

ASO - App Store Optimization

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Agenda

- Intro
- Black Hat
- ASO Campaign
- Keyword research
- Tools
 - Sensor Tower

Introduction

- App stores represented a easier way of distributing digital content
 - (and a gateway too...)
- It is really common for an specific app (or game!) to fall into the graveyard
 - Loose ranking, revenue and investment
- App Store Optimization (ASO) is the (not so) new "cousin" of good old SEO
 - Same principles, different mechanics and tools
- It has become a HUGE market itself
 - Books, tools, consultancy...

Introduction

- The main goal of ASO is: reduce **costumer acquisition cost** (CAC)
 - App stores are a frenetic and extremely competitive battlefield
- It must be faced as a marathon instead of a drag race
 - Method, discipline and tools in perfect harmony

Introduction

- It is **not** a one-size fits all strategy
 - Each store has its own algorithm, guidelines, etc.
 - They employ a mixed combination of:
 - Metadata
 - Popularity ranking
 - Ratings
 - Reviews
 - Number of downloads (!)

Introduction

- Ranking types
 - **Top free/paid:** the Holy Grail of rankings
 - **Top free/paid in a particular category:** most downloads of a specific kind
 - They help forecasting trends in who is going to top overall
 - Basic starting focus of a ASO strategy: competition reference
 - **Top grossing:** lists apps with the most amount of revenue
 - Revenue can come from app selling and in-app purchases
 - Apps in this category already have a good combination of monetization and UX
 - Think of **Revenue** and **Scale** stages (discussed previously)

Introduction

- How does a user find an specific game?
 - Search engine dominates
 - But also: WoM, social media, charts, featured lists, categories and online reviews.
- Challenge for developers: user searches are really simplified within app stores
 - There's no "try before you buy"
 - Most of the times, users' choice is based on screenshots and metadata (and reviews sometimes)

Introduction

- Important factors for discovery:
 - **Localization:** adapt game's metadata to each countries' stores
 - **Rating/Review:** users are more prone to download 3+ stars apps
 - **Device capability:** employ user's device full potential
 - **Social media:** social signals helps stores knows which apps are "alive"

Black Hat

- Bending the rules do manipulated search algorithm
- Ethics aside... it works.
 - Until it gets noticed by moderators or blocked at all by the stores
- Why does it works?
 - Overall, every store is based on the number of downloads
 - **Bursts** can help you **gain momentum**
 - “This game must be doing something right”, said algorithm.
 - **Launch** is one the most important phases for an app/game

Black Hat

- Cost per install (**CPI**): the developer pays for a channel for each download it receives.
 - More of a “brown” hat :)
 - Almost every app uses this tactic
 - It has become increasingly expensive
 - CPI implementation can be done two-fold: incentivized or non-incentivized (organic)

(**REAL**) Black Hat

- **Incentivized CPI:** Users are given something to download your app
 - Virtual coins, additional features, bundles...
 - Unengaged audience, high churn: may lead to bad reviews
 - Stores are normally against this tactic

(REAL) Black Hat

- **Review scrapping and generating software**
 - Use software scripts to collect review database from iTunes or any other store
 - These review are then slightly edited with terms to make them seem more “legit” - “luv it”, “gr8 app”, etc.
 - Finally they are posted to “my app”
 - (This tactic is employed by big players out there)

(**REAL**) Black Hat

- **Manipulate paid category**

- Put a ridiculous price to my app, like \$1000
- Get 10 friends to buy it (or even myself)
- Skyrocket on top grossing apps!
- Then your friends ask for refund and lower the price to \$0.99
- Use the momentum of high ranking for more organic traffic

Black Hat

- **Problem with black hat:** positioning yourself in a cat-vs-mouse pursuit
 - Although it seems “easy” at first, it is not. It is a pretty time-consuming task.
 - Think you can game Google engineers? That easy? Seriously? Think again.
 - Better focus your energy/time/money on good productive battles

ASO Campaign

- It comprises the step of:
 - Pre-keyword research
 - Use ASO tools and data analysis
 - Choose potential titles
 - Keyword field selection
 - Localization
 - Ongoing tracking and optimization

ASO Campaign - Pre-keyword research

- Divergent phase: bring many options to later focus on most relevant ones
- Objective: Create long tail keywords options (2 to 4 keywords combination)
- This step is composed of these sub-steps:
 - **Own keyword pool:** brainstorm on (seed) terms related to your app - function and perspective
 - **Build keywords from different sources:** employ dictionaries, thesaurus or even Google Keyword Planner to increase seed keywords database
 - **Espionage:** look for keywords used by competition and how they rank for them (manually or using ASO tool)

ASO Campaign - Pre-keyword research

- This step is composed of these sub-steps (continued):
 - **Ask people:** get out of the building and ask real people
 - **Trend-watching:** look for terms that (or can) become relevant on your segment, employing tools like Google Trends
 - **Review scrapping:** your competitors reviews section can be a good source of inspiration for recurring words (manually or using ASO tool)

ASO Campaign - ASO tools and data analysis

- Developers tend to freeze on this stage
- Use an ASO tool to **extensively** analyze keywords strength and relevance
 - Measure the competition on long tail keywords, don't stop on the first 5 or 10 good results
 - A new round of combination can reveal even better opportunities

ASO Campaign - Choose a title

- At this stage, we already have a good pool of **strong keywords**
- Narrow your options and consider the best ones for your title
 - The remaining ones can serve for other versions of the game (e.g. paid) or as alternatives if the chosen ones fail to rank

ASO Campaign - Fill keyword field

- App store: keyword field with 100 characters
- Google Play: description field, has a bit of mystery (how many keywords and what add to them, etc.)

ASO Campaign - Localization

- In order to target different markets, one-size fits all does not work
- It can have a HUGE impact on your campaign
- It is a process more complex than simply translating original keywords
 - Each language has specific characteristics or terms for a meaning
 - Think about translating movie titles...
- Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3euQ2X3pM4&feature=youtu.be>

ASO Campaign - Optimization and tracking

- It stands for the process of continuously seeking for opportunities of bettering your app ranking
- Think about Lean Startup Cycle: **Build, Measure and Learn**
- Video: <http://youtu.be/92NDScqEtIA>

Keyword Research

- It is the main step in order to improve game rankings within an app store
- Give the developer a certain level of control of his game's fate
 - It is important to know factor you **can** (contextual factors) or **cannot** control (reviews and retention)
 - **Contextual factors:** bit of information about an app or game, like title, description, keywords, etc.
 - These are not the only item that algorithm takes into account

Keyword research

- The hard part: evaluation and selection of keywords
 - Criteria will be defined by **relevance**, **difficulty** and **traffic**
 - **Relevance**: each store has its own mechanism for relevance
 - Apple: does not relate similar terms (ex: "bmw" and "car")
 - Google: has a better link among related terms
 - It is important not only that people find your game, but the RIGHT people find it.

Keyword research

- The hard part: evaluation and selection of keywords
 - **Difficulty:** represents the competition level for a specific keyword
 - Choose your **top 10** keywords and use their average difficulty as a benchmark
 - Filter your potential keywords for having the **same or less difficulty** score
 - **Warning:** difficulty levels are given automatically by ASO tools

Keyword research

- The hard part: evaluation and selection of keywords
 - **Traffic:** now we have a relevant and good difficulty level keywords, it is time to **filter by high traffic.**
 - SensorTower benchmark: score 2+ is fair game; 5+ are "golden" keywords
 - It is usually attached to high level of difficulty
 - Look for easy victories first: **high traffic; low competition**

Keyword research

- **How to find and select keywords**
 - ASO tools help a lot, but do not rely completely on them. It is important to have a plan first.
 - There are 3 most common approaches:
 - **Start broad and narrow the niche**
 - **Piggyback off of the (not-so) big boys**
 - **Setting sniper target**

Keyword research

- How to find and select keywords: **Start broad and narrow the niche**
 - It is the most common technique
 - Start with broad terms
 - Eliminate (or balance) competitive and sub niches
 - Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wK1ZpgJmfS0&feature=youtu.be>

Keyword research

- How to find and select keywords: **Piggyback off of the (not-so) big boys**
 - In short: Copy what high ranking apps are doing.
 - Why? Use the influx of their traffic in your favor.
 - Disadvantage: everybody does and you are always chasing your own tail.
 - Two critical factors: **speed** and **lucky**
 - **Alternative:** piggybank on not-so big boys,
 - There is plenty of opportunity on **top 100-300**
 - Much less competition and fair traction

Keyword research

- How to find and select keywords: **Setting sniper target**
 - Targeting keywords with low competition to guarantee ranking
 - Competition ranging from 10-20 maximum
 - Disadvantage: extremely laborious, needs patience
 - Categories with clear function (e.g. Productivity) fares better under ASO due to precise keywords
 - Video: <http://youtu.be/BqBAkAKjftM>

ASO Tools

- They bring a lot of the knowledge already obtained from SEO
- Handling stores data in a consistent and error-free way is extremely hard if done manually
- ASO tools provides automation for these task as well as some intelligence to the process
- They support and help in designing our game strategy

ASO Tools

- Ideally, a game developer must employ a series of ASO tools, but they cost some money
- Here is a list of recommendation regarding some criteria:
 - **Ease of use:** SensorTower
 - **Accuracy:** MobileDevHQ
 - **Rank tracking:** Search Man Graphic References
 - **Affordability:** MobileDevHQ (free account for indie developers)

ASO Tools

- Hands on session with SensorTower: <https://sensortower.com/>

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