



The Risks and Consequences of Poor App Quality

From user abandonment to lost revenue to damaged brands, a poor quality app can cost your company big time

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In-The-Wild Testing for Functional + Security + Load + Localization + Usability



Introduction

In today's world, it's imperative to have an online presence and your company likely has some combination of a web app, mobile app and mobile-optimized website. But simply having a presence isn't enough. Today's average user is fairly tech savvy and has high standards when it comes to interacting with apps. All it takes for a user to abandon your app in favor of a competitor's is a few taps, clicks and swipes – the switching cost for a user is nearly nothing. On top of that, there are more platforms than ever for users to broadcast their poor opinion of your app, and others will listen. Overall, releasing a poor quality app will hurt you more than help.

Ranging from lost users, to brand reputation damage, to lost revenue, the risks and consequences of putting a poor quality app into the hands of your users are far reaching.

Poor quality encompasses a range of potential issues, and all it takes is one to affect your entire app adversely:

- Software bugs
- Crashes and freezing issues
- Slow load times
- Unintuitive navigation
- Inconsistent experiences across devices
- Security vulnerabilities
- Poor battery performance
- Privacy breaches
- Confusing content

Issues found later in the software development life cycle can be more costly and harder to fix and can even result in unplanned major architectural reworks. As many companies become more agile and release cycles tighten, the importance of catching and fixing quality issues as soon as possible increase exponentially. If an issue is discovered post-release, the time and energy needed to fix it takes away from future projects and requires even more resources. Moreover, while you're fixing the issue your app could experience unfortunate downtime or might remain live and accessible to users in its flawed form. Either way, you're disappointing even more of your users.

Then there are the hurdles that no amount of work or money can overcome: You've already disappointed users (and you might not be able to get them back), you've made a bad first impression and repercussions could already be rippling through your company.

So while it may be tempting to declare your app "good enough," that approach leaves you facing a lot of risks and the very devastating consequences associated with a poor quality app.

User Frustration

This may be obvious, but if you release an app that doesn't work well, is hard to use, is buggy or has any other poor quality issues, it will frustrate and disappoint your users.

Performance issues cause of the majority of user frustration and only 16% of users will give a frustrating app more than two tries, according to Compuware. Apps that are slow, crash, freeze or are buggy are sure turn-offs for users. The good news is that performance related issues are some of the easiest to prevent before launch. These are your traditional load and functional bugs – something, somewhere isn't right.

If you want to avoid user frustration, you need to test the app from the perspective of your users. While your app may work perfectly in the lab, that's not where your users work, live and play. People are everywhere, using different devices, operating systems, browsers, app versions, networks, security layers, connectivity levels and consumption preferences. When you realize the unlimited combination of test matrix possibilities, suddenly your in-house testing strategy is no longer enough. Testing in the wild puts your app through its paces under real world conditions, capturing bugs and quality issues you didn't notice but that your users surely would.

Embracing the exploding mobile market is another important part of avoiding user frustration. With websites, users need to be able to easily navigate and access information on both computers and mobile devices. If your site isn't mobile friendly, you'll disappoint 48% of users, according to a Google study. As responsive web design continues to take hold, testing websites on a range of mobile devices will become as important as addressing device fragmentation in native apps. The line between traditional web and mobile is blurring and you need to be prepared if you don't want to frustrate your users.

Leaving users frustrated – whether through a lack of planning or a lack of real-world testing – can overwhelm your customer support channels and lead to other unintended consequences.

App Abandonment

When users are frustrated, they'll leave your app. Plain and simple. Users expect websites to load within three seconds (you get about six seconds for mobile web) and 78% of users expect native mobile apps to load faster than websites – typically within two seconds (Compuware). That may seem like a tall order to fill, but the fact of the matter is, if your app doesn't meet these expectations your users will walk away – right into the arms of your competition.

Users will quickly abandon your app if it doesn't meet their wants, needs or expectations.

- 48% of users are less likely to use an app again if they're unhappy with the app's performance (Compuware)
- 44% of users delete a native app immediately if it doesn't work (Apigee)
- 34% go to a competitor's mobile app if they're not happy with your's (Compuware)
- 22% of users only use an app once (Localytics)

With so many options today, people don't need to – and won't – tolerate a poor app quality. Whether your app doesn't load quickly enough, freezes, is hard to navigate, asks for too much personal information or doesn't follow usability best practices, there are many ways poor app quality can drive users away forever. Once they're gone, they're not likely to come back and will even discourage others from trying your app.

Bad Reviews and Word of Mouth

As if losing your users wasn't bad enough, with the rise of social media and the advent of app store ratings and reviews a disappointed user now has a far-reaching platform to share their less-than-favorable opinions about your application.

According to recent studies, 84% of people consider app store ratings and reviews before downloading a new app (Compuware) and more than 50% reportedly learn about new apps via word of mouth (Apigee) – so you need that word to be a positive one. If a user's experience falls short of expectations, 32% will tell someone they know personally and 21% complain on social media (Apigee).

Bad reviews and word of mouth is the equivalent of having a poor letter grade from the local public health department posted front and center for all potential customers to see. Would you eat at a restaurant that only earned a 'C' rating? Probably not. So why expect users to invest time in your app if they've been warned by others that it's not up to par? Remember, three stars is simply average and most people aren't willing to settle for average when other "good" (4-star) and "excellent" (5-star) apps are available.

The only way to combat bad – or even so-so – reviews of your application is to listen to what users are saying, address the issues and win over future users. Nothing *you* say will woo people back. Instead, you need users to have a positive experience and hope they spread the word. If you release a high quality app to begin with, you'll save yourself from this issue.

Damage to Brand Reputation

An app may only be one facet of your company, but to the everyday user your app *is* your brand. Even if you commission an agency to create the app, if a poor quality app is released with your name on it your users will blame you, not the agency.

A recent survey found that 88% of Americans form negative opinions of brands if the brand has a poorly performing app (SOSTA). Meanwhile, 48% of people interpret a poorly performing mobile site as meaning the brand doesn't care (Google). This is an excellent way to lose even your most loyal fans.

“While a good reputation precedes you, a bad reputation will follow you for a long time.”

- Richard Branson

Users forming a poor opinion of your brand because of a bad experience with an application has far bigger implications than lost visitors and decreased traffic. People with a negative opinion

are far more likely to stop interacting with the brand on all levels. If your app was created to foster brand awareness and keep your company at the top of your users' minds, this kind of damage can be devastating.

Once poor app quality and bad word-of-mouth impact your brand's overall public reputation, the issue stops being a quality problem and becomes a whole company problem – one you certainly don't want.

Lost Revenue

Just because there's not a dollar sign in front of the install link doesn't mean you can't make money from your app. In-app purchases, advertising and brand influence all have an effect on your topline. For instance, a poor quality retail app will lose the company potential sales – sales made via the app, sales via the website users are now less likely to visit and all future sales if the consumer forms a poor opinion of the brand as a whole. If users can't find what they're looking for or lose patience with your app, you'll lose revenue because of frustration. If the quality issue has to do with a bug in the payment feature itself, you'll experience an even bigger, more devastating hit – one that could potentially cost millions of dollars.

Even apps that aren't outright encouraging users to make a purchase should be concerned that poor app quality could cost money. The vast majority of apps serve some commercial purpose, even if it's only brand awareness. To fulfill that purpose – no matter what it is – you need visitors. A poor quality app can drive your users away, and if they disappear, you'll lose the influence and vital interactions that attract advertisers and other revenue streams. Poor quality also leaves the door wide open for a competitor to steal your potential users (and their wallets) simply by doing your job better. This becomes even more apparent when your app serves up content via in-app purchases. Having users driven away by quality equates to lost dollars. Once users are discouraged, the chance of regaining their attention and wallets is low. You also don't want to forget about your advertisers. If you rely upon advertising as part of your revenue stream, you want to keep users engaged with your app for as long as possible.

Even the smallest quality issue can have a big impact on your revenue. While studying users' opinions of mobile web, Google discovered that 50% of people limit interaction with a brand they like if the company doesn't have a good mobile site. KISSmetrics found that 79% of people are less likely to purchase from a site again if they experience performance issues and a 1-second delay in page load time can result in a 7% drop in conversions.

And don't forget about the internal cost of an escaped bug. Not all bugs and issues are created equal; but sometimes you don't find that out until one has escaped into the wild. The cost of not catching a big one is higher than just the impact to your reputation. The bug can but costing you money from users, but it also has an implicit cost that affects your in-house teams and timeline. Your implicit costs are based on the amount of time and energy you have to spend hunting down and fixing a bug in a released app. That's time you could spend developing the next feature or addressing user feedback. At the same time, if you have to pull your build from the app store, fix it and wait for re-approval, you're losing potential revenue and consumer interest.

Conclusion

Users aren't forgiving. In the world of applications, the old saying "you only get one chance to make a good first impression" is truer than ever. With apps, a first impression is often all you get. Today's users expect apps to:

- Work whenever they need it (72%)
- Not keep them waiting (62%)
- Work as expected (62%)
- Not crash (53%)

These data points suggest that users consider *all* of those factors important, which points to a general expectation for high quality apps. Launching a poor quality app will set off a chain reaction that starts with user frustration and ends by harming your reputation and profoundly damaging your bottom line. Focusing on quality and putting good apps in your users' hands from the very beginning every time isn't just vital to an app's success, it's vital to your company's future.

About uTest

uTest provides in-the-wild testing services that span the entire software development lifecycle – including functional, security, load, localization and usability testing. The company’s community of more than 100,000 professional testers from 200 countries and territories puts web, mobile and desktop applications through their paces by testing on real devices under real-world conditions.

Thousands of companies – from startups to industry-leading brands – rely on uTest as a critical component of their testing processes for fast, reliable and cost-effective testing results.

More info is available at www.utest.com and blog.utest.com.



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