

# App Marketing: e-Science of Loyalty

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In five short years the mobile application has become a dominant medium for everything from news and weather to the infamous and clichéd cat videos.

While consumers continue to add pages of apps to their smartphones, the business of developing mobile apps has grown increasingly robust. Mobile applications are not just extensions of brand image – an appeal to younger demographics – anymore.

Instead, mobile apps are the products of concerted technical and marketing efforts that center on the science of creating loyalty; each mobile app faces stiff competition for the ever-shortening attention span of mobile users who are both strapped for time and fiercely loyal to those apps that work, and work well.

As lotteries increasingly “go mobile,” the importance of App Store Optimization, commonly called ASO, cannot be underestimated. With hundreds of thousands of apps competing for space on any given user’s device, it should come as no surprise that there are already apps out there offering a variety of the tools or information the average lottery player is looking for. Lotteries may think that simply releasing an “official” app is enough to corner the app market, but official endorsement doesn’t secure a higher ranking right away. The unofficial endorsement of continued user engagement is what helps an app secure a higher app store ranking.

Right now, searching the app stores for “lottery” will return somewhere near 2,000 results. The competition is well established, and the top developers in the field already have strategies in place to maximize their visibility in the app store.

For new apps – officially endorsed or not – there is an urgent need to develop a strategy to encourage user engagement. Encouraging engagement is ASO, and building loyalty is a never-

ending process of listening and developing; the inflatable are doomed to fail.

## BUILDING THE RIGHT BASE

“Content is King” has been a mantra of Internet marketing professionals for years. For brand visibility, credibility and the ever-important search ranking, providing great content is step one in search engine optimization, the more familiar cousin of ASO. Why is content so important? Because it drives engagement around a brand.

Functionality is to apps what content is to websites and blogs. Mobile apps are primarily tools, and for that reason, providing users with either the best tools or a variety of functions is key for developers looking to crack the top of the app store lists.

In an article for the National Business Research Institute, Dr. Terrie Nolinske quotes a research analyst from an unnamed firm on the importance of functional engagement within a mobile app:

“Customer loyalty is no longer just about points, discounts, miles and rewards; it is about the way processes, technologies, ideas, and interactions engage individuals with the brand. The only way to achieve loyalty is through deeper engagement,” said Mark Johnson.

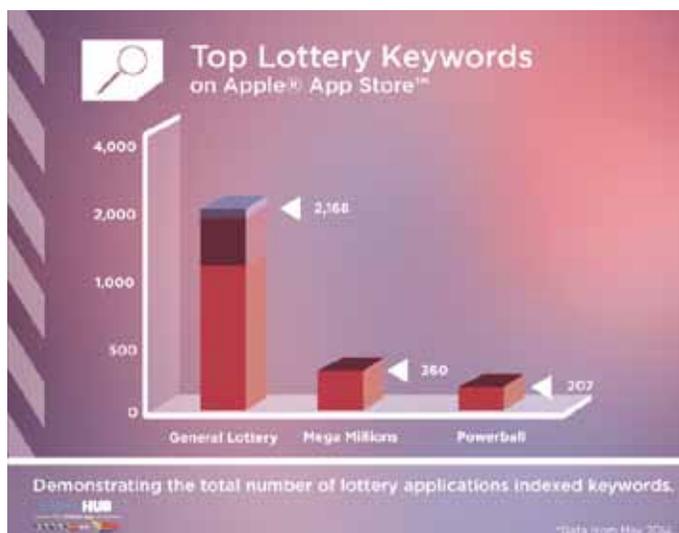
However, before anyone can fall in love with a company’s mobile app, they need to find it, and for the most part, they’re not looking for your app, they just want one that will do the job.

According to Alex Klein of MobileDevHQ, a leading provider of app store optimization tools ...” users are searching for more than just a specific app; they are searching for generic phrases to find an app that can help answer a question, complete a task or solve a problem.”

It would follow that the more solutions a mobile app provides, the more users will recognize its usefulness, become engaged, and the higher the app will rank in the app store. But, while the total number of downloads an app receives is important for ranking in the app store, the complex algorithms behind ranking take many other factors into account.

“Engagement” is the umbrella under which many of those factors fit. The time users spend on an app, ratings and reviews, uninstalls, social media; app store algorithms are not at all simple, but the strategies that developers and marketing professionals can employ to bump their app store rankings are pretty straightforward.

It is important to remember, however, that increasing rankings is not an overnight endeavor. Hundreds of thousands of apps compete for space in the app store around the clock, and while a solid ASO strategy can help improve rankings, apps are still at the mercy of the market. That’s why functionality - the right base - is the



first step in optimizing an app for both users and app store cruisers.

## RESEARCH, REFINE, REPEAT

Any brand looking to use a mobile app as a successful marketing effort must understand that, as MobileDevHQ put it in a “State of ASO in 2014” year-end review “success in an increasingly crowded app store with more sophisticated marketers requires constant attention, refinement and measurement.”

A smoothly-functioning app can, and often will, inspire word-of-mouth referrals from happy users. But, while referrals are a great indicator of a mobile app that works well, mobile apps are more likely to be downloaded by someone searching or browsing in one of the app stores. These are the targets of the measurement and refinement process; about 63 percent of app downloads start with the user using the app store search.

Understanding the base you’ve built - the basic functionality of your app - can help you better target your users. Good ASO starts with placing keywords in your app title and description. As mentioned above, when a user searches “lottery,” they’ll get thousands of results. So how can keywords help?

The goal of ASO, of course, is to maximize the number of times your app is being downloaded, so to start, make sure you’ve got the right keywords to get your digital foot in the door as a search result. If more than 60 percent of downloads come from searches, and users are searching for specific phrases, app titles should reflect their functionality and include the simplest or core keywords.

In the same way that titles employ core keywords, descriptions should try to pinpoint several key functions that users will be searching for, and good screenshots (the visual side of a description) make a big difference. Use quality screenshot images and take screenshots of all of your app’s main functions.

The official app of Powerball and Mega Millions, LotteryHUB, used this optimization strategy long before gaining “official app” status to secure top spots in search results for “Powerball,” “Mega Millions,” and even among the enormous list of apps with “lottery” as a keyword.

As I said before, “official” status is nothing without the unofficial endorsement of engaged users to back it up. Since October 2013, LotteryHUB has ranked among the top five “Powerball” apps, not because that keyword was shoe-horned into the app page, but because the app was optimized to find real estate among search results, and delivered a quality, engaging experience that users were searching for.

Before becoming Mega Millions’ official app, LotteryHUB offered numbers and news for the game, but not live drawings or ticket tracking. Once those functions were added to the app, and the app store titles and descriptions were updated to reflect the changes, LotteryHUB jumped from the twenty-third ranked app to the third-ranked app under “Mega Millions,” and continues to climb along with user engagement.

Simple changes can have a big impact, too. Just accounting for spelling errors in your core keywords can have a cumulative effect on your app’s overall rankings. In LotteryHUB’s case, including “Power Ball” and “Megamillions,” two common spelling errors, in the app’s description means that misspelled searches turn into hits rather than misses, and the base of engaged users grows. And, as we know, it’s all about engagement. The more

users and the more engaged they are, the better your app will measure up to the competition.

## OPTIMIZATION DOESN’T STOP IN THE APP STORE

So, once you’ve optimized your title and description to include the keywords most relevant to your app’s functionality, just wait for the downloads to start coming, right? Unfortunately, it isn’t that simple.

You’ve researched your competition, refined your keywords, and hopefully your app is being found more easily and downloaded more times. But again, this is a process that requires “constant attention, refinement and measurement.” Moving forward from your first push at ASO, consider different avenues to find downloads.

The more downloads, the higher your app will rank, after all, and while the wallet can come out to give you a boost, remember that paid campaigns still won’t secure a higher spot. Paid campaigns may seem like an obvious answer or even a tempting cure-all for slow downloads, but they’re growing gradually more expensive, and you can’t buy engagement. There are plenty of ways to gain positive exposure for your app, but like ASO, finding the right channels requires some research and precious time.

Consider taking the time to pitch your app to reviewers with the right audience – app reviewers hold a lot of sway in a community of other influential app users, and getting a review in the right place, often called “earned media,” can generate plenty of organic downloads.

That’s where you’re headed. ASO is all about encouraging engagement, and while every developer hopes that their mobile app will be an instant organic hit, a titan of mobile engagement, the fact is that it takes constant attention and effort to maintain engagement across several channels – in your app, on the app store, and in the broader ecosystem of app marketing. Remember, your app is always in competition, but with a great product and a dedicated marketing effort, the top spot in the app store can be yours. ♦

*About LotteryHUB, powered by Shoutz: Shoutz is dedicated to making lotteries more convenient, engaging and rewarding. Shoutz is mobilizing the multi-billion dollar lottery industry with its state-of-the-art mobile engagement and monetization platform, including the award-winning mobile app, LotteryHUB. LotteryHUB is the official mobile app of Powerball® and Mega Millions® which provides players the freedom to pursue their dreams and engage with Powerball and Mega Millions from just about anywhere. Players can easily follow jackpots, check and track numbers, watch live drawings and get the latest news and tips – all while earning rewards and benefits. The Shoutz platform not only provides Powerball and Mega Millions a means of engaging and monetizing their large, national player bases but it also provides them a means of communicating with and distributing news and information to their players. Shoutz will continue to provide the latest features and benefits to lottery players via LotteryHUB while also providing lotteries with an advertising driven revenue model as well as analytics regarding player behavior, trends and demographics.*

*Lotteries and advertisers can contact Shoutz via email at [info@shoutz.com](mailto:info@shoutz.com) or visit [www.shoutz.com](http://www.shoutz.com) to learn more about LotteryHUB and the benefits of the Shoutz mobile engagement and monetization platform.*