



THE APP DESIGN HANDBOOK

App Icon & Splash Image

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Design and Usability: The perfect mix for app success

Getting your application published in the major app stores can often be a complex and frustrating process to carry out. Given the number of restrictions and guidelines set by each store, it is not unusual to see your own app being rejected for unforeseen bugs or design features not compliant with the store guidelines.

[Design plays a key role in the app store acceptance process](#), so much so that Apple released what is called The Human Interface Guidelines which describe the principles to design a perfectly user-friendly interface compliant with Apple requirements.

In this ebook we will focus on [the main design principles to keep in mind when creating your app icon and splash image](#), to boost your chances of getting your app published in the stores and provide a superlative user experience at the same time.



Did you know that...

When developing your app through AppsBuilder, you can edit your content, layout, menu and page icons as many times as you want without having to resubmit your app to the stores. However, if you modify your app icon, title or splash image, you need to resubmit your app to the stores.

Why app icons are so important?



The **app icon** is the icon that users download on their smartphone's home screen and tap every time they want to start an app. In other words, it **is the first thing users will see in your app** and thus will work as a reminder of your application's functionalities.

Every app needs an icon, not just because it is an element required by all the major app stores, but because **it is the place where branding and strong visual impact come together into instantly recognizable, attractive design**.

This means that app icons are not just mere decorative elements but **a crucial part of the user experience** as they communicate your app's first impression and greatly contribute to its success.

The impact on users

To better understand which impact your app icon may have on users and thus on its success in the stores, think about shopping for cereals. Stores may be crammed with shelves full of different boxes and brands, yet everyone will be naturally attracted to the most eye-catching packaging. Taste, nutrition facts and other essential considerations will only come in a second stage.

Same rule applies to app stores, where it is proven that **users tend to click and download the most creative, unique and attractive icons** among the hundreds of thousands now available.



Ok, so now it's clear that your app icon is crucial and must be able to get attention. The trouble is that what makes an app stand out is subjective. Your app icon may look absolutely stunning to your eyes (especially after all those hours of work!), however potential users may not see it this way.

The only possible solution is to **test it over and over**. Once you have released your app, monitor its performance and download rates for a while.

After a few weeks you might want to test some new patterns, for example switching up the colours or replacing it with a brand-new version. As in advertising, sometimes even small details can make a whole difference.

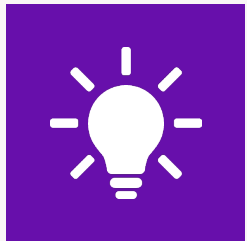
Remember: being consistent with your brand colours and style is great, but it doesn't mean a lot if it cannot make you grab people's attention!

App icon size criteria for the stores

Given its crucial role, **app icons must meet specific size criteria in order to be displayed correctly on all devices**. Table 1.1 sums up information on all the size formats required by the major app stores, both for the app icon – the one displayed on smartphone's home screen – and the store icon – the high-resolution icon available on the marketplace.

Table 1.1 App icon size criteria for app stores (size in pixels)

| App Type | Size for iPhone5/iPod touch (5th generation) | Size for high-resolution iPhone/iPod touch | Size for iPhone/iPod touch | Size for iPad | Size for high-resolution iPad | Size for Android tablet | Size for Android smartphone | Size for Windows 7 | Size for Windows 8 | Size for BlackBerry 10 |
|----------------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| App icon (required for all apps) | 114 x 114 | 114 x 114 | 57 x 57 | 72 x 72 | 144 x 144 | 96 x 96 | 48 x 48 | 62 x 62 | 99 x 99 | 86 x 86 |
| App icon for the store | 1024 x 1024 | 1024 x 1024 | 512 x 512 | 512 x 512 | 1024 x 1024 | 512 x 512 | 512 x 512 | 300 x 300 | 300 x 300 | 480 x 480 |



Did you know that...

One of the greatest benefits of relying on a cross-platform tool like AppsBuilder is that you will not have to worry about each store's size requirements. You will simply be asked to upload your high-resolution 1024 x 1024 app icon on our platform and we'll take care of all the resizing work.

DOs and DON'Ts to design great app icons

It is clear now that every app needs an icon and that it plays a crucial role in user experience. However, if on the one hand you app icon should provide a coherent and effective representation of your app's functionalities and/or brand, on the other hand [it is highly recommended to follow some standard guidelines to optimize design](#) and make sure that your app will be properly displayed on each device.

Moreover, sticking to the following guidelines will also increase your app's chances to be published in the stores and make an awesome first impression on app store shoppers.



Easily recognizable images

Your app icon should be able to [convey your app's functionalities at first sight and across all languages](#), that's the main advantage of iconography. Make sure that you use universal imagery that people of different languages and cultures will easily recognize. Avoid focusing on secondary aspects of an element or on associations of thought that might not be as universal as you would expect.





Keep it simple

Avoid cramming several images into your icon. Remember the online world's golden rule: Less is more.

You only have 3249 pixels at your disposal, so figure out your analogy carefully and select one single element to convey your app's main functionality.

Think of what your app is really about: **if you could only show people one thing to represent your whole app, what would it be?**

Also look for apps with similar functionalities in the stores and avoid using style, images and colours that may create confusion with other apps: it's your app you want users to download, not a look-alike.



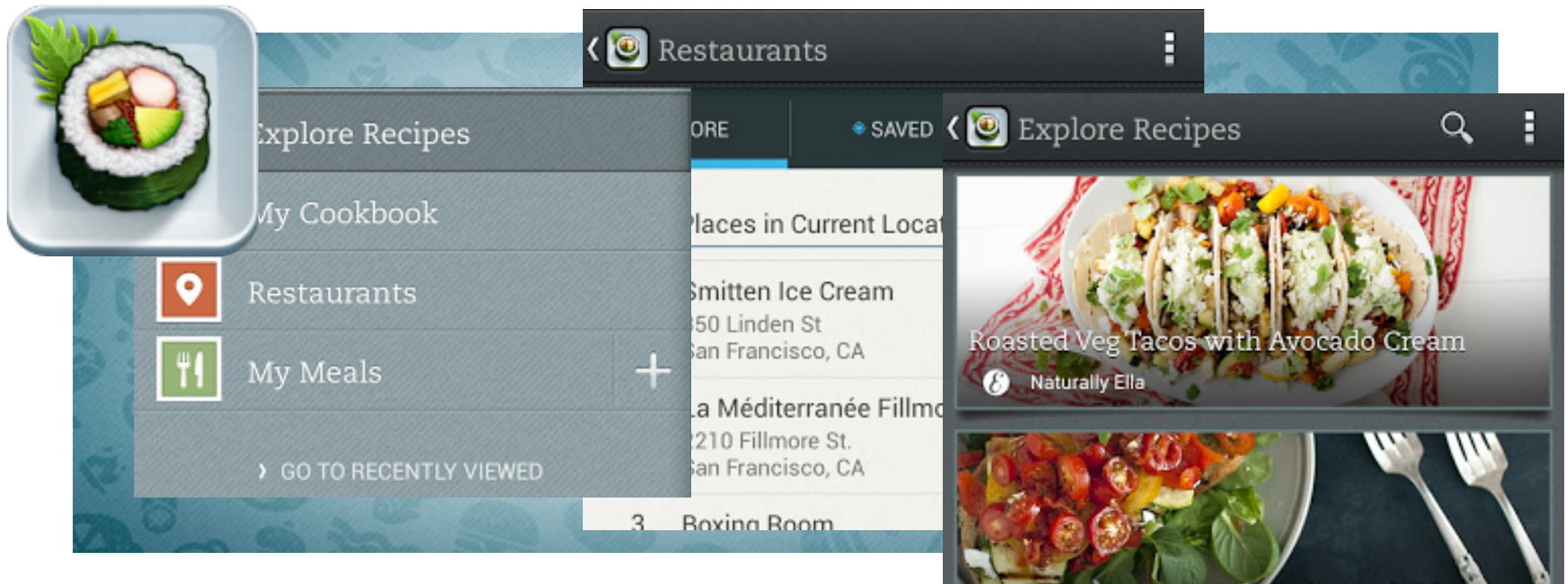
When creating your icon, ask yourself what your app is really about.



Be consistent

Much of your app success depends on the user experience provided by your app. [A satisfying user experience depends also on the consistency existing between your app icon and internal design.](#) There's no point in designing a glossy professional-looking app icon if you cannot maintain the same high expectation with the actual use of your app.

If the two events – tapping your app icon and actually using it – generate the same level of expectations, you will have more chances to elicit trust and loyalty from your users.





Use a simple colour scheme

Much of your app's look and feel relies on the colour scheme used. If your application refers to an existing brand, your company logo and colours will already suffice to define your app's colour scheme. If this is not your case, we recommend keeping it simple. A good idea, for example, is to [focus on contrast rather than specific colours](#), given the fact that most users are colour blind, which is particularly true if your application is mainly addressed to men.

Choose your main colour – preferably a bright one, such as green, orange, red or blue – and then pick a subdued secondary colour that doesn't grab too much attention nor clashes with your primary colour. As for the text colour, again the golden rule is to focus on contrast.

[Avoid using coloured fonts if you have a lot of content](#), as this could considerably affect usability.



A simple colour scheme – based on 2 or 3 primary colours – is usually a winning



Avoid text

An icon is a graphical representation of a word, concept, object or operation, so you'd better stick to the options offered by this means of communication. [If you need to use words to reinforce your app's message, it probably means that you are not using the full force of your pictorial arsenal.](#)

Adding text to your app icon can also be risky in terms of usability as it makes the app look cluttered and harder to decode.

If you still want to show text in your icon, but don't want to draw attention to the words themselves, [avoid using greek text or wavy lines](#) to suggest it. A better option would be to start with actual text and scaling it down until it gets hard to read.



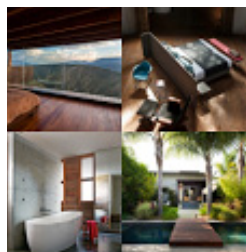
Because of text, all these app icons look cramped and hard to decode.



Avoid using photos

Although photos and screenshots can effectively represent app's functionalities, [it is better to opt for an idealized version of the subject](#). Moreover, unless the shot is truly professional, the final effect risks being a bit poor.

Creating an artistic representation of your app's functionalities also allows you to give more emphasis to the specific features you want users to focus on.



It is easy to give a shabby-looking impression with non-professional shots.



Avoid replicas of hardware products

It can be tempting to use symbols of successful hardware products in your app icon, so to take advantage of the popularity and trust that these items nurture in the majority of people. However, keep in mind that [symbols representing trademark products are copyrighted, thus cannot be reproduced in your app icon without official authorization](#).

As a rule of thumb, it is always advisable to avoid replicas of any specific hardware product in your app icon, because their design often changes and you could risk giving your app icon a dated look.



Avoid transparency

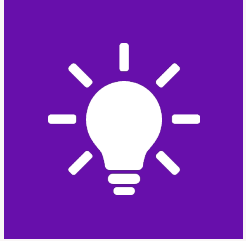
Once it has been downloaded, your app icon should be clearly visible on users' home screens and encourage tapping. If you create an app with a transparent background, it will blend in on your users' home screens and will not look tappable.

For this reason [all the main store guidelines strongly recommend that you should not use alpha transparency in your app icon](#). However, if you submit an app with an icon on a transparent background, be aware that a dark background will be added as a default action.

As a result, your app icon will appear as the image in the middle (if no shine effect is added) or the one on the right (if shine effect is added):



As a default action a dark background is always added to app icons on a transparent



Did you know that...

When iOS displays your app icon on the home screen of a device, the following effects will be automatically added:

- Rounded corners
- Drop shadow
- Shine effect

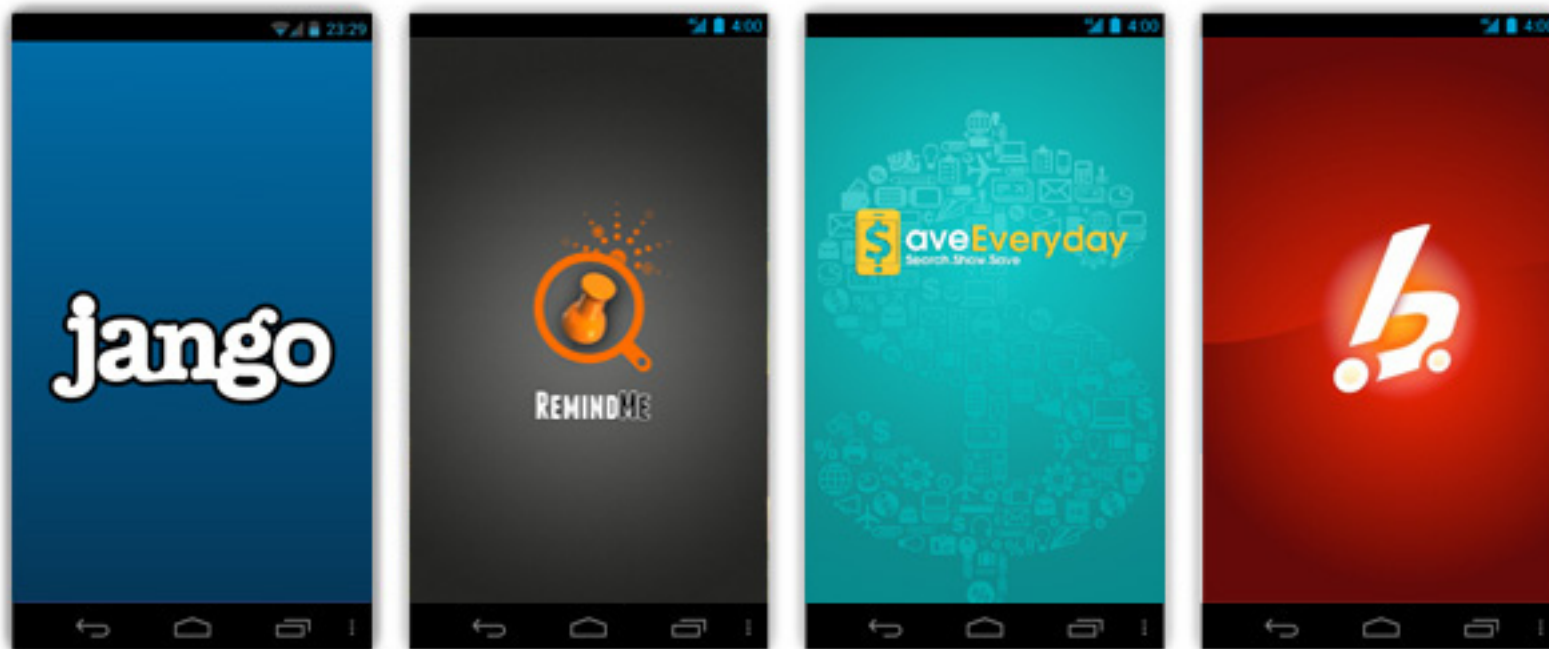
While it is not possible to prevent the rounded corners or drop shadow from being applied, it is possible to override the shine effect by providing a prerendered icon and making a change in the tiapp.xml file.

As a default action, AppsBuilder does not apply any shine effect to the icons of the apps developed on the platform, in order to preserve the original aesthetics of the icon. Users who wish to have a gloss applied to their icon can add it to the original image before setting it as the app icon.

What is a splash image?

The **splash image** – also known as launch image – **is the first screen your app displays to users while waiting for the app to be fully uploaded and ready to use**. Therefore, it is easy to understand how crucial a splash image can be in terms of user experience and app introduction.

Along with the app icon, it helps users get a first impression of the app and the type of contents and design awaiting them.

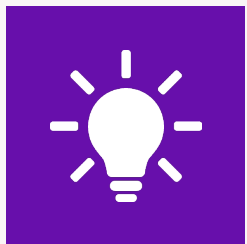


How can splash images help my app?

Although far from being the place to express your artistic kills, your app's splash image can be used as an opportunity to provide:

- A design introduction of your app
- An about window
- A space to showcase branding elements

As pointed out for app icons, it is important for the splash image to be consistent with what users are expected to find inside the app. Therefore, store guidelines often recommend using a splash image very similar to the app's home page. However, do not copy entirely your app's home page as some elements of your user interface might change in time and this could confuse users.



Did you know that...

Although there are several screen sizes depending on the type of device, when creating you app with AppsBuilder you will not have to worry about it. In fact, you will be asked to upload one single splash image (640x960 px) that will be adapted to fit all the existing devices.

As a rule of thumb, the same concepts of consistency, simplicity and intuitivity described for app icons should be applied to the choice of a good splash image. It is advisable, then, not to cram this page with superfluous graphic elements and colours, and to keep in mind that the main objective of this page is to make the waiting a more pleasant experience for users.



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