

CUSTOMLYTICS

eBooks

App Store Optimization

This information was written by the Customlytics team for inclusion in the Mobile Developer's Guide To The Galaxy.

For a full copy of the developer's guide, visit the [Customlytics website](#)

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1 Introduction

Once your app development is completed and you have created something incredible, it's time to present it to the public. After spending all this time developing your app, you want it to be found, recognized and used by as many people as possible. The performance of an app is often measured by the number of downloads or installs, which makes this KPI an important growth metric. According to [App Annie's Annual State of Mobile 2019 Report](#), approximately 194 billion apps were downloaded in 2018. To generate a significant number of downloads, your app needs to be visible to potential users.

But just publishing it to the app stores (mainly Google Play Store for Android apps and Apple App Store for iOS apps) will not do the trick here. The number of apps in the app stores is constantly and rapidly increasing, which means your app is competing with more and more apps to be found by potential users. According to [statista](#), Android users can choose between 2.1 million apps in the Google Play Store nowadays. iOS users have slightly fewer apps to pick from, but with 1.8 million, it is still an overwhelming number. Thus, mobile app marketers and developers need to make sure that their apps stand out from the crowd. This is where App Store Optimization (ASO) comes into play.

This chapter will answer the following questions for you:

- What is ASO?
- Why is ASO important?
- What are the differences between the Apple App and the Google Play Store?

While reading this chapter, you will find some tips and tricks on how to position your app in the best way possible, and therefore maximize organic growth.

2 ASO overview

2.1 What is ASO?

ASO which stands for App Store Optimization, is the process of maximizing organic app downloads or installs coming from high quality users, by increasing visibility and conversion rate in the app stores. Searching through the app stores is the most popular way for users to discover new apps. According to Apple, 65% of iOS apps are discovered directly through search on the Apple App Store. On the Google Play Store the share is almost as high with 53% of downloads, according to AppRadar. This underlines the importance of high visibility. To make it simple, ASO helps you to attract more users by increasing the visibility of your app in the app stores, and subsequently increasing the likelihood of converting users from seeing your app into downloading it. The key is to make your app as visible as possible to your potential users to generate downloads and ensure organic growth.

2.2 Why is ASO important?

Users visiting the app stores usually decide on an app very quickly. When entering either the Google Play or Apple App Store, users have the option to find an app by searching with specific keywords or search terms, or browsing through the feature cards, categories, and lists of recommended or similar apps. The apps on top of the search results page are the ones most likely to be downloaded. Great ASO strategies will help you secure such a position for your app, and therefore become more visible to a large amount of potential new users.

But there is more to ASO than increasing the visibility. Many users who find an app still don't download it. It could be because the app ranks for irrelevant keywords that do not match the users download intents. Or, it could be because the app's store listing of your app is not attractive or persuasive enough. This leads to the second mission of ASO, conversion rate optimization.

2.3 Two main goals of ASO

- Improve the visibility of an app in the app stores
- Increase the conversion rate from app store page visit to download

ASO will improve the visibility of your app in the app stores and boost the conversion rate from point of contact to app install. This is especially important when investing in paid media activities to promote your app. Thus, every user who wants to use your app needs to download it from one of the app stores first, so they need to visit your app store page. To ensure a high conversion rate, your app store page should be visually pleasing as well as textually compelling and provide the user with relevant information about the values and features of your app.

3 Differences between the Google Play Store & Apple App Store

When talking about ASO, it is important to have an overview of the different elements which can be optimized, and understand the differences between the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store in which your apps are published.

3.1 Google Play Store

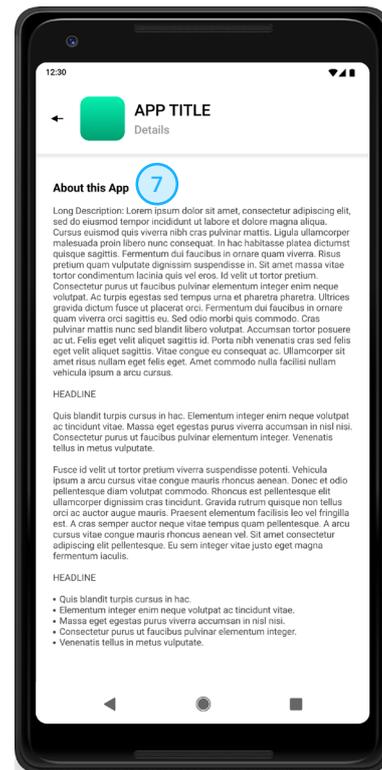
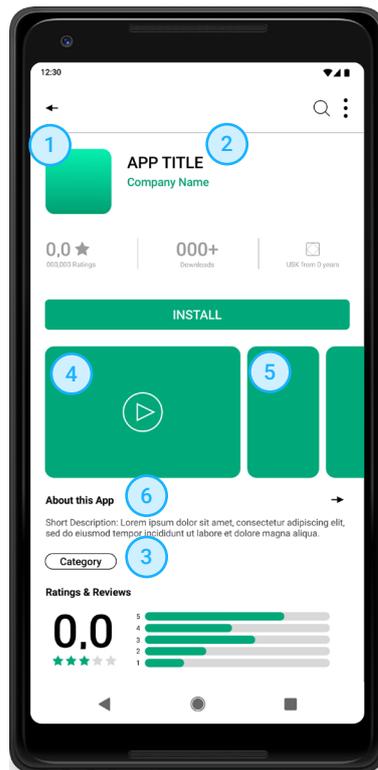
Let's start off with Android and the metadata presented in the Google Play Store. There are seven main on-page elements to consider when optimizing the appearance of your app in the Google Play Store, which are illustrated in the graphic below.

3.1 Google Play Store (continued)

ASO Essentials



- Icon (1)
- App Title (2)
- Category (3)
- Promo Video & Feature Graphic (4)
- Screenshots (5)
- Short Description (6)
- Long Description (7)



All of these elements except the promo video are mandatory and have to be provided when releasing your app to the Play Store via the Google Play Console. Unlike the App Store, you are free to change the metadata and visual assets whenever you desire without having to publish a new version of your app. Something else which is unique for the Google Play Store are the Store Listing Experiments. Those give you the option to A/B - test different variations of your app store page elements on the Google Play Store to identify the best performing combination based on downloads. When doing ASO for Android apps you should definitely take advantage of this testing possibility to analyse the impact of your changes.

3.2 Apple App Store

For iOS apps, the structure of the app store page is rather similar, with a few major differences to note. In the Apple App Store, you have eight elements to consider for your ASO activities. Two of these elements, namely the app preview video and the subtitle are optional, while the rest are mandatory.

3.2 Apple App Store (continued)

ASO Essentials



Icon (1)

App Title (2)

Subtitle (3)

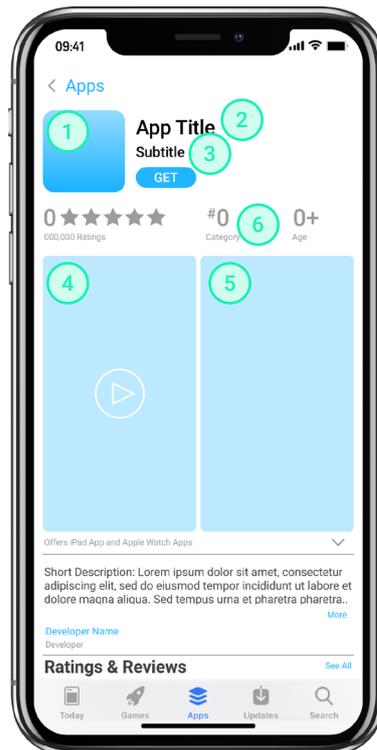
Preview Video (4)

Screenshots (5)

Category Ranking (6)

Long Description (7)

Off-page Key Word Field (8)



Another specialty in the Apple App Store is the keywords field, which is invisible for store visitors and competitors and can only be viewed and adjusted in the App Store Connect Console. Unlike the assets in the Google Play Store, changes in the Apple App Store can only be applied when releasing a new version of the app. Therefore, aligning your ASO activities with the development activities is crucial. The single elements and their impact on the visibility and conversion rate will be discussed in greater detail in the sections below.

4 Optimizing the textual elements

One important aspect of ASO involves optimizing the textual elements (app title, subtitle, short description, long description, keywords field) of your app store page in terms of keyword usage. Using the right keywords in the right positions will boost visibility by helping your app to appear on top of the search results page for all relevant search terms. In order to boost conversions and therefore downloads, it is important to review if the selected keywords drive the right people towards your app and make adjustments if needed.

4.1 Understanding the keyword ranking algorithm

Each of the app stores has its dedicated algorithm which is responsible for ranking an app for specific keywords. The ultimate goal of every search ranking algorithm is to help users find the best products & services for their needs. This is done by showing a sorted list of results that best match the used search terms. The goal of ASO is to trigger the algorithms to consider your app as relevant for specific search terms. The algorithm of the Google Play Store is indexing **every textual part** of an app store page. Therefore the app title, short description and the long description should be filled with relevant keywords. The algorithm of the Apple App Store is more selective and **only a few elements** such as app title, subtitle and the off-page keywords field are indexed. Therefore, it is especially important for the Apple App Store to position your keywords wisely by placing the most relevant once in the app title.

4.2 Keyword research & analysis

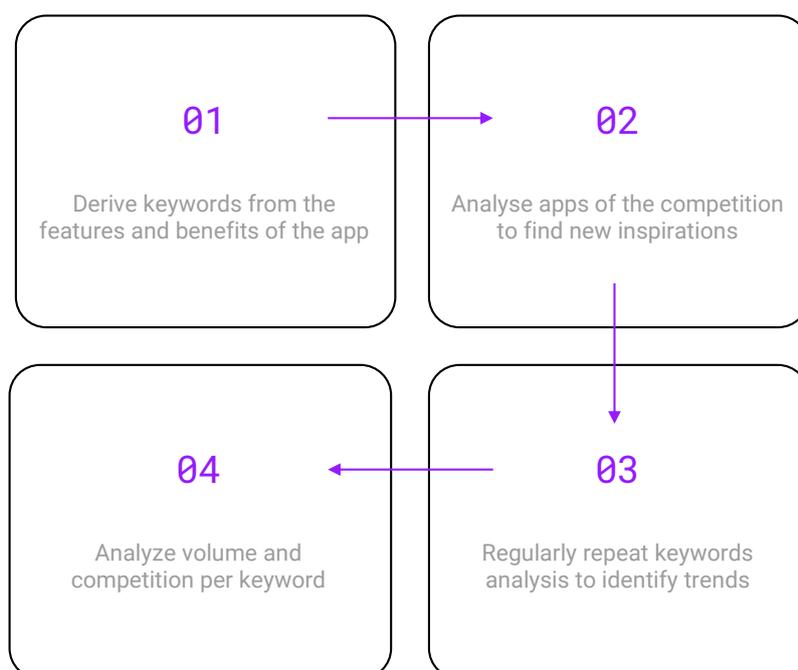
Keyword research is one of the most crucial ASO activities. Keywords are a decisive aspect for your app to be found on the Apple App Store and Google Play Store search results. One of the first steps in App Store Optimization is to perform a detailed keyword analysis. There are different tools enabling you to see which keywords are valuable and which should possibly be replaced.

Some tool options for keyword analysis:

- [Apptweak](#)
- [The Tool](#)
- [Mobile Action](#)
- [App Radar](#)
- [AppAnnie](#)
- [Sensor Tower](#)

4.2 Keyword research & analysis (continued)

Important metrics to focus on when analyzing your keywords are the search volume and the competition each keyword sees in the respective app stores. The goal is to identify keywords that will drive relevant traffic to your app store page and are not already under high competition. Keep in mind that a keyword analysis and ASO in general are typically things you should repeat every once in a while in order to react to changes either in the store algorithms or in your app. The keywords you are using in the metadata of your app store page should be monitored and iterated regularly to achieve the best results.



4.3 App title

Keywords in your app title have a lot of weight in the algorithm of both app stores. Therefore, try adding your most valuable and most relevant keywords in your app title to increase your app's discoverability. Choose an app title that contains relevant keywords, but still fits the purpose of your app and the guidelines of your brand. It should be a simple, memorable title that hints at what your app does. A best practice to add additional keywords to your app title is to put your app name first and then use a ":" or "-" to fill the remaining characters with relevant keywords.

4.3 App title (continued)

Don't change the app title too often, as it may have a negative impact on your ranking and confuse your users. Please note that the app title in the app store is independent from the name of your app on the home screen of a device once it is installed. This means adding additional keywords to your app title in the app store won't change the name of your app once it is installed on the device in any way.

Specifications for the app title:



Apple App Store

- Max. 30 characters



Google Play Store

- Max. 50 characters

4.4 App subtitle (Apple App Store only)

The subtitle appears under the app title in the Apple App Store and allows you to explain the value of your app in greater detail. A subtitle does not exist in the Google Play Store. Keywords from the subtitle are indexed by the algorithm of the Apple App Store and are therefore an important ranking factor. Avoid generic descriptions such as „World's Best App.“ Instead, highlight the unique value propositions of your app. As mentioned above, the subtitle is one of the few elements in the metadata of your app store page which are not mandatory. If you do not choose a dedicated subtitle, the publisher's name will be shown underneath the app title. This is not recommended since it does not let you make use of the allowed 30 characters that could be a substantial resource for visibility improvement.

Specifications for the app subtitle:

- Max. 30 characters

4.5 Short description (Google Play Store only)

The short description is only available for your app store page in the Google Play Store, and appears underneath the screenshots and promo video. Within the short description, you can motivate the user to download your app by providing a short and eye-catching one-line description, which explains the best features and functions of your app.

Other approaches which could also be used for the short description are a call-to-action (CTA) (e.g. “Join the largest film-making community now!”), or a user-centric trigger (e.g. “Can you solve the mystery?”). Depending on your app, one approach may work better for your audience than the others. This is something you could test with the [Store Listing Experiments](#) which were mentioned above.

Specifications for the short description:

- Max. 80 characters
- The usage of emojis and rich text (html) is possible

4.6 Long description

Within the long description you can highlight features and functions of your app and guide the user on how to access the full potential of your app. Let potential users know what makes your app unique and why they will love it. The long description is only indexed by the algorithm of the Google Play Store, and not in the Apple App Store. When optimizing your long description for the Google Play Store, use your relevant keywords as often as possible while maintaining a meaningful and relevant content. For the long description, a good structure is vital. Subheadlines are a good way to enable interested users to quickly find relevant information. To keep it simple, you can reuse the content from your optimized long description from the Google Play Store for the Apple App Store. Keep in mind that changes on the Apple App Store can only be applied when publishing a new version of your app, while changes on the Google Play Store are possible at any time.

4.6 Long description (continued)

Specifications for the long description:

Apple App Store

- Max. 4.000 characters

Google Play Store

- Max. 4.000 characters
- Formatting via HTML is possible
- Use of emojis is possible

4.7 Promotional text (Apple App Store only)

The promotional text is an optional element on your app store page in the Apple App Store. Within the 170 allowed characters you can promote limited-time sales or inform users about new upcoming features of your app. If used, the promotional text will be shown on top of the long description. In contrast to the other elements on your Apple App Store page the promotional text can be updated at anytime without having to publish a new version of your app.

4.8 Keywords field (Apple App Store only)

The keywords field only exists in the Apple App Store, and is invisible to store visitors and competitors. The keywords field can contain up to 100 characters per localization which should be separated by a comma only. Using additional spaces is not necessary and will waste your character allowance. The keywords field should contain relevant keywords that are not part of your app title or subtitle.

4.9 Category

Choosing the right category for your app to be listed in is crucial. It will influence how users can discover your app while browsing through the app stores. The position of your app in the category ranking depends on the number of downloads and uninstalls, as well as your ratings. The higher the number of downloads and the better the star-ranking for your app, the higher you will be listed in the chosen category.

On the Apple App Store you can choose 2 categories, a primary and a secondary category. You will only be listed in your primary category. The secondary category only serves as a keyword, e.g. picking the *navigation* category for the secondary will improve your ranking for the keyword *navigation*. On the Google Play Store you can only pick one category. Keep an eye out for new categories, this does not happen frequently, but do not let it catch you by surprise! By being one of the first in a new category you can benefit from less competition. You can check all available categories for the [Google Play Store](#) and for the [Apple App Store](#).

5 Optimizing the visual elements

This includes improving your app's store presence in the app stores by making it visually appealing and textually compelling. Optimizing the visual elements such as app icon, preview video, and screenshots will draw the attention of potential users towards your app which will eventually have a positive influence on the conversion rate and therefore on the number of downloads. Furthermore, a clean design of your app store page will enhance the first impression a user gets of your app and set the tone for further interaction.

5.1 App Icon

The app icon is the very first visual element a user sees when finding your app in the app stores. Having a great icon does not necessarily guarantee tons of downloads, but it might help to get users to explore your app in more depth. A clean and eye-catching app store icon that is recognizable and understandable will make your app stand out from the crowd.

Specifications for the app icon:



Apple App Store

- 512px by 512px
- You can find some more information regarding the specification for the app icon under [App Store Connect Help](#)



Google Play Store

- 512px by 512px
- Additional information can be found on [Google's developer page](#)

5.2 Screenshots

Screenshots allow you to comprehensively and visually communicate the best features and the most outstanding value propositions of your app. The screenshots are one of the most valuable elements on your app store page. Since visual information can be processed quickly by the human brain, potential new users are able to gain lots of information about your app by quickly looking at the screenshots. Make sure to provide them with relevant information and an appealing design to optimize the conversion rate and increase the number of downloads.

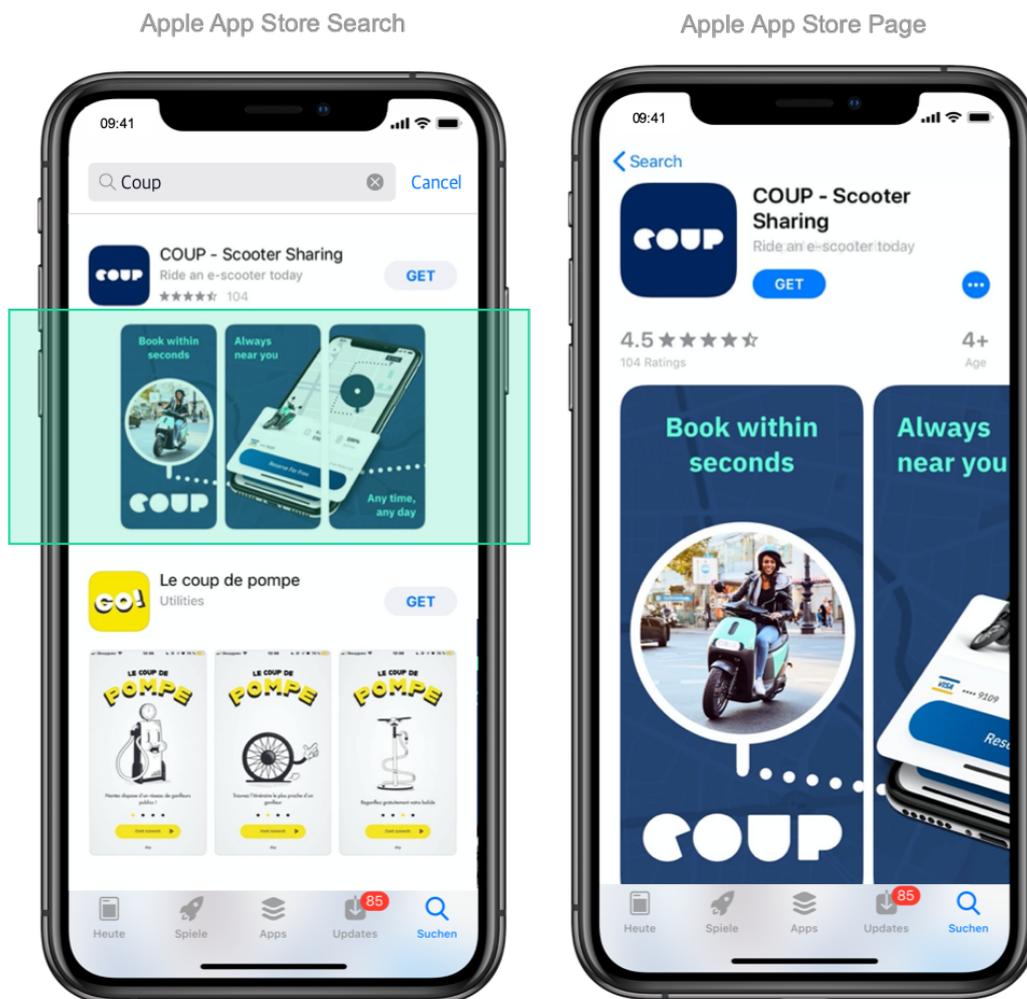
There are numerous ways to conceptualize and design your screenshots. Viable approaches can range from a strict value and feature show-off, to a more creative approach that emphasizes on emotions and artistic aspects.

5.2 Screenshots (continued)

The main point is, that potential new users should be attracted by your screenshots. The Screenshots will support potential users by deciding if your app fits their needs and give them a first feel for your app. Therefore, well-conceptualized and well-designed screenshots can have a positive impact on your conversion rate from app page views to downloads. Again there are some differences when it comes to the two app stores which should be considered.

Specifications for the Apple App Store:

On the Apple App Store, one screenshot per localization is required, but up to ten screenshots per device (iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch, tvOS) can be published. The first three screenshots will be displayed on the search results page and should therefore be highly informative and appealing.

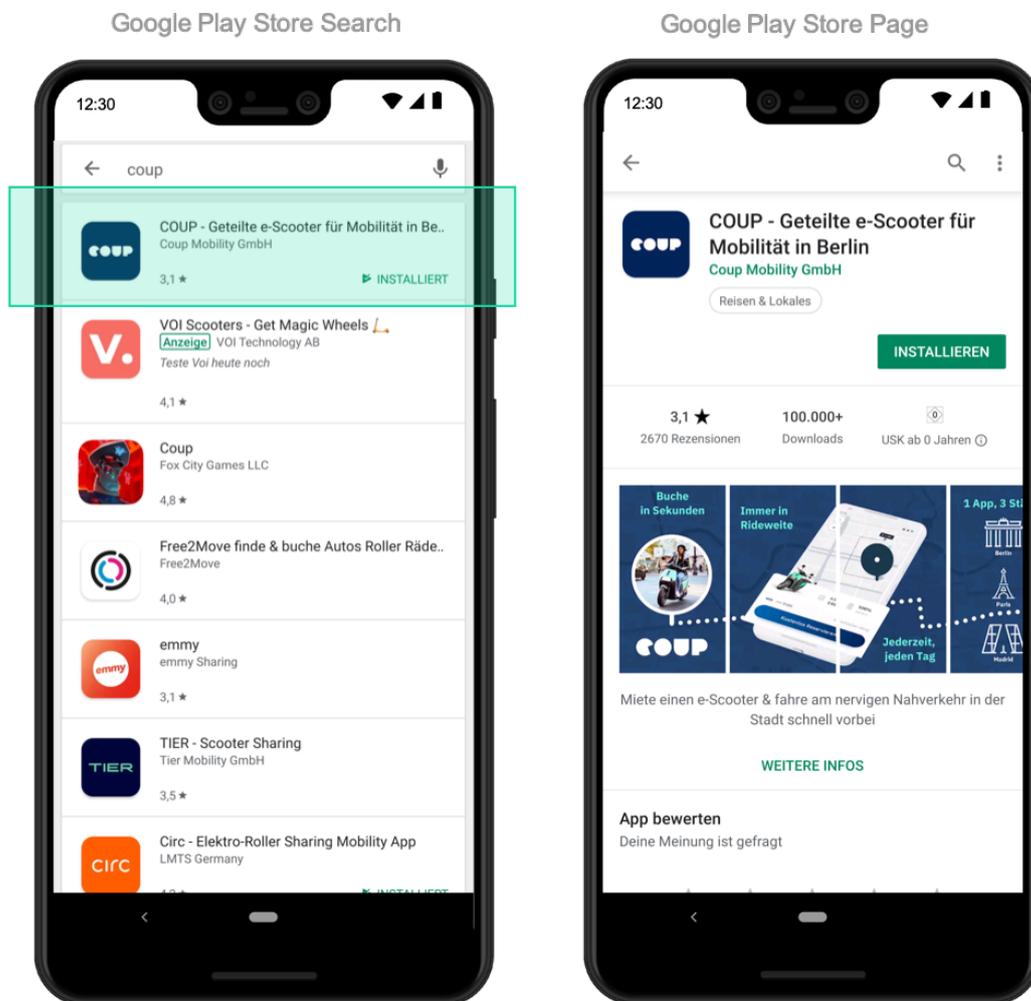


5.2 Screenshots (continued)

To publish your app to the Apple App Store screenshots for 6.5-inch iPhone Xs Max and 5.5-inch devices are required. These screenshots will scale down for smaller device sizes. Further information on the different specifications can be found at App Store Connect Help.

Specifications for the Google Play Store:

On the Google Play Store, up to eight screenshots per device (Smartphone and Tablet) can be uploaded. A minimum of two screenshots has to be provided in order to publish a store listing.



More in-depth information and specifications can be found in the [Play Console Help](#).

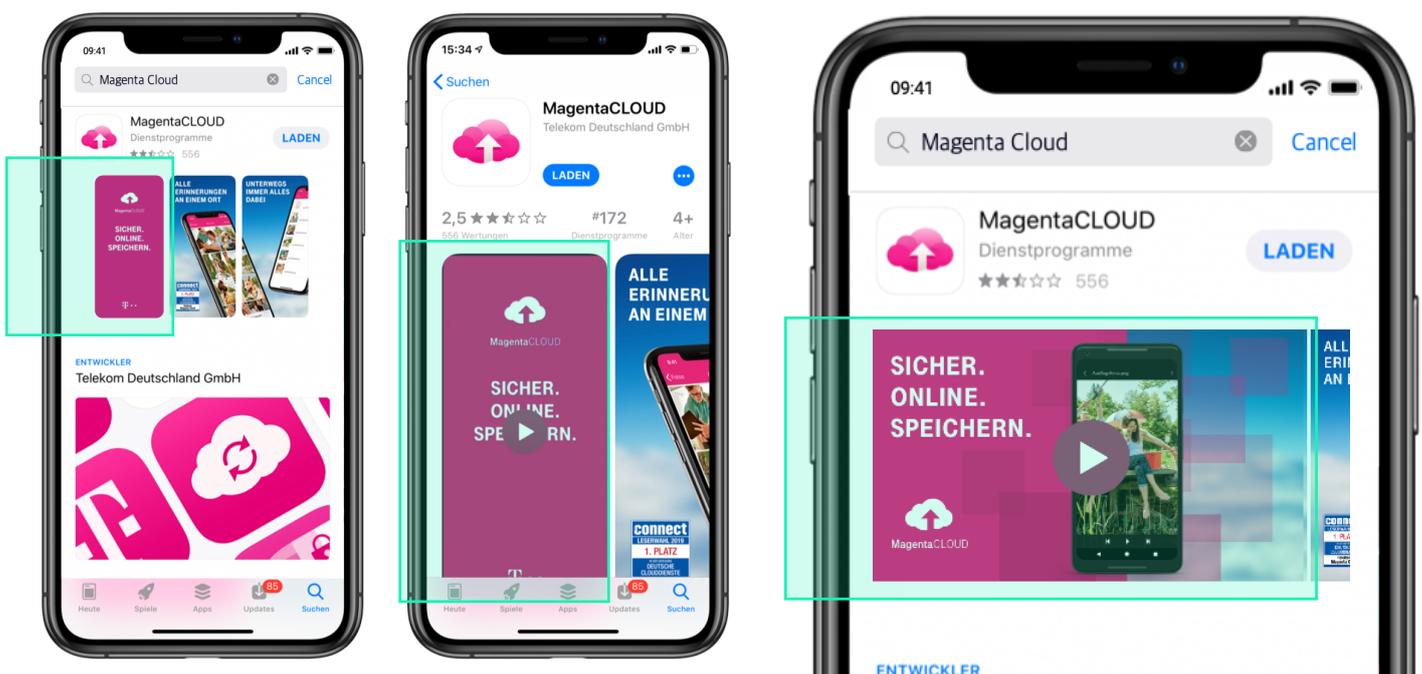
5.3 Video

The video gives users a much more dynamic view into your app, with the help of animations, sounds, music, and voice captions. A video is not required from the app stores but is recommended as a fun and engaging way to present your app to potential users. The video will be positioned in front of the screenshots and is therefore highly visible.

Specifications for the preview video:

Apple App Store

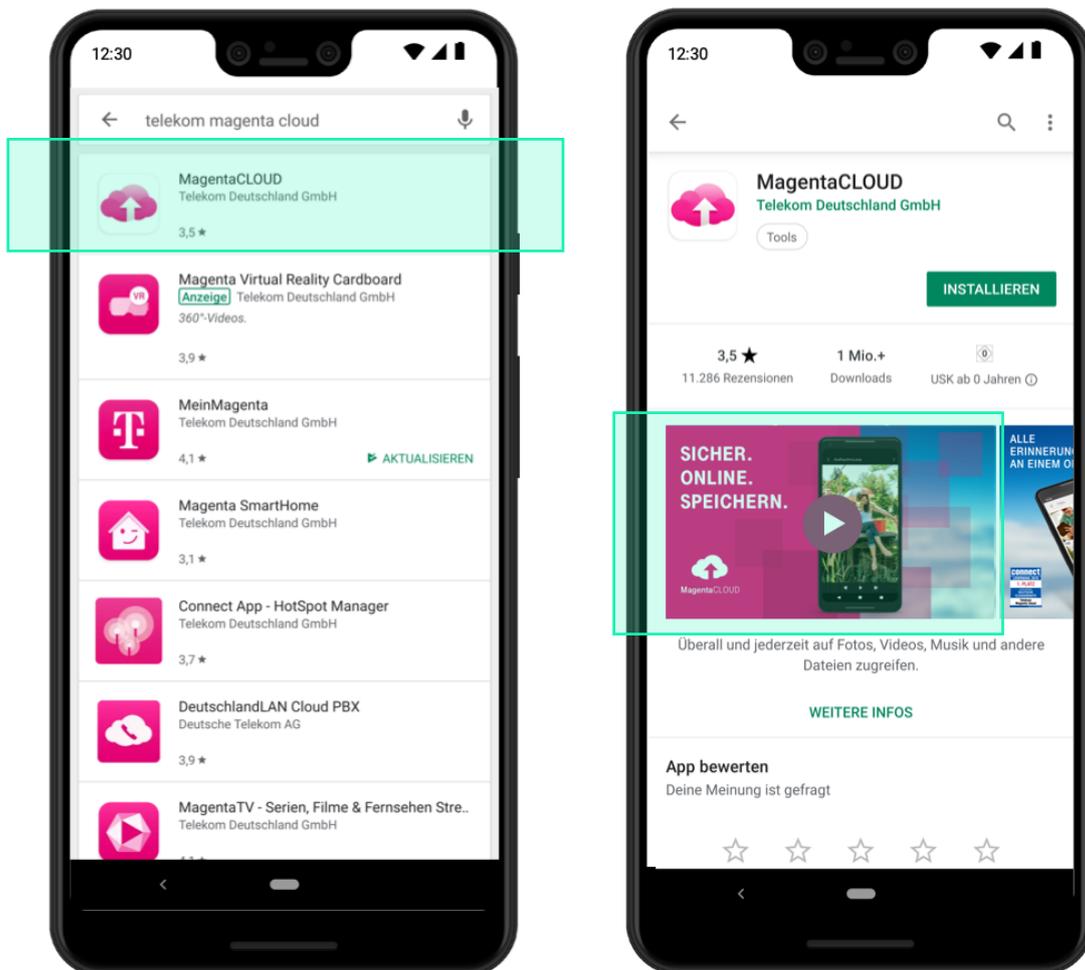
On the Apple App Store, up to three videos can be uploaded, but usually, one video should be sufficient. The video will be shown within the search results page and autoplay directly by default. Therefore having a video on the Apple App Store is crucial, since it will be a moving element in the search results page that will catch the attention of the user and increase the visibility of your app. The length of the video should be between 15-30 seconds and only in-app-footage is supposed to be shown. You are free to add music or a speaker to your video but keep in mind, that some users watch the video in silent mode, so make sure that they understand the benefits of your app without sound. In order to include a video, you will have to upload it to your App Store Connect Console. You can find some more information regarding the specification under App Store Connect Help.



5.3 Video (continued)

Google Play Store:

On the Google Play Store, only one video can be added to your store listing. In order to do so, your video has to be published to Youtube first. Once this is done you can upload it to the Google Play Store by inserting a YouTube URL in the „Promo video“ field in your Google Play Console. In comparison to the video in the Apple App Store, you are not limited to in-app-content when it comes to your video. You can reuse existing video material which explains the functions of your app, add an explanation text or even contextual scenes if needed. Try to stay within 30 seconds to keep the attention of the user. The video will be displayed on your app page before the screenshots. In order to watch the video users will have to click on the play button on top of the feature graphic and then they will be taken to YouTube to watch the video. Additional information for the specification of the video can be found on [Google's developer page.](#)



5.4 Feature graphic (Google Play Store only)

The feature graphic and the promo video are intertwined assets, in the sense that the feature graphic is required, but won't be shown on your app page without the video. When using a video in your app store listing in the Google Play Store the feature graphic is displayed before your screenshots. A Play button will be overlaid on the feature graphic, and users can watch the video by clicking on it. Consider the placement of the play button when designing your feature graphic and ensure a nice ensemble between the feature graphic and the following screenshots. Furthermore, animate the video so that the transition from the „thumbnail“ that is the feature graphic to the first few seconds of the video is smooth so you don't irritate the viewers.

Specifications for the feature graphic:

- 1024px by 500px
- JPEG or 24-bit PNG (no alpha)
- Use large font sizes when adding text

6 Learn more

This chapter covered the basics of ASO which is a field that is ever evolving. It is a complex topic and it is impossible to cover everything within one chapter. Apple and Google are regularly performing changes on their respective app stores which can influence the requirements. Therefore, it is important to frequently review the app store presence of your app and keep an eye out for changes. We hope this chapter has whetted your appetite to learn more about ASO. Here is a list of some elements which were not touched in this chapter but are still relevant for ASO:

- Release Notes/What's New
- Optimizing ratings and reviews
- App Store Features
- ASO Analytics