartphone users have never paid for an app.

2. **Apps help most with specific tasks.**
   
   Apps and mobile sites serve different purposes. Apps are more commonly used for doing specific tasks like playing games, staying organized, and tracking physical activity, while mobile sites are used most for browsing and exploring.

3. **Simplicity of use is key.**
   
   For consumers, there's not a more valuable attribute in an app than ease of use and navigation. This is nearly twice as important as anything else an app can offer.

4. **Memory is a dealbreaker.**
   
   Taking up too much phone memory is the #1 app-related issue that leads consumers to uninstall an app. However, most people will give your app another shot if changes are made.
To discover new apps, people turn to those they trust: friends and family

Top methods of app discovery

- 51% My friends/family are using them
- 48% By browsing app stores
- 34% Recommended to me in the app store
- 33% Saw an ad while using another app
- 32% I read about them online
- 32% I see them shared on social networks
- 31% Saw an ad while browsing the web
- 26% Saw an ad on TV
- 21% Through search engines
- 20% Saw an ad on YouTube

Base: 999
Q32. How do you typically find out about new smartphone apps?
Q33. And have you found out about an app in any of these ways?
When deciding whether to install an app, price and privacy are the most important factors

Top motivating factors among those who search in app stores

Extremely important/very important

- Price: 85%
- Privacy or security of information: 84%
- How much I’ll use the app: 71%
- Description: 71%
- Memory used: 66%
- Reviews: 61%
- Ratings: 60%
- Friends or family using it: 28%
- Number of users: 28%
- A video about the app: 20%

Base: Searches for apps on phone's app store (n=795)

Q38. When searching for apps in your smartphone's app store, how important are the following factors when making a decision about which app(s) to download?
Speaking of price, half of people have never paid to download an app.

For those who have, desired content is what motivated the purchase.

Top reasons for paying for apps:
- 45%: It had the content I wanted
- 35%: It offered features/functionality unavailable on free alternatives
- 33%: I want an app that is ad-free
- 31%: There were no free alternatives
- 28%: The app had good reviews

Base: 999 *Median
Q22. What is the most you have ever paid for an app? Please enter amount to the nearest whole number.
Base: Have paid to download an app (n=493)
Q23. Why have you chosen to pay for apps over other free alternatives?
Of all the apps people have installed, more than half are used regularly.

On average, users have **35 apps** installed on their smartphone.

And **52% of those apps** are used at least weekly.

Number of apps currently installed:
- 19% have 51+ apps
- 37% have 21-50 apps
- 44% have 1-20 apps

Frequency of app use:
- 31% daily
- 21% weekly
- 17% never

Base: 999
Q14. How many apps are installed on your smartphone (including any that were already installed when you bought it)?
Q15. Roughly what percentage of the apps are installed on your smartphone do you use?
Base: Has apps installed on smartphone (n=999)
App or mobile site? Depends on the task

Among those who have performed activity in the past 30 days

- **App usage**
  - 91% Play games
  - 87% Track your own physical activity
  - 84% Stay organized
  - 80% Listen to music
  - 80% Navigation
  - 79% Manage finances
  - 78% Use/control other devices
  - 76% Check the weather
  - 72% Read books/magazines
  - 71% Take/edit/share photos/videos
  - 67% Organize transport locally
  - 66% Watch videos
  - 61% Communicate with people
  - 59% Check sport
  - 56% Use a voice assistant to answer questions or perform tasks
  - 53% Shop
  - 52% Find discounts, deals, offers
  - 50% Read/watch news
  - 50% Organize leisure/business travel
  - 45% Find things to do/places to eat or drink locally
  - 43% Order takeout
  - 39% Find things to do/places to eat or drink while traveling
  - 29% Search/browse the internet

- **Mobile website usage**
  - 80%
  - 79%
  - 78%
  - 76%
  - 72%
  - 71%
  - 67%
  - 66%
  - 28%
  - 17%
  - 27%
  - 30%
  - 45%
  - 43%
  - 39%
  - 50%
  - 65%
  - 64%
  - 65%
  - 64%
  - 29%

Base: Have performed activity on smartphone in past 30 days and randomly selected to answer
Q5. Have you used a mobile website or an app for each of these in the last 30 days?
The apps they love most are easy to use and navigate

What users find most valuable about their favorite apps

- 61% They’re easy to use and navigate
- 34% There’s always new things to explore
- 29% I’ve personalized them so I get the best experience
- 28% There’s a large range of things to explore
- 26% I receive useful notifications from them
- 24% The products feel more relevant to me than other apps
- 23% I like the way they look
- 19% They’re from a brand or company I use a lot in the real world
- 17% The app is more convenient than calling or going to the branch/store
- 16% They have good discounts or offers

Base: 999
Q27. Which of the following are true of your favorite apps?
Offering a wide range of features and personalization options is also key to building app preference.

Preferred features for smartphone apps:

- **Has a wide range of features**
  - Prefer: 66%
  - No preference: 29%
  - Do not prefer: 5%

- **Stores my preferences to make future activities easier**
  - Prefer: 62%
  - No preference: 29%
  - Do not prefer: 9%

- **Specializes in a small number of features that I use frequently**
  - Prefer: 58%
  - No preference: 36%
  - Do not prefer: 6%

- **Requires sign in for secure access**
  - Prefer: 58%
  - No preference: 31%
  - Do not prefer: 11%

- **Uses my current location to provide relevant local information**
  - Prefer: 41%
  - No preference: 36%
  - Do not prefer: 23%

- **Stores personal information for a more personalized experience**
  - Prefer: 38%
  - No preference: 36%
  - Do not prefer: 26%

- **Is linked to my social networks**
  - Prefer: 35%
  - No preference: 33%
  - Do not prefer: 32%

- **Is free to download but has ads within the app**
  - Prefer: 33%
  - No preference: 40%
  - Do not prefer: 27%

- **Stores my credit card/billing information to make future purchases faster**
  - Prefer: 24%
  - No preference: 27%
  - Do not prefer: 49%

- **Charges a fee to download but is ad-free**
  - Prefer: 18%
  - No preference: 29%
  - Do not prefer: 53%

Base: 999
Q28. Thinking about all of the apps that you use, which of the following features do you prefer to have?
If they provide value, push notifications aren’t a turnoff

85% find notifications on mobile useful

Most useful notifications

- 42% Purchase being shipped/delivered
- 35% Upcoming reservation or appointment reminder
- 35% New discount or offer
- 34% Upgrade to the app itself (e.g., new feature added)
- 32% Price reduction for a product I’m following
- 30% Purchase/transaction status update
- 25% Loyalty points update
- 22% New product or service available
- 20% Reminder of a booking/purchase in progress
- 15% Recommendation of a product/service
- 10% Friend or family member purchasing an item
- 7% None of the above

Base: 999
Q29. Apps or websites can give you notifications on your phone to tell you about a new update, message, or event, for example. What sort of notifications do you find useful?
Remember this: People stop using apps when they’re not useful or take up too much memory

Personal reasons for abandoning an app
- 55% I no longer had a need for that particular app
- 53% I needed to free up memory
- 50% It wasn’t as useful as I thought
- 28% I had a similar app that was more useful
- 24% I had a similar app that was easier to use
- 22% I forgot I had the app
- 9% My friends stopped using it

App-related reasons for abandonment
- 46% It was taking up a lot of memory
- 39% It had technical problems
- 32% The app contained too many ads
- 28% It wasn’t as described
- 27% I was receiving too many notifications from it
- 26% It wasn’t easy to use or navigate
- 22% Ads made the app harder to navigate
- 18% Ads were not relevant to me
- 15% It needed to be updated too often

Q40. Have you stopped using apps on your smartphone for any of the reasons below? Select all that apply.
Q41. And have you stopped using apps on your smartphone for any of these reasons?
The good news: Most people will reconsider using an app if it’s improved (and trimmed down in size)

91% would consider using the app again, if changes were made

Reasons to re-engage

- 43% The app uses less memory
- 36% The app was redesigned for easier use
- 32% The app uses less mobile data
- 29% New features added
- 17% Exclusive or bonus offers or products
- 13% Family or friends start using it
- 13% Discount on next purchase
- 9% Being linked to the app in a relevant situation online
- 9% Nothing would make me start using the app(s) again
- 18% None of the above

Base: 999
Q43. Thinking about apps that you’ve stopped using, which of the following would encourage you to use the app again?
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