



How to Supercharge Your Mobile App User Testing Strategy



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The Situation

The power to look beyond analytics. Most mobile app companies know how important analytics are in understanding the usage of their applications. But analytics don't tell the whole story. Why do users do what they do? If there's a problem, what caused it? And how do they feel about your app? To answer those questions, you need user testing.

Although user tests once required focus groups, dedicated facilities, and weeks of prep time, today it's easy and inexpensive to plan a mobile user test in the morning and have results as soon as the afternoon. This document describes how user tests can help you make your app successful, and describes the testing best practices used by successful app developers.

The Risks: Fail to Test, Plan to Fail

The normal web development mantra—launch an embarrassing website quickly and then revise it—is a recipe for failure in mobile apps. Mobile app users are notoriously impatient; if they don't like an app on the first try, they often never come back. Bad reviews in the app stores tend to linger, making it very hard for a tainted app to get attention. Instead of shipping an embarrassing app early, mobile developers need to test early and often, before they release the app.

Snapshot: Bad Mobile, Mad Customers

In late 2013, a major U.S. retailer released a new mobile shopping app without testing it adequately with users. The reviews on the app store were scathing. But the effects of the bad app went far beyond word of mouth. Users went to retail locations asking for help with the app, forcing sales clerks to try to be tech support reps. The company's brand image was damaged. Basic user testing, which takes only a few days, could have prevented this debacle.

And as you can see from the dates on the comments below, the damage continued for months because the company was not able to fix the problems immediately. Here are samples of the online comments:

 November 19, 2013 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ False advertising Got a secret reward card that said to dl app and scan card. Scanner does not work and not to mention the app is incredibly slow. So much for bonuses that were falsely advertised.	 December 7, 2013 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ The app doesn't work right when you get the error message asking you to report the problem. When they get thousands of complaints they will do something. I've already reported 4 times and will continue. Make sure to do your part.
 December 10, 2013 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Disappointed For such a big name, one expects more...	 December 19, 2013 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Doesn't load. Apparently is not optimized for my screen size... On a Samsung Galaxy S4 - seriously, the most popular android phone and it doesn't work! Also does not work on my girlfriend's kyocera hydro elite for the same reason.
 October 15, 2013 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Abusive Why does this app have access to android can call numbers, also can change my calendar events? Uninstalled!!	 October 15, 2013 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Scanning does not work This app sucks. I am starting to dislike because the one close to where I live now, sucks. None of the employees know anything about products. I tried to figure out why the scanning does not work, but guess what? Apparently, no one in the store has heard of the app. Are they just not informed? Or are they just ignorant. I might consider other stores. I am starting to like Nordstrom.
 December 18, 2013 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Worst app I have ever seen! Really bad app... Wow put a little R&D into this. Not even in the Android format.	

Mobile Testing Done Right

Mobile user testing helps companies avoid the risks associated with poorly executed apps. And adding mobile tests to your user testing mix doesn't have to be time-consuming, expensive or complicated. We've run hundreds of thousands of user tests, so we know which testing approaches work best. Here's a summary of the best practices used by the most successful app developers.

Top Mobile App Testing Takeaways:

- *Test throughout the development process, while you still have time to act on the results.*
- *It's better to test frequently in small batches than to do a single large study.*
- *Test for both usability and emotional engagement.*

7 Mobile App Testing Best Practices



Test Early, Test Often

You should test throughout the development process. That way you can catch problems early, when they are easier to fix. The general rule is: Test early, test often. If you're doing Agile development, you should conduct user testing every week or two, to validate the work you've just done and guide what you do next.

We've heard heartbreaking stories from companies that left mobile testing until the end of development. They found significant problems, but launched anyway because it was too late to make major changes.

A good approach is to test at each stage in the development process. Here's an example:

- ***Test competitors.*** Before you even start development, do some tests of competitors. You'll learn your competition's strengths and weaknesses, and get ideas for your own product.

- ***Test wireframes.*** Early in the design process, you can test wireframes of your main screens and button layout. If you have basic navigation problems, it's best to detect them early. You can also get good feedback on desired functionality and use cases, navigation structure, preferred design patterns, layout of content, and more, all without needing to swipe or tap anything.
- ***Test static comps.*** You can test your visual designs before they've even been animated, to make sure users can understand them at a glance.
- ***Test clickable prototypes.*** As you get the designs working, check how they come across to users. This is a great stage to test button and icon designs, and any interactive widgets you've created. Often this is the stage where you'll have passionate debates in your team about design details. You can use user tests to quickly settle those debates.
- ***Test pre-release.*** Before you ship, test to make sure everything is working correctly and that you've resolved all the problems you identified earlier.
- ***Test post-launch.*** As you get analytics on what your users are doing, you can employ user tests to figure out why they're doing it, and how they feel about it.

If you use an agency or contract developers to create your mobile app: You should insist that they follow this same testing schedule. Either have them run the tests, or better yet, you should do them yourself to check the contractor's work. Do not leave testing until the end of development, or you may be hit with major rework charges, and schedule delays, to fix the problems.

If you are a contract developer: User testing can be a great way to demonstrate the quality of your work, and to settle disputes with clients. We often hear from contract developers whose clients try to force features or UI elements into a mobile app inappropriately. A few quick user tests can give you video of actual users stumbling over a bad idea, enabling you to gently persuade your client to do the right thing.

2

Test Frequently, In Small Batches

It's common for developers to want to complete all work on a mobile app, and then test it all at once on a large number of users. We don't recommend this method. As few as five users will generally be enough to allow most of the problems you'd find in an app to surface. Between five and ten users is even better. More than ten users in a round of testing is usually overkill.

Once you reach that number, it's better to do multiple rounds over time, rather than to group them all together.

For example, suppose you can test a total of 30 users. A good plan is to test ten users each, at three points in development. A great plan is to run six rounds, with five users in each round.



Test User “Journeys”

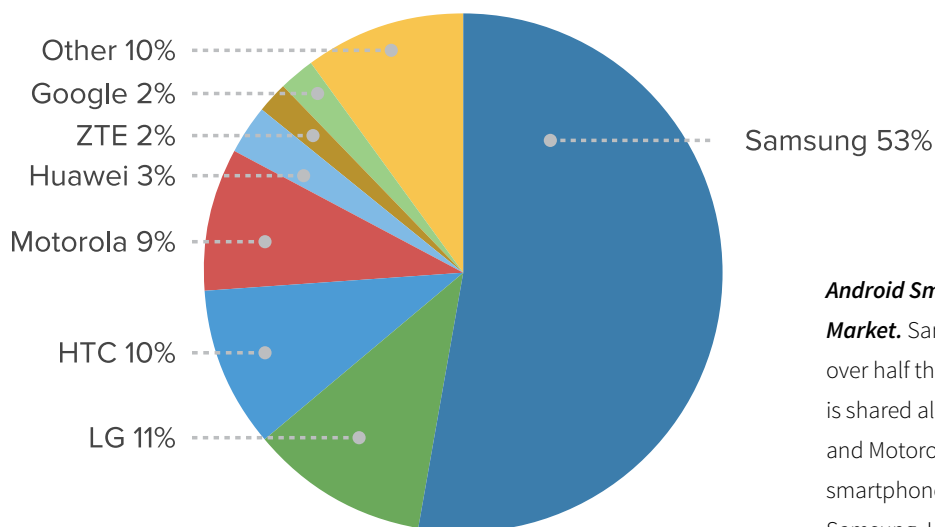
Companies that are new to user testing sometimes struggle to figure out exactly what tests they should have users perform. They'll either create elaborate comprehensive test scripts that exercise every aspect of an app, or they'll throw testers into the app with no guidance at all. Both approaches can result in muddled results that are hard to analyze. Often the best results come from testing a particular “journey,” the process of using a specific aspect of an app. For example, test the user flow from the first screen of a shopping app to the shopping cart, or from the first screen to research a product. Choose the key journeys in your app, and start by testing them. By focusing the test, you'll get more actionable feedback.

4

Test the Right Platforms

If you're developing for iOS: You want your app to run smoothly on both iPhone and iPad, so you should test on both of them. Don't assume that if things are OK on the iPhone they'll also be fine on the iPad, or vice-versa. Often usability problems surface only with one particular screen size.

If you're developing for Android: The diversity of Android devices makes testing very challenging. It's hard to get reliable figures on the installed base share of various Android brands. In the U.S., we've found that share of web traffic is a good proxy. Using that measure, this is the approximate share of Android smartphones in the U.S.:

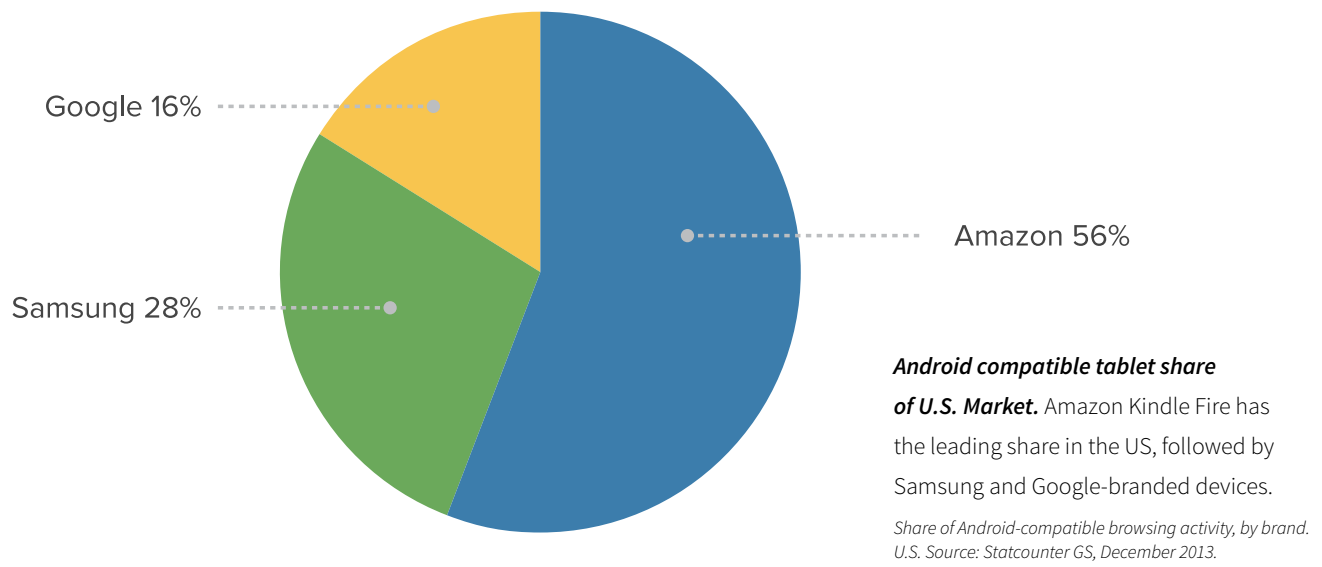


Android Smartphone Share of the U.S.

Market. Samsung is in the lead, with a bit over half the installed base. The next 30% is shared almost evenly among LG, HTC, and Motorola. So to test 70% of the Android smartphone base, you'd need to test on Samsung, LG, HTC, and Motorola.

*Share of Android browsing activity, by brand, U.S.
Source: Statcounter GS, December 2013.*

Brand share of Android-compatible tablets in the U.S.:



5

Test Released and Unreleased Apps

You can test released and unreleased apps on both Android and iOS. When using UserTesting to run your study, the process is simple: You come to our website, design your test, and tell us where to download your app. We take care of the rest. For an unreleased iOS app, that means we take care of managing UDID numbers for you, too. You don't have to use up your UDID allocation.

6

Test Revisions to Existing Apps

One common question we get from iOS developers is how far they should go in changing the look of an existing iOS app to match a new release of iOS. That is an excellent subject for testing, since changing the look of an app can create intense dissatisfaction among your user base. We strongly recommend that you run user tests on major UI changes before you push them out to market.

7

Test for Both Usability and Emotional Engagement

Two factors are critical to the success of a mobile app: usability and emotional engagement. You should test for both.

Usability means the ability of a typical user to easily figure out how to use your app. Mobile users are notoriously impatient; if an app confuses them, they will probably move on to something else. You can't assume that what works on a computer will also work on mobile; it's a different usage pattern. Some technologies that work on computers are not available in mobile (for example, pop-up tooltips), and the screen sizes are very different.

The usability issues you test will change depending on your development stage. Early in development, you should test the basic flow and key features of your app. Do users understand what they're supposed to do? Have you made the most important features easy to find?

If you have an existing desktop app, it can be very hard to decide which features to prioritize on mobile. User tests can help you answer that question.

Later in development, you should focus on fine-tuning navigation and user flow. Do all of the buttons and icons make sense? Does your help system work properly? (Yes, you need a help system in any mobile app other than a mystery game.) If you're using a freemium business model, are you hooking people with your free features but leaving enough incentives to convert to paid usage? The conversion rate is critical to the success of many mobile apps, and user tests are a great way to fine tune it before you launch.

Emotional engagement measures the user's motivation to use your app. Are you providing features that users actually want, and have you made it easy to get to them? Do people feel rewarded enough by your app that they want to return? Many apps are opened once and then never touched again. You want to know if you have that problem before you ship.

This is obviously critical to freemium apps that entice people into paying for features, but it affects all mobile apps. You need to get inside your users' heads, to understand how they react and how your app fits into their lives. User testing helps you learn how your users think and what motivates them, and that helps you plant emotional hooks to keep them engaged with your app.

Mobile Testing Checklist

Take your mobile testing strategy to the next level. You'll instantly gain the upper hand on your mobile app testing approach with our Mobile Usability Testing Checklist. This handy checklist includes everything you need to plan, implement, and analyze your tests.



Download Now »

This FREE checklist includes:

- ✓ *Pre-test planning suggestions*
- ✓ *Recommendations for making each test count*
- ✓ *Ideas for determining your testing outcomes*
- ✓ *Tips for making the most of your metrics*
- ✓ *Pointers for analyzing the results of your tests*

bit.ly/MobileAppUXChecklist

How Mobile App Testing Works at **UserTesting**

If you've never done a user test before, you may be surprised by how easy and inexpensive it can be. You design your test online, specifying the tasks you want users to perform and the questions you want to ask them. You specify the type of people you want tested. Then you give us a URL to download your app. That's it. We field your test to our panel of mobile users, who record themselves doing the test and describe what they think and where they get confused. It's like watching over the shoulder of someone as they use your app.

The resulting videos are usually returned within a day, enabling you to test a new feature in the morning and get feedback the next day (if not sooner).

*You can test both released and unreleased apps. On iOS, you don't have to manage UDID numbers; we take care of that for you.**



*iOS unreleased apps require additional work to distribute them to testers, and can take several business days to complete.

eBook: How to Supercharge your Mobile App Usability Testing Strategy

Now What?

Planning and testing are key to creating effective mobile. UserTesting can design a mobile testing program tailored to your customers and your development process. Then, we'll execute the plan and give you actionable results in no time. Want more info?



Learn more »

Visit **UserTesting.com/enterprise**



Request a demo

Call us at 1-888-877-1882

About **User**Testing

UserTesting provides the fastest and most affordable website and mobile app testing in the market. Watch videos of your target market using your site and gain the insights you need to increase your organization's customer retention, conversion, and profitability. Improve customer experience and boost your company's success.