

21 STEP CHECKLIST FOR MAKING AN APP



bluecloudsolutions

CARTER THOMAS

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21 STEP CHECKLIST FOR MAKING AN APP

WELCOME!

If you're reading this, chances are you plan to make some money with an idea you have for an app! The process isn't as difficult as you think. In fact, I've successfully used this checklist many times with Project Managers and developers and have been able to step out of the development process completely.

Pretty cool, right?

If this is your first time developing an app, I highly recommend reading through all 21 steps and taking notes. Make sure to follow up in the areas you don't feel 100% comfortable with. The [Bluecloud Solutions blog](#) is the perfect place to get a better understanding on all the topics.

For you Mavericks out there that have already developed a handful of apps, use this checklist as a guide to get them developed efficiently and ready for takeoff.

This checklist will help your app dominate the app store.

Whether this is your first app or 100th, make sure you have some help. A mentor, partner, forum...somewhere you can go to seek advice and get answers. The best service we recommend is Bluecloud Select. With Bluecloud Select, you will get access to app source codes, tutorials, content, ebooks, Q&A, videos, private FB groups, and lots more. [Click here to join >](#)

Let's get started!

Hi! My name is Carter Thomas and I've built A LOT of apps (queue metal music and firework show).

Beyond the 1,500+ in my own portfolios, I've worked on dozens of massive apps ranging from a top grossing Android game to a \$1B San Francisco startup's Utility app.

But I don't consider myself an "expert" or a "guru" or anything like that. I think those terms are pretty lame, to be honest.

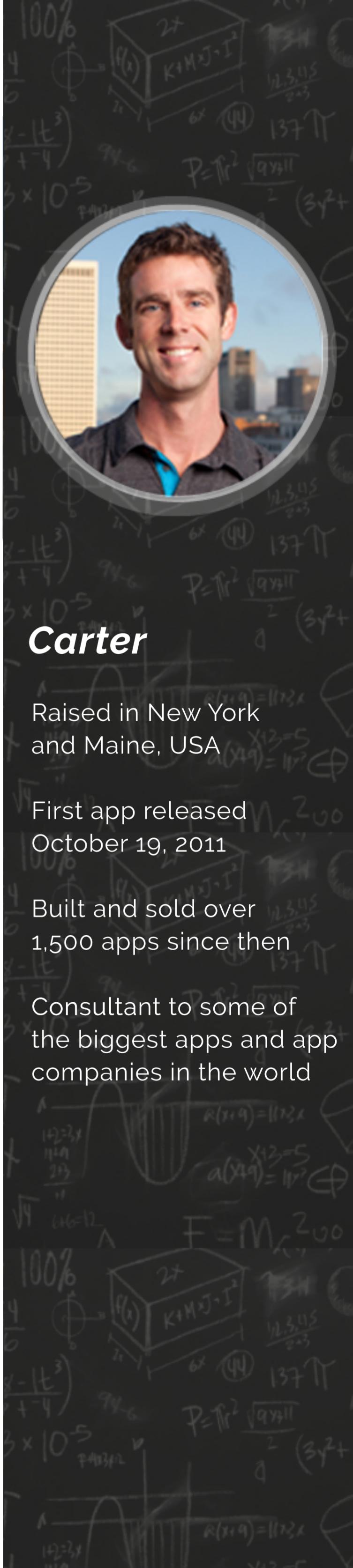
I am a straight talker who has been able to backup everything with results. I speak in terms that anyone can understand. And I always tell you how it is.

Over the past two years, I've been fortunate enough to receive over 19 Million downloads and generate 7 figures of income. I sold three separate companies for multiple six figures. I went from living in a small town in Maine, USA to having a full office in one of the hottest incubators in San Francisco.

You would think I have this development thing dialed by now, but I can't tell you how many times I've forgotten to include an SDK or properly set up a marketing campaign.

So, **I created this 21 Step Checklist as a safety precaution to make sure all the bases are covered.**

Keep reading to learn the 21 steps I follow during the development process of an app.



Carter

Raised in New York
and Maine, USA

First app released
October 19, 2011

Built and sold over
1,500 apps since then

Consultant to some of
the biggest apps and app
companies in the world

1. Establish A Business Plan

Don't go down the rabbit hole without a plan - as they say. Define your outcome first. I know this sounds boring and something that you'll figure out later, but NOW is the best time to start making these decisions. Having a concrete plan will save your business down the road.

Your business plan deciphers the direction of your business. It tells you how to spend your money and your time and make business choices objectively. It is essentially the recipe that makes up your business.

5 Common Business Plan Examples:

- **App Factory** - make as many apps as possible
- **The Dev Shop** - you build apps for others
- **Indie App** - individual or small team focused on customized apps
- **The Deal Maker** - connects people to broker deals
- **Business Apps** - for small business owners (or B2B) who want to increase marketing and offerings



Questions to ask yourself to help define your perfect business plan:

- How fast do I want to go?
- How many products do I want?
- Am I in this for the long haul, or is this a short-term move?

Read more about app business strategies [here](#).

Define the outcome of your business.

Pick a business plan.

Ask questions to help define your business.

2. Research The Market

"All I'm armed with is research." -Mike Wallace

FACT - 90% of developers who come to me with an app idea have done ZERO research. In most cases, the exact app idea already exists. How embarrassed would you be if you spent hundreds of dollars on a project to later find out that it's already been done?

Whoops!

Happens all the time, and that's why your project has an exponentially higher chance of succeeding - because you put the time in to make a well thought out plan.

Let's begin with the end in mind. Begin by asking yourself, *why are you creating this app?*

Most of us want to create an app to make some extra money, increase exposure of a local business, or create a utility to make life easier. All great intentions.

But try and stay focused on what the market wants, not what you want to develop. Your dream app isn't going to be very fun if it's burning a hole in your pocket.

Listen to the market. We need to figure out what the public is interested in and is currently downloading. Find the competition. Find out what strategies apps are using to get a 10x better outcome than everyone else.

One of the best ways to do this is by using App Intelligence tools like Apptopia. There is a price, but the information is invaluable.

Questions to ask yourself when researching the app store:

- How can I provide value?
- Who is my competition?
- Where is the traffic coming from?
- How can I take this app to the next level?
- How can I create a unique experience?

Finally, network with people and expand your knowledge. Buy someone coffee, pick their brain, and get their feedback. *"What do you think about this? Here's my plan. How much value do you think it has?"*

Think high demand, low competition.

Learn more about Market Research [here](#).

3. Set A Budget

Now that we have researched the market and have an app idea that is going to crush it - How much is this gamebuster going to cost?

Every code and developer is unique, so there is no way of knowing the EXACT development costs. But, we can get close...

One strategy to estimate development costs is to post on freelance services like Upwork and Elance. Create a vague job description and see what people reply with. Or, include the link of an app that has similar features and ask how much it would cost to develop.

Don't go outside your means. Don't gamble with your money. If you can't afford to lose money, you shouldn't be risking it on apps. Define the risk level of the project beforehand and decide if it is within your means.

The honest truth is, if you're looking to solely make money with apps, you might as well walk into a casino and place all your money on the roulette table. Apps are not guaranteed magic money making machines. If you publish an app similar to Angry Birds, I can 100% guarantee you will not get anywhere near the same results. But if you have done the work, and made a quality product that fits a demand in the market - you're halfway there.

Read more about development costs [here](#).

4. Look For An App Template

App templates are one of the biggest kept secrets. An app template acts as the foundation for development and innovation.

For example, imagine you want to build a simple Casino Slots game for your business. Most people would hire a developer, spend \$10,000+ and get a product that's buggy and not exactly what they want (not to mention it would take months).

In almost every case, someone has already done all the hard work and developed a code that closely resembles your idea. Instead of going through all the work and money of creating a code that already exists, you can purchase it at a highly discounted price.

Include links of apps live in the store to get a better estimate for your projects.

Don't invest money you can't afford to lose.

Try and find an app template that is similar to your project before investing in development

Here's how the process works:

- You find a source code that works and purchase it. You can find these online or simply by cold calling people who have built apps already.
- You (or a design/development team) will make a "new" app with new graphics and features. You'll update all the IDs in the app so that it displays YOUR ads and has its own name, etc.
- You customize the app to your liking with more/less features and functionalities.
- You publish your app in the store and start marketing it accordingly.



App templates are 90% cheaper and take a fraction of the time. Plus the product is almost **ALWAYS** higher quality than building from scratch.

Learn more about app templates [here](#).

5. Pick A Market

Be conscious of your market.

There are different app stores, devices, Operating Systems, and demographics. Pick the market that will best benefit your app functionality and target demographic.

There are several markets to choose from, but the big three are Apple, Google Play, and Amazon. You need to create a developer account for each market you wish to publish to.

Can I submit my app in multiple markets?

YES!

We'll talk about this more later on.

- **Find a template**
- **Swap resources**
- **Customize it**
- **Publish to the app store**

Apple, Google Play, and Amazon are the biggest app markets.



6. Create A Wireframe

A wireframe is a blueprint or skeletal guide that represents the functionality and navigation of an app.

Some people use professional tools like balsamiq to create wireframes, others create detailed walkthroughs with photoshop, I've even seen Top Charts apps drawn up on a cocktail napkin (works best after drinking a sazerac).

Take everything you have learned in the research process and create a wireframe of how your app will work.

Some items to focus on when creating a wireframe:

- Making an incredible User Experience (UX)
- Outlining the navigation of the app
- Menus
- Buttons (don't forget navigational buttons)
- Images
- Text boxes
- In-App Purchases
- Ads
- Actions like 'swipes' and 'scrolling'

It is important to walk through each section of your wireframe with your developer. One strategy is to hand your wireframe to a friend (or even perfect stranger), and see if they understand your app without you having to say a single word.

Don't forget to include and properly detail your app's monetization strategy!

Chances are if you don't include an item in the wireframe, your developer won't include it in the app. **Don't assume anything.**

7. Choose A Programming Language

Let me start by saying, I have ZERO experience programming apps. I can enter an Ad ID and upload a source code, but I have no idea how to code. And I don't want to!

Don't freak out about knowing nothing about coding.

Here are the very basics you need to know: **an Android app almost always uses Java, and an iOS app uses Objective-C.**

BAM! Those 2 programming languages are going to take care of 90% of your projects.

Here are some other things to think about.

Do you want your app to be developed exclusively for one platform? In other words, are you only planning on publishing only to the Apple App Store? Then you want a "native" application. A native app is an application program that has been developed for use on a particular platform or device.

If you want to develop an app and publish on multiple markets (like Apple and Android), you need to make sure your application is "cross platform." Cross platform mobile development refers to writing a single codebase for apps that will eventually be used on different operating systems. You have one code that is used to publish to Apple AND Android.

This is huge!

Another popular coding language you've probably heard of is "HTML5." HTML5 is a programming language used for web frontend apps. Popular apps like Uber, Basecamp, and Instagram are coded in HTML5.

One final important piece of advice, make sure you **take note of what programming language was used.**

When picking a programming language:

1. Ask your developer for recommendations

2. Find out what similar apps were coded in

3. Find the price differentiation between programming languages

4. Always get a quote on making the code cross platform

8. Customize Your App

Customizing your app does not refer to picking a **COOL FONT** to deck out your project with.

I'm referring to integrations. What features do you want included in your app?

Do you want to run advertisements? Then you better install ad Software Development Kits (SDKs) like Chartboost and AdMob.

Do you want Push Notifications? Then make sure you have integrated services like Urban Airship to manage your outgoing messages to users.

One source that I've been guilty in the past of always forgetting is Facebook. I always setup my apps so users can share on Facebook. BUT, I would forget to integrate tracking features for Facebook to analyze data for marketing campaigns such as buying app installs. Now that I'm more of a data geek, I've gotten better at this.

Here is a list of other unique integration options to think about:

- **Crashlytics** - tells developers why an app crashes, how many devices it has crashed on, and even the other apps running at the time.
- **Helpshift** - an in-app customer support service that improves customer service and retains users in the app.
- **LocationKit** - uses GPS location up to as close as 10 meters.'

Take the time and think about what you want (and may want later) in your app. Remember, if you don't include it now, it could take weeks if not months to get it coded and approved in the app store.

The more integrations you can add at the beginning will save you time later on.

It is a good idea to install multiple ad networks so you can measure which one is best

For best results, install Google Analytics or Flurry in your app

9. Find A Good Developer

You've got your project all mapped out, now you just need someone to execute it!

Hands down, the best way to find good freelancers is through word-of-mouth. If you know someone in the business, ask for recommendations.

Another option is to check freelancing websites like Elance and Upwork. You'll find plenty of reviews, plus you can take advantage of the built-in payment protection.

Things to look for in a good developer:

- **Reputation** – Are other people happy with the work? Find feedback, reviews, and legit testimonials.
- **Communication** – Communication breakdowns can ruin a project. Freelancers should be available via email, Skype, etc. It's a good idea to hop on Skype for an introductory chat.
- **Portfolio** – Has the freelancer done similar work before? This speaks to their expertise as it relates to your project.
- **Deadlines** – Look for a proven track record of shipping working apps on time.

Get EVERYTHING in writing. I'm talking about every last detail. It doesn't mean that you don't trust the person – it's just good business. When hiring a developer, ask for a detailed scope document and agree on a set price. The days of conducting business with a handshake are over (ask NBA star DeAndre Jordan about that). It worked for grandpa, but not these days.

Don't get burned. If you have a bad vibe and feel you're getting taken advantage of, simply stop the project and go somewhere else. One way to protect yourself is to breakup the project into milestones.

Test new developers with a small job.

Having a developer on the same timezone is a huge benefit



Use milestones and get a contract signed.

10. Find A Good Designer

A good designer will not only make your app easy on the eyes, but hopefully improve the navigational and user experience as well.

You can find designers on the same freelance sites as developers, but also other micro services like Fiverr. Fiverr is a great inexpensive service to use for small projects.

For example:

- You visit fiverr.com and find a designer that has a great portfolio that matches the style you're looking for
- You hire him/her to create an icon as a small test
- You pay \$5-\$20 for the icon and the designer nails it (yes)!
- You contact the designer outside of fiverr and ask if he or she is interested on working on other parts of your app
- A financial agreement is negotiated and you've found your own personal designer - Woohoo!

It's that easy.

You can do this with any design service too. Replace "fiverr" with Upwork, 99designs, Dribble, etc.

11. Create A Developer Account

By now you have your app idea, wireframe, and a team ready to get to work.

Nice job!

Now you need a developer account to publish your masterpiece to the market.

Quick Tip: Make sure your designer has experience with apps and will provide you with master copies of all app art.

There are 2 types of accounts: Individual and Business

You will need to share your account credentials, OR give your developer access to your account. He or she will need to create signing certificates, provisioning profiles, bundle IDs, and a few other small items to get the ball rolling.

However, YOU have the ability to input icons, screenshots, descriptions, keywords, pricing, ratings, categories...on your own easily without the help of a developer.

The biggest thing you need to think about is whether to **sign up as an Individual or Business**.

For an individual account, all you need is some basic information (Name, address, etc) and your Social Security Number.

For a business account, you will need all the basic info plus an EIN number and D-U-N-S ID (for Apple only). This is to verify that you are an actual business.

12. Create A Repository

After your developer and designer have handed over the code and resources, you will need to store your work somewhere safe.

You can store resources on a physical device like an external hard drive. Or you can sign up for a cloud hosting service like Dropbox. Most services will even give you a decent amount of space for free when you sign up.

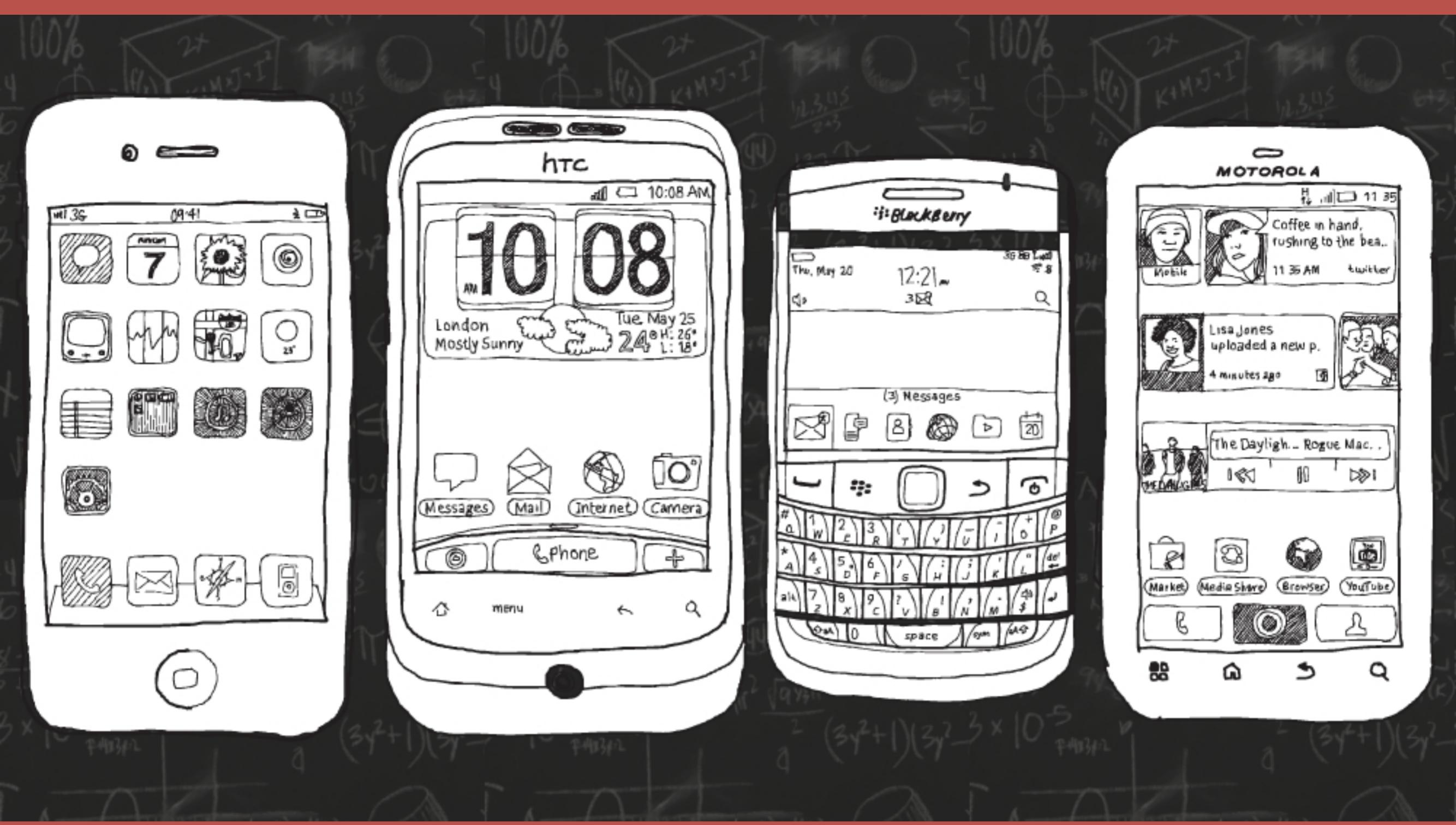
Some services like GitHub offer special features like **Version Control**. Version Control is a system that records changes to your project as you make them. For example, you integrate a feature and notice your app crashes. With Version Control you can easily recall the project to an earlier state.

Bam!

Visit the [Bluecloud Resources page](#) for more options and info.

Important Note:
You can upgrade from an individual account to a business account. But you cannot downgrade from a business account to an individual account. So it is safer to start as an individual and work your way up.

Create a system for storing codes and files. Use folders, subfolders, and version numbers.



13. Test & Revise

Beta test your app thoroughly. Overlooking one small detail could cost hundreds of dollars and take weeks to get submitted back in the store.

Don't risk it.

- Different devices
- User Experience
- Buttons
- On Wifi vs cellular networks

One of the most common reasons for apps being rejected are In-App Purchases. Make sure you test IAPs before submitting your app to the store. It takes 5 minutes and could delay you weeks if it gets rejected.

Ask friends and peers to test your app. Your developer can upload an app build to your device and others using services like TestFlight and Diawi. Make sure to get plenty of feedback.

Also ask your developer to show you via screencast how to run the app on simulator. That way you can test on any device and OS without having to go hunting for phones and tablets.

14. Implement Premium Services

This could mean unlocking more features or even including a subscription where users have to pay monthly for premium features.

Another gamechanger is to collect email addresses for marketing campaigns outside of your app.

Let's say you developed a fitness app and you have a connection to a supplement company. How pumped are they going to be when you hand them an email list of 10,000 people who show a strong interest in fitness and exercise supplements.

Game Over!

One of my favorite premium services is **Parse**, a powerful cloud database, push notification service, and analytic tracking platform. You can collect and track specific information from users and dynamically manage tasks and app settings.

Huh?

Lets use a casino game as an example. With parse I can pull data from users such as their FB profile, email account, what they purchase in the app, even their betting habits. This is great because if I notice "John Smith" is spending 2 hours a day in my app, I can add credits to his account and personally reach out and tell him how valued of a customer he is.

How cool is John going to feel after he gets that message?

Premium services don't have to be integrated in version 1.0. Make sure your app works firstly and there is a market for it. But, it is never too early to start thinking about how to take your app to the next level.

Get creative and integrate premium services.

Think outside the app store with email campaigns and business partnerships.



Make sure your app is marketable and has some form of success before risking money on premium services.

15. App Store Optimization

Now that we have an app ready to be uploaded to our developer account, we need to optimize it for the market.

App Store Optimization (ASO) is the process of improving the visibility of a mobile app. Put simply, the better your ASO - the more visibility your app will receive.

The ASO basics:

- App Title
- Keywords
- Icon
- Screenshots/Video
- Description
- Category
- Rating

Learn more about ASO [here](#).

16. Define A Marketing Strategy

App Marketing is crucial for acquiring new users and retaining them. Before people use apps they have to know how to find them.

By researching and setting up a marketing strategy early on, your network will snowball and lead to higher download numbers.

Ways to market your app:

- Social media pages (Facebook, IG, Twitter)
- Mobile Ads (click, installs, cross promotions)
- Email campaigns
- Create a quality landing page with a countdown
- Build a microsite
- Produce a product video
- Reach out to bloggers
- Press Releases
- Reviews

Read more about app marketing [here](#).

An app's success is inextricably linked to ASO, particularly if you're not prepared (or able) to spend \$100K on app installs.

Research the market so your app stands out and doesn't get lost in the masses.

Developing an app is the easy part, getting a successful marketing system dialed for consistent traffic is where the challenge begins.

17. Pre Release Essentials

Cover all your bases before the big day. A pre release strategy will help you iron out all the details of your app and your business model.

Outline your launch strategy. Connect the dots of all your marketing campaigns to create a sealed launch strategy. This may include a Soft Launch where you release your app to a few smaller territories like New Zealand to test. Or working out a promotion where you heavily discount your app during the first week of being published.

Create the perfect pitch. Your pitch should explain your app's key features and benefits. Create several versions of your pitch with different lengths and that highlight different areas of your app. Be honest and stick to your app's key selling points.

Reestablish the connection between your company and your app. How does this app benefit your company and brand? Make adjustments to help your app flow with other projects in your app network and maximize your business plan.



Prepare yourself for every scenario.

18. Plan For Customer Support

You're not the DMV! Make sure your customers will have the best support experience possible.

Make a plan for responding and taking action when support emails and reviews start piling in. This is your most valuable business asset and is critical to building a successful company.

Apps can gain popularity quickly. For example, it only took Instagram 3 months to hit 1 million users. As your user base grows, so does the volume of support tickets. You'll get emails, phone calls, Tweets, and other messages from users.

Be prepared.

To minimize support efforts:

1. Create template email responses
2. Have a knowledge base
3. Include FAQs in your app Out source support

19. Set Up A Measuring System

The answer is always in the data. If you're not measuring, then you could be missing out on big money. Whether you're A/B testing, collecting data on user behaviors, or measuring traffic campaigns, the information you get from data is what's going to help you exponentially increase your revenue.

The goal of any business is to increase **Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs). Start outlining what your app's KPIs might be. Examples are:

- **Usage** - who is using your app and how? Are they using it at day or night? What devices are people using?
- **Lifetime Value** - LTV is the prediction of the entire profit attributed to the lifecycle of your customer
- **Session time** - amount of time spent in the app
- **Retention** - how often users return to your app
- **Most/Least Popular In-App Purchases**
- **Advertising** - clicks, installs, and ECPMs
- **Active Users** - these are the people who like your app and use it often. Measure your MAU and DAU base.
- **Average Revenue Per User** - knowing your ARPU is crucial when it comes time to buy more installs for your app
- **User Acquisition** - study how people found your app

Read more about analytics [here](#).

20. Have An Update Plan

After your app has been released and you've had a chance to digest the data, you are going to want to plan for an update. Updates not only help improve your app, but also keep it fresh on the market.

Create an update schedule. Updates should be routine. You should prepare to update your app every 2-8 weeks. Sometimes even updating your app for the hell of it with no changes can bring in a push for your downloads and revenue.

Constant A/B testing. You should always be testing your app. *What color button works best? What icon is most popular? What keywords can I measure?*

You can access massive amounts of data straight from your developer account. But most developers use other intelligence services like App Annie and Appfigures to track data.

For more specific and customized data, make sure to integrate and track data with Google Analytics and Flurry.

Start thinking about your update strategy early on.

Reasons to update your app:

- Bug fixes
- More/Less features
- Promotional/Seasonal
- ASO

The good news is, for most marketing updates (title, screenshot, category, etc) you don't need a coder. So updates can be a free strategy to improve your app results.

There is nothing more powerful than making a customer feel like you really care about them and updates are the ultimate way to do that.

21. Automate Your App

Once you have a working UX, monetization funnel, marketing campaign, and an update strategy - it's time to package everything up. The goal is to be able to hand your project to a Project Manager, Development Team, or even a potential buyer, and have everything easily laid out for them.

Create an App Template. By creating an app template, you are essentially writing the instructions for your app. This includes documentation that details the code, in-app purchases, advertising networks used, Game Center, where the resources folder is, etc.

App Templates often come with video or picture tutorials, asset sheets that document the name and size of images, even PSD (Photoshop) files that can be used to export images to all device sizes and filenames. Having an App Template comes in handy when you need to revisit an app months later, hire a new development team, or are looking to publish the code multiple times (skinning).

Create Systems Of Protocols. SOPs help keep your business organized, and will single handedly transform your life. You'll be able to produce 10x more with the same effort. You'll be able to finally use data to drive your decisions instead of feeling like you're barely getting enough air to breathe.

Learn more about SOPs and specific app strategies [here](#).

An app is never complete, something can always be tweaked.

SOPs allow you to:

- Get more done
- Make better decisions
- Make more money

FINAL THOUGHTS



CONGRATULATIONS!

You're on your way to making a well organized and thought out app.

One final thing to check-off is to celebrate! Remember to celebrate the small victories. This is a fun creative process.

You will stumble and hit the wall on every one of these checklist items. But think about how much you have learned already. Now imagine if you learn that much every time you make another app. It's a compounding effect – every swing of the bat gets you closer to being a master.

Good luck, and keep rocking!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CTH".