

1 Introduction

App Review sites are a key way to generate publicity for your mobile app. While internal app store reviews get the most attention these days from developers, external sites can lend an authoritative stamp of approval and should not be discounted as part of the promotional mix. Furthermore, app review sites can go beyond simple reviews and encompass features, interviews, previews and other promotional activities that help advertise your application and boost its credibility. But app review sites have diverged wildly from their videogame, movie and music-based cousins. Many are still positioned as simply providers of unbiased opinion, while others have become multi-layered promotional platforms, which have no qualms about charging money for reviews.

In this guide we take a closer look at the app review site ecosystem. We will explain the difference between paid reviews and free reviews, give you top tips on how to get noticed by editors, interview a number of app review site owners, and provide a directory of app review sites for you to check out.

For more on mobile app promotion check out our [mobile app marketing directory](#) at

2 What are app review sites?

So what are we talking about when we say ‘app review site’? Well the definition has become somewhat fuzzy over the last couple of years. Initially app review sites followed the tried and tested method of other media review publications, such as videogame review sites and movie review sites, providing an authoritative opinion on the latest apps and mobile games. Such sites not only provide reviews, but also news on the latest apps, previews and features. Readers get to find out which apps are worth downloading and which should be avoided. But there’s been problems applying the template set by videogame/movie/music review sites to app review sites. One of the biggest problems is the amount of apps being released. With traditional videogames (i.e. console based), editors can easily tell readers which games released in a given week are worth buying and which are not. But the pace of mobile app development dwarfs that of other media, with an estimated 15,000+ apps released each week. Mobile app review sites simply don’t have the resources to even scratch the surface of this deluge of apps and readers certainly don’t have the inclination to read them all. Therefore picking which app to review becomes an incredibly biased process. In fact, some review sites have taken to publishing statements such as the one below, which comes from BestAppsForKids:

“We currently only feature 4 to 5 star apps... because we would rather spend our time reviewing apps we like than reviewing the many apps that are just not good enough.”

Could you imagine a movie website only reviewing movies that it will give 4 or 5 stars to? But then if you’ve got hundreds of apps in your inbox every week, you need to apply some criteria in order to determine what gets reviewed.

The other unique problem app review sites face – separate from movie and game review sites – is that the majority of released apps are either free to download or only cost a few dollars. This means users can try apps they’re interested in with little risk, which may limit the importance of an app review compared to a game, movie or music review.

However, while app review sites are slightly different from other media review sites, this doesn’t mean they’re not useful for developers. The tidal wave of app releases created a huge opportunity for such sites to become promotional platforms for developers, who are desperate to stand out from the crowd. This has reached its logical conclusion with sites that charge developers for reviews.

2.1 Paid app reviews

Over the last few years a number of sites have been charging developers for reviews and have [attracted some negative attention in the process](#). Most of these sites say they review apps for free, like a regular review site, but also offer a guaranteed and ‘expedited’ review for money, which means your app doesn’t end up on a long waiting list.

Prices can vary greatly. We found costs for a single review, with no promotion, ranging from \$15 to \$50 (check our directory below for more information). Obviously the more traffic and higher readership a site has then the more valuable the link. It's definitely worth shopping around.

Many of these sites also offer complete promotional packages, including bundled social media promotion and video production. For instance, you can pay extra for video reviews and demos, or to have your review promoted on the front page of the site. You can also buy re-tweets for your review and Facebook posts, which take advantage of the site's fanbase (although how legitimate these fanbases are is anyone's guess).

Worth noting – we did not find a single paid review site promising positive reviews. All sites claimed to offer an unbiased service. Although some did say they would give developers the option to take down reviews if they scored below three stars.

Some sites, [DailyAppShow](#) in particular, are careful not to actually offer opinions in reviews. Instead they simply showcase your app and provide developers with promotional materials, such as videos, and promote the showcases to their readers/viewers. You can check out our interview with DailyAppShow below for more info.

2.2 App review submission platforms

A few platforms now exist offering app promotional services aimed at the press and app review sites, further blurring the lines between paid review sites and app promotion companies. These platforms are kind of like PR newswires and build directories of fresh apps, along with press assets, for journos to browse. But some of them also bolt on other services, such as social media promotion, video demo production and in-house reviews. In fact, many are very similar to the above sites that offer paid reviews, with the biggest difference being their potential audience (journalists, rather than consumers).

If you're looking for app promotion agencies and platforms, check out our comprehensive directory right here. Let's take a closer look at some of the app submission platforms:

[App Launch](#) is a review site submission service in its purest form and simply takes the work out of submitting your app to 100s of sites. It handles all the promo code distribution, news agency distribution and creates a press kit for you. Prices start from \$50 up to \$125. Check our interview with AppLaunch's founder further below for more info.

[Appromoter](#) is similar to AppLaunch and offers a directory of new apps for journalists to browse. Creating a directory entry yourself is free. AppPromoter charges for additional services, like creating press releases, distributing press releases and promoting your app on

the front page of the website. It also offers other app promotion services like SEO, ASO and promo video production.

[AppReviewPros](#) is a little different from the above. The site offers app promotion services, like ASO, video production and press release distribution. But its main offering is five “unbiased app reviews” from its team of reviewers. It seems to pitching this as professional constructive feedback on your app – as well as reviews that you can use for promotional purposes (assuming they’re positive).

[AppShout](#) focuses entirely on iOS app promotion and is really a newswire service for apps. The platform gives you your own media contact and distributes press materials to up to 60,000 journalists globally. AppShout also handles video production. It’s a bit pricier than others, with promotion packages starting from \$455 up to \$1395.

3 The value of app reviews

So how valuable are app reviews? Like with videogame or music reviews, it's very hard to assess and data is thin on the ground. But we did ask a few app promotion experts and developers their opinion.

Matt Palmer from the [app promotion agency Marketing Your App](#), gave us one example where app reviews did have a direct impact on downloads. Palmer says that after weather app [RainAware was reviewed](#) on AOL-owned The Unofficial Apple Weblog it jumped no1 in the Weather category, ahead of big brands like The Weather Channel and Weather Bug (you can [see the data here](#) – check the April 10 spike following the review).

Palmer says app reviews have a big role to play in promotion, as they not only raise awareness amongst readers but they also give developers “trusted and unbiased quotes” that can be put to use in marketing. Mention a 5 star review, or stick a glowing quote, in your app description page and it could be an important push toward convincing people to download. Gary Yentin, [CEO of App Promo](#), echoes Palmer, saying that app review sites have been effective for his clients. One recent client PicilT24 [was featured on](#) and that article strongly correlated with the app moving into the top 100 rankings in the App Store photo category. But Yentin says reviews, on the whole, are just “a small but effective piece to get users to talk about your application”. He says “no one marketing tactic works alone, and it is important to note that marketing is an ongoing process.”

Not everyone we talked to was so positive on the impact of app review sites. Developer Travis Houlette, who runs GhostBird Software and [developed KitCam for iPhone](#), says app reviews have helped him, but only when it comes to specialist sites.

“Generally i have found that app review sites on an individual basis do very little to help promote an app,” Houlette told us. “From my experience a single review on a non major mac or tech network wont break you into the big time no matter how good of a review it is. That said, sites that cater to specific niches of which your app is apart can go a long way to increase your apps exposure. For example, iPhone photography blogs such as _____ or _____ can be very helpful when promoting photography apps. Likewise a good review on Touch Arcade can do wonders when promoting a new game (my experience with Touch Arcade is from over 2 years ago so it may be a little out of date). Getting the people that are typically into the types of apps that you are promoting is a great start.”

Houlette adds that general app sites “should not be ignored” and it's always worth trying to get as much exposure as you can. He was very negative on paid reviews, saying developers should spend the money elsewhere, such as on a “professionally designed app icon

3.1 Beyond reviews

Remember, review sites are not just about reviews. Ask anyone in the videogame, music, or movie PR industry and many will tell you that a strong round of previews and pre-release features can often be more important publicity-wise than the reviews themselves. Many review sites openly invite developers to contact them for preview opportunities and developer interviews.

Here's your chance to think creatively. Try and get into the head of a blogger and think about what you can offer their readers? Maybe you have some controversial opinions on the state of mobile gaming or – even better – on another developer! Or maybe you can give a behind the scenes look at how you've created your app.

Think about competitions too. Obviously there's the bog-standard promo code giveaway (many websites thrive off this and actively encourage developers to send in promos), but maybe you can run a competition inviting readers to submit ideas for characters in your mobile game – the best one gets into the finished app. Or ask readers to name your app, or certain features within the app.

Here's something else to think about – many sites industry-focused sites love getting interesting app stats from developers. If you have worthwhile data on, for instance, how your downloads rocketed after a price drop, or how many extra downloads you got after reaching certain chart position, try getting in contact with journos and seeing if they're interested. When it's a slow news day, all kinds of stuff will be picked up by industry blogs (like [Inside Mobile Apps](#)), which can give your app a little promotional boost.

4 How to approach app review sites: Top tips

Press release, or not?

When contacting review sites you don't necessarily need a press release. A personal email or message can often be more effective than a professional PR-written piece. App reviewers get a lot of press releases delivered to their inboxes, and as any journalists will tell you, press release tend to blend together after a while. A regular personalised email can stand out better. However, the majority of review sites provide app submission forms, so you won't need to worry too much about this.

Be informative, be concise

When sending out an email or filling out a submission form, make sure you get the basic information about you and your app across. Journalists have a lot of apps to review. So make their job as easy as possible and they'll be more inclined to cover your app. Include exactly what the app does, who it's aimed at, pricing information, release date, who you are and what other apps you've developed. Provide the key information bullet-pointed at the top of your message. Then toward the bottom you can flesh out any details, going further into your app's features and perhaps background on why you developed it. Also include app screenshots, or links to app screenshots, and an image of your icon.

Promo codes

Journalists won't pay to download your app. So you'll need promo code or other ways of sending it to them free of cost. Most app review sites that have submission forms only permit promo code submissions.

Follow guidelines

Check the site your submitting your app to for any recommended guidelines. Not all sites have guidelines, but some do and especially the bigger ones. Make sure you adhere to these guidelines or you'll just irritate the journalists. Also make sure you understand the type of site you're contacting. No point sending your camera app to a site that only reviews games.

Video

If you can make a video of your app, then all the better. This will give reviewers an instant understanding of what your app does and makes you look more serious and professional. Video demos are especially useful for videogames.

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