App Store SEO: How to Diagnose a Drop in Traffic & Win It Back

For some organizations, mobile apps can be an important means to capturing new leads and customers, so it can be alarming when you notice your app visits are declining.

However, while there is content on how to optimize your app, otherwise known as ASO (App Store Optimization), there is little information out there on the steps required to diagnose a drop in app visits.

Although there are overlaps with traditional search, there are unique factors that play a role in app store visibility.

The aim of this blog is to give you a solid foundation when trying to investigate a drop in app store visits and then we'll go through some quick fire opportunities to win that traffic back.

We'll go through the process of investigating why your app traffic declined, including:

1. Identifying potential external factors
2. Identifying the type of keywords that dropped in visits
3. Analyzing app user engagement metrics

And we'll go through some ways to help you win traffic back including:

1. Spying on your competitors
2. Optimizing your store listing
3. Investing in localisation

Investigating why your app traffic declined

Step 1. Identify potential external factors

Some industries/businesses will have certain periods of the year where traffic may drop due to external factors, such as seasonality.

Before you begin investigating a traffic drop further:

- Talk to your point of contact and ask whether seasonality impacts their business, or whether there are general industry trends at play. For example, aggregator sites like SkyScanner may see a drop in app visits after the busy period at the start of the year.
- Identify whether app installs actually dropped. If they didn’t, then you probably don’t need to worry about a drop in traffic too much and it could be Google’s and Apple’s algorithms better aligning the intent of search terms.

Step 2. Identify the type of keywords that dropped in visits

Like traditional search, identifying the type of keywords (branded and non-branded), as well as the individual keywords that saw the biggest drop in app store visits, will provide much needed context and help shape the direction of your investigation. For instance:

If **branded terms** saw the biggest drop-off in visits this could suggest:

1. There has been a decrease in the amount of advertising spend that builds brand/product awareness

2. Competitors are bidding on your branded terms
3. The app name/brand has changed and hasn’t been able to mop up all previous branded traffic

If **non-branded terms** saw the biggest drop off in visits this could suggest:

1. You’ve made recent optimisation changes that have had a negative impact
2. User engagement signals, such as app crashes, or app reviews have changed for the worse
3. Your competition have better optimised their app and/or provide a better user experience (particularly relevant if an app receives a majority of its traffic from a small set of keywords)
4. Your app has been hit by an algorithm update

If **both branded and non-branded terms** saw the biggest drop off in visits this could suggest:

1. You’ve violated Google’s policies on promoting your app.
2. There are external factors at play

To get data for your Android app

To get data for your Android app, sign into your Google Play Console account.

Google Play Console provides a wealth of data on the performance of your android app, with particularly useful insights on user engagement metrics that influence app store ranking (more on these later).

However, keyword specific data will be limited. Google Play Console will show you the individual keywords that delivered the most downloads for your app, but the majority of keyword visits will likely be unclassified: mid to long-tail keywords that generate downloads, but don’t generate enough downloads to appear as isolated keywords. These keywords will be classified as “other”.

Your chart might look like the below. Repeat the same process for branded terms.

Above: Graph of a client’s non-branded Google Play Store app visits. The number of visits are factual, but the keywords driving visits have been changed to keep anonymity.

To get data for your IOS app

To get data on the performance of your IOS app, Apple have App Store Connect. Like Google Play Console, you’ll be able to get your hands on user engagement metrics that can influence the ranking of your app.

However, keyword data is even scarcer than Google Play Console. You’ll only be able to see the total number of impressions your app’s icon has received on the App Store. If you’ve seen a drop in visits for both your Android and IOS app, then you could use Google Play Console data as a proxy for keyword performance.

If you use an app rank tracking tool, such as TheTool, you can somewhat plug gaps in knowledge for the keywords that are potentially driving visits to your app.

Step 3. Analyze app user engagement

metrics

User engagement metrics that underpin a good user experience have a strong influence on how your app ranks and both Apple and Google are open about this.

Google states that user engagement metrics like app crashes, ANR rates (application not responding) and poor reviews can limit exposure opportunities on Google Play.

While Apple isn’t quite as forthcoming as Google when it comes to providing information on engagement metrics, they do state that app ratings and reviews can influence app store visibility.

Ultimately, Apple wants to ensure IOS apps provide a good user experience, so it’s likely they use a range of additional user engagement metrics to rank an app in the App Store.

As part of your investigation, you should look into how the below user engagement metrics may have changed around the time period you saw a drop in visits to your app.

- App rating
- Number of ratings (newer/fresh ratings will be weighted more for Google)
- Number of downloads
- Installs vs uninstalls
- App crashes and application not responding

You’ll be able to get data for the above metrics in Google Play Console and App Store Connect, or you may have access to this data internally.

Even if your analysis doesn’t reveal insights, metrics like app rating influences conversion and where your app ranks in the app pack SERP feature, so it’s well worth investing time in developing a strategy to improve these metrics.

One simple tactic could be to ensure you respond to negative

reviews and reviews with questions. In fact, users increase their rating by +0.7 stars on average after receiving a reply.

Apple offers a few tips on asking for ratings and reviews for IOS app.

Help win your app traffic back

Step 1. Spy on your competitors

Find out who's ranking

When trying to identify opportunities to improve app store visibility, I always like to compare the top 5 ranking competitor apps for some priority non-branded keywords.

All you need to do is search for these keywords in Google Play and the App Store and grab the publicly available ranking factors from each app listing. You should have something like the below.

Brand	Title	Title Character length	Rating	Number of reviews	Number of installs	Description character length
COMPETITOR 1	[Competitor title]	50	4.8	2,848	50,000+	3,953
COMPETITOR 2	[Competitor title]	28	4.0	3,080	500,000+	2,441
COMPETITOR 3	[Competitor title]	16	4.0	2566	100,000+	2,059
YOUR BRAND	[Your brands title]	37	4.3	2,367	100,000+	3,951
COMPETITOR 4	[Competitor title]	7	4.1	1,140	100,000+	1,142
COMPETITOR 5	[Competitor title]	24	4.5	567	50,000+	2,647

Above: anonymized table of a client's Google Play

competitors

From this, you may get some indications as to why an app ranks above you. For instance, we see “Competitor 1” not only has the best app rating, but has the longest title and description. Perhaps they better optimized their title and description?

We can also see that competitors that rank above us generally have a larger number of total reviews and installs, which aligns with both Google’s and Apple’s statements about the importance of user engagement metrics.

With the above comparison information, you can dig a little deeper, which leads us on nicely to the next section.

Optimize your app text fields

Keywords you add to text fields can have a significant impact on app store discoverability.

As part of your analysis, you should look into how your keyword optimization differs from competitors and identify any opportunities.

For Google Play, adding keywords to the below text fields can influence rankings:

- Keywords in the app title (50 characters)
- Keywords in the app description (4,000 characters)
- Keywords in short description (80 characters)
- Keywords in URL
- Keywords in your app name

When it comes to the App Store, adding keywords to the below text fields can influence rankings:

- Keywords in the app title (30 characters)
- Using the 100 character keywords field (a dedicated 100-character field to place keywords you want to rank for)

- Keywords in your app name

To better understand how your optimisation tactics hold up, I recommended comparing your app text fields to competitors.

For example, if I want to know the frequency of mentioned keywords in their app descriptions on Google Play (keywords in the description field are a ranking factor) than I'd create a table like the one below.

Keyword	COMPETITOR 1	**COMPETITOR 2**	**COMPETITOR 3**	**YOUR BRAND**	**COMPETITOR 4**	**COMPETITOR 5**
job	32	9	5	40	3	2
job search	12	4	10	9	10	8
employment	2	0	0	5	0	3
job tracking	2	0	0	4	0	0
employment app	7	2	0	4	2	1
employment search	4	1	1	5	0	0
job tracker	3	0	0	1	0	0
recruiter	2	0	0	1	0	0

Above: anonymized table of a client's Google Play competitors

From the above table, I can see that the number 1 ranking competitor (competitor 1) has more mentions of "job search" and "employment app" than I do.

Whilst there are many factors that decide the position at which an app ranks, I could deduce that I need to increase the frequency of said keywords in my Google Play app description to help improve ranking.

Be careful though: writing unnatural, keyword stuffed descriptions and titles will likely have an adverse effect.

Remember, as well as being optimized for machines, text fields like your app title and description are meant to be a compelling “advertisement” of your app for users..

I’d repeat this process for other text fields to uncover other keyword insights.

Step 2. Optimize your store listing

Your store listing in the home of your app on Google Play. It’s where users can learn about your app, read reviews and more. And surprisingly, not all apps take full advantage of developing an immersive store listing experience.

Whilst Google doesn’t seem to directly state that fully utilizing the majority of store listing features directly impacts your apps discoverability, it’s fair to speculate that there may be some ranking consideration behind this.

At the very least, investing in your store listing could improve conversion and you can even run A/B tests to measure the impact of your changes.

You can improve the overall user experience and content found in the store listing by adding video trailers of your app, quality creative assets, your apps icon (you’ll want to make your icon stand out amongst a sea of other app icons) and more.

You can read Google’s best practice guide on creating a compelling Google Play store listing to learn more.

Step 3. Invest in localization

The saying goes “think global, act local” and this is certainly true of apps.

Previous studies have revealed that 72.4% of global consumers preferred to use their native language when shopping online

and that 56.2% of consumers said that the ability to obtain information in their own language is more important than price.

It makes logical sense. The better you can personalize your product for your audience, the better your results will be, so go the extra mile and localize your Google Play and App Store listings.

Google has a handy checklist for localization on Google Play and Apple has a comprehensive resource on internationalizing your app on the App Store.

Wrap up

A drop in visits of any kind causes alarm and panic. Hopefully this blog gives you a good starting point if you ever need to investigate why an apps traffic has dropped as well as providing some quick fire opportunities to win it back.

If you're interested in further reading on ASO, I recommend reading App Radar's and TheTool's guides to ASO, as well as app search discoverability tips from Google and Apple themselves.

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