



6 Mobile Product Management Myths Demystified



Mobile product management requires world class multitasking. A great product manager is not only accountable for aligning engineering with business objectives, but also for staying attuned to the ever-changing mobile landscape. They have to keep abreast of all of the challenges facing the development, marketing, sales, and customer success teams, and make sure all departments are interacting seamlessly.



Working at the intersection of these units means that the product manager is the glue that keeps everything together. For the product to be successful, they have to know four different sectors inside out, each of which changes day-to-day.

As a result, product managers have to spend a lot of their time knee-deep in research, and while the web is teeming with advice—some of it is skewed with inaccuracies and exaggerations.

In this white paper, we will lay to rest some of those myths, once and for all.

Customer Success: Understanding the User

Over [1,000 apps are added](#) to just the iOS app store every single day, which means it's sink or swim out there.

Users today have high expectations for native mobile apps. They want more than apps that just work. They want apps that are fast, responsive, and bug-free. To deliver on user experience, product managers must look past standard best practices for development. They have to keep the customer front-and-center to what they build, and help users achieve success in *their* app.

MYTH #1

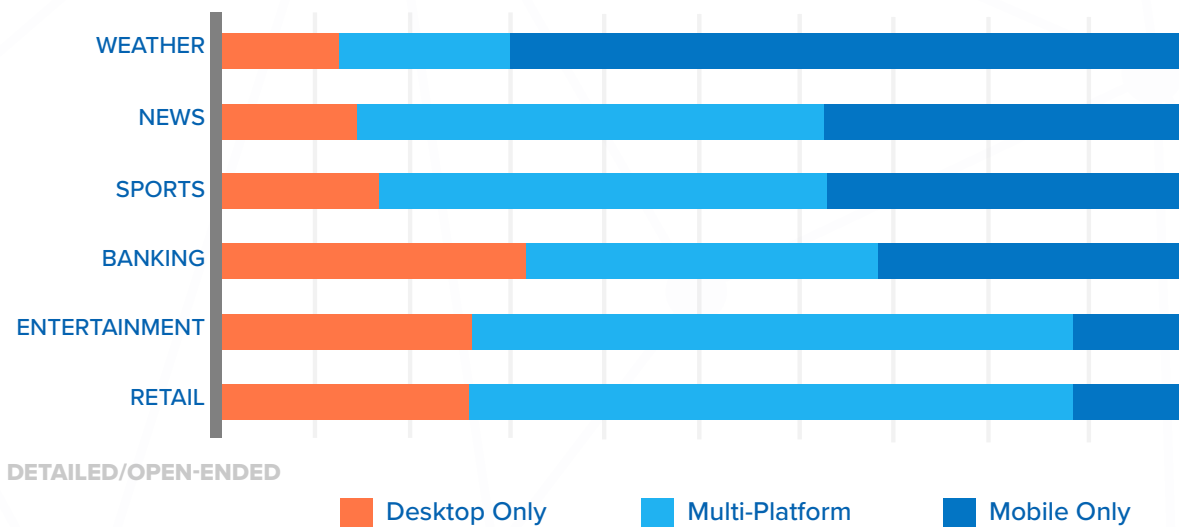
THERE IS NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE WEB USER AND THE MOBILE USER

We know that the same people who use web products use mobile apps, so we should not think of mobile users as a distinct user base.

Assuming every person employs different devices for the same use case is a fallacy. In fact, users expect different devices to have distinct functionalities. For instance, users spend [over 90% of their time](#) in maps, photos, and social networks on mobile. Users prefer mobile for immediate and functional tasks—and desktop, or a combination, for more detailed and open-ended work.

Device Choice as Influenced by Content

INSTANT/FUNCTIONAL



DETAILED/OPEN-ENDED

Desktop Only Multi-Platform Mobile Only

Data Source: [ComScore](#)

This phenomenon can be explained by the popular Jobs-To-Be-Done (JTBD) framework. Users often employ their mobile devices for “quick” tasks, such as sending an email or checking their Facebook feed. If it takes them too long, or too many clicks, to get a task done, they will save it for their desktop.

[Mobile users are unique](#) in that they are:

- highly task-oriented
- easily disengaged

This means that the steps needed to perform any given function in your app have to be minimum. The general rule of UI is that it should take no more than three clicks to get to any particular screen. On top of that, Steve Krug suggests that it’s even more important for [each click to be mindless](#) to keep users engaged and make the experience as frictionless as possible.

MYTH #2

HYBRID APPS ARE A GOOD SUBSTITUTE FOR NATIVE APPS

If you are strapped for resources, a hybrid app can be just as good as a native app.

Native apps and hybrid apps can be made to *look* the same, but the user expects much more than that. As soon as the scroll is delayed or the app loses connection—something much more commonplace with HTML5—the user experience goes downhill.

Facebook ditched the “m.facebook.com” layout in a mobile app wrapper back in 2012. Mark Zuckerberg says it should have happened sooner, and he [regrets relying so heavily](#) on the HTML5 for the original Facebook app.

Once Facebook decided to build the native app, users consumed twice as much content in their newsfeed. Native apps are faster, crash less often, and provide a more seamless experience. [According to Mozilla developer James Longster](#), that is not changing anytime soon:

“There’s no indication the DOM [document object model, the API used to pass information to the mobile interface and server] will ever be fast enough, and if it does happen it’s light years away on mobile. I’ve seen no technical description of a truly plausible way to make it significantly faster.”

Marketing: Applying Data To Product

The next step is honing in on your *specific* user base. Like your sales team, you have to know the unique value your app presents for your customers, and not in a general sense. You need in-depth knowledge of your buyer personas and all their in-app behaviors.

Gathering information about your users, however, is the easy part. It is how you apply it to your product that proves tricky. When confronted with dozens of metrics it's easy to be misguided.

MYTH #3

ALL DECISIONS SHOULD BE METRICS-DRIVEN

You should use metrics like daily active users (DAU) or time-on-page to dictate product decisions.

The issue with numbers is that they do not always mean something (*correlation ≠ causation*). Andrew Chen, part of the Growth team at Uber, says that “*being [data-informed](#) means that you acknowledge the fact that you only have a small subset of the information that you need to build a successful product.*”

When evaluating the value of a particular metric, here are the things you should consider:

- **Is the metric contextual?** This separates vanity metrics from actionable metrics. If you are looking at a high engagement metric but it's been steadily dropping the past few months, you have cause for alarm. If adoption rate is low, but retention rate is high, you might be in the clear.
- **Are the factors that influence the metric evident?** It's important to consider whether the metric is an indicator or a side-effect. Are users not accessing a certain feature because it is hidden, or because it is only applicable for a subset of users?

While data is imperative, it's difficult to make decisions on numbers alone. Gather qualitative data from customers to learn the *why* behind the numbers.

MYTH #4

BUILD EXACTLY WHAT YOUR USERS ASK FOR

The key to happy users is to build exactly what they request.

Too many product managers take feature requests not just seriously, but literally. Many of them learn the hard way that users do not always know what they want.

Next Web co-founder Boris Veldhuijzen van Zanten [told the Apptimize team](#) about how they made this exact mistake:

“We had gotten enough requests for it and had gotten the impression there were thousands of anxious Android tablets owners holding their breath for an Android version of our magazine. Unfortunately, we’ve found out that although Android users are very vocal, they aren’t very active when it comes to downloading and reading magazines.”

The users who are the most vocal are not necessarily your baseline user. Before making decisions based on a handful of requests, make sure that they are representative of your core user base. You can solicit feedback through:

- **Email surveys.** This is the least intrusive way to reach out to your users and see if they would be interested in the new feature. You can even offer a small reward as an extra incentive.
- **Social Media.** Social platforms are where your users are spending the most time, so it’s the best way to reach them. It provides an opportunity for instant open-ended feedback and makes users feel heard. At the close of 2016, [Airbnb founder Brian Chesky took to Twitter](#), asking “*If @Airbnb could launch anything in 2017, what would it be?*” He received 2,000 submissions within five days.



- **In-app.** Asking users for feedback, while they are using your app, will get you the most detailed feedback, but it comes at a cost. Be careful not to create friction when interrupting users during their app experience.

Development: Optimizing The Production Cycle

In the mobile world, your product is only as good as your process. Kevin Stewart, Reddit's VP of product, said that the team was able to scale, only due to their establishment of a [modular product and engineering team](#). The ability to delegate problems without disturbing the team is what kept the production process running smoothly.

It all comes down to nailing a repeatable, scalable process that your dev team can rally behind. But when your dev team is balancing bug-fixes, feature updates, and building new products, it becomes difficult to prioritize and get the whole team on the same page. Especially since projects vary in scope and difficulty.

MYTH #5

YOU SHOULD QA ENDLESSLY

You need a lengthy QA process to make sure that your app doesn't break and get rejected by the app store.

An excellent way to get validation early without doing a full roll out is to use feature flags. They enable you to do staged roll-outs, first to a small portion of your users, then to a larger portion, and finally to your entire user base—all without having to redeploy.

Dropbox's Waseem Daher often highlights the [importance of continuous iteration over perfection](#). He says, "If you take a look at the version history of most apps today, you'll notice that updates come in slow, lethargic releases every few months. Contrast that to the top apps in every vertical, and you'll find that those top teams are instead releasing every 1-2 weeks."

Here is version history of Uber's APK as an example:

1. [Uber 3.129.8 APK](#) (11/28/16)
2. [Uber 3.129.7 APK](#) (11/26/16)
3. [Uber 3.127.3 APK](#) (11/11/16)
4. [Uber 3.127.1 APK](#) (11/3/16)
5. [Uber 3.126.0 APK](#) (10/26/16)
6. [Uber 3.125.1 APK](#) (10/20/16)
7. [Uber 3.124.2 APK](#) (10/17/16)
8. [Uber 3.123.2 APK](#) (10/11/16)
9. [Uber 3.122.3 APK](#) (10/5/16)
10. [Uber 3.121.0 APK](#) (9/27/16)

The problem is that it is scary building a product and letting it out into the wild quickly. Many product managers have the tendency to try and perfect every feature or update before letting users get involved. Feature flags, however, help shorten your production cycle, without running the big risks -as you would with- of a full feature roll out.

MYTH #6

DEVELOPERS DO NOT NEED TO WORRY ABOUT CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Developers do the heavy-lifting. Talking to users and applying their feedback is only for the PM or Customer Success team.

Kenneth Berger debunked this myth when he joined Slack as the product manager. His philosophy was that “[*Metrics become powerful*](#)— *when the people closest to the work define them for themselves.*”

For the Slack team, that meant getting the whole department to work towards one north-star principle: getting each team of users to hit 2,000 messages. [In an interview](#), Slack CEO Steward Butterfield points out that “*regardless of any other factor, after 2,000 messages, 93% of those customers are still using Slack today.*” With the whole dev team hooked on this principal, Berger oversaw Slack’s record-breaking growth from 100,000 DAU to over one million.

Too many development teams are deadline and number-oriented. They know their target numbers, but they do not know why they’re building the product. To bring them in the loop, try:

- **Documenting and distributing project goals.** Bring this to each team meeting and make sure that every adjustment to the project is in tune with this goal.
- **Tying metrics to goals.** Every KPI that you want your team to meet should be paired with an explanation that ties in with a higher-level objective that the whole team can get behind.

A Great Product Manager is CEO of Product

As a mobile product manager, you are responsible for aligning your company's business objectives into a unified vision for the product. That is why you have to look beyond best practices for product management. Fortunately, you don't have to start from scratch.



Good product managers know the market, the product, the product line and the competition extremely well and operate from a strong basis of knowledge and confidence. A good product manager is the CEO of the product.

Ben Horowitz

Co-founder & General Partner, Andreessen Horowitz



The best PMs leverage the resources that they have. They act as a bridge across development, marketing, and customer success to build products people want.

About Us

Apptimize is the best-in-class mobile growth platform for enterprise and SMBs. Our platform has powered 1.2 Billion App downloads, across 75 countries.

Key Features



Native A/B Tests

Run experiments within minutes using our drag and drop Visual Editor and programmatic testing.



Feature Flags

Exercise complete control and manage risks at every stage of new feature rollouts.



Instant Updates

Launch changes and promotions directly to your app without using any code.

Some Apps That Use Apptimize





APPTIMIZE

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