What to Know Before You Download That App

The Apple App Store launched in 2008 with 500 apps. Since then, app stores have seen significant growth. Today, there are over four million apps available for Apple and Android devices, catering to a wide range of interests and needs.

****App**** (short for “application”) is a program you install or open on a phone, tablet, or computer that helps you do a specific thing.

****Apple devices**** are products made by Apple, like iPhones (which are phones) and iPads (which are tablets). They use a system called iOS, which is easy to use and looks the same on all Apple devices.

****Android devices**** are made by various brands, including Samsung, Motorola, Google Pixel, and LG. They run on Google's Android operating system, which allows for a wide variety of features and customization options.

App Download Statistics:

With approximately six billion smartphone users and five billion online users worldwide, mobile apps are extremely popular.

- In 2024, the Google Play Store reached 102.4 billion downloads, while the iOS App Store had 35.4 billion downloads—a slight yet notable 1% decrease in total app downloads compared to 2023.

Many users are eager to try new apps, as shown by the high download figures. However, the drop in downloads from 2023 to 2024 indicates that people are becoming more cautious. To make safer choices, it helps to understand the difference between first-party apps and third-party apps. Knowing this can guide you in downloading apps securely, protecting your personal information, and safeguarding your devices from potential risks.

First-party apps are made by your device's manufacturer—like Safari on iOS, Google Chrome on Android, or Microsoft Edge on Windows.

****Safari, Google Chrome,** and **Microsoft Edge**** are all web browsers, which are programs that allow you to access and navigate the internet.

Although more reliable and trustworthy, first-party apps have some disadvantages:

- **When it comes to privacy and data collection,** they are usually better optimized and more secure than third-party apps. However, they can still gather data without you realizing it, especially if you're signed into an account like Microsoft or Google.
- **First-party apps are checked and managed by the platform itself.** These apps go through an approval process to meet security and quality standards. Additionally, the manufacturer is responsible for keeping these apps up-to-date and fixing any issues, which helps them operate smoothly and safely. Nevertheless, no app is entirely immune to security exploits.
- **Some first-party apps can launch automatically when you start your device or open other apps.** This means they keep running even if you're not actively using them. As a result, these apps use memory and processing power, which can slow down your device and make it feel less responsive or sluggish.
- **If you don't use certain first-party apps, they might just take up space,** but since they are tightly integrated with your device's operating system, removing them could cause issues.

Third-party apps, in contrast, are created by external developers, and their quality and security can vary. Examples include Facebook and Netflix. While they offer specific benefits, they can also pose security risks if not used carefully.

Before downloading a third-party app, check if your device already offers the feature you need or want. There may be built-in options or first-party apps that perform the same function, eliminating the need to download a new app. Therefore, if you decide to install a third-party app, consider the following:

- ★ Where are you downloading the app from?
- ★ Who is the app's developer?
- ★ What permissions does the app require?

Where Are You Downloading The App From?

App stores offer quick access to a wide variety of apps, whether for managing medications, budgets, or just for entertainment. You can find what you need on a single platform, the **"App Store"**

Do All Devices Have an App Store?

No – only gadgets with operating systems designed to install extra software include an app store. So, you'll find one on smartphones (iPhones, Android phones), tablets (iPads, Android tablets), computers (Windows Store, Mac App Store), smart TVs, and game consoles. Basic feature phones, e-readers, digital cameras, or appliances don't support app additions, so they won't have a store.

****Gadget**** is a small tool or device designed for a single main purpose—something that makes a task easier or more enjoyable.

****e-reader**** is a small, handheld electronic device made just for reading digital books, magazines, and newspapers.

Default App Stores

These are the ones that come with the operating system and are the official way the system expects you to get apps. Since they're built into your device's operating system, the store is automatically available, receives updates from the system, and its apps are tested to work smoothly with that platform.

Apple App Store

For those with a MacBook or any device running macOS or iOS, you can use the Apple App Store. This store stands out for its user-friendly design and high-quality apps.

Google Play Store

This is the app store for most Android devices. One benefit is its integration with Google services. If you use Gmail or have an Android phone or tablet, you can easily sync your apps across multiple devices.

Microsoft Store

On Windows devices, the Microsoft Store is the primary app store, offering a broad selection of apps, including traditional desktop programs and modern Universal Windows Platform (UWP) apps. One of its advantages is that it provides exclusive deals and discounts on popular apps.

****Universal Windows Platform (UWP) apps**** are special types of applications you can use on various Windows devices, such as your computer or tablet. Think of them as versatile apps that look and work similarly, regardless of which device you're using.

Brand-Specific App Stores

These stores are created by the device maker, carrier, or manufacturer to provide additional apps tailored to their hardware or services. They're accessible alongside the default app store and may feature exclusive apps, special promotions, or apps optimized for the brand's specific features. However, they're not required for the device to operate basic software. Some examples include:

Samsung Galaxy Store

This app store is available on Samsung devices, including smartphones and tablets. It offers apps, themes, and games optimized for Samsung devices.

LG Smart World

LG devices, particularly smart TVs and smartphones, have access to the LG Smart World app store, which includes apps and content designed for LG products.

Amazon Appstore

While not tied to a specific device brand, the Amazon Appstore is available on Amazon devices like the Fire tablet and Fire TV, offering apps and games optimized for those platforms.

Whether integrated into mobile or desktop devices (default app stores) or customized for a specific brand (brand-specific app stores), app stores share common features that enhance user experience and make it easier for users to find apps.

Let's explore some similarities among them.

App Store Features

- **Categories:** Apps are sorted into different groups, like Games, Productivity, and Health. This setup helps users easily browse and find apps that match their interests without having to search through everything.

- **Search functionality:** This helps users quickly find specific apps by typing keywords into a search bar. Many app stores also suggest options as you type and let you filter results by category, rating, or price. For the best results, make sure your spelling is correct and search using the app's full name, not an abbreviation.

- **User Accounts:** Many app stores encourage account creation, making it easier to buy apps, manage subscriptions, and access content across devices. For instance,

* **An Apple ID,** which is usually an email like "john.doe@icloud.com," allows you to access Apple services like the App Store, iCloud, and iMessage. It makes signing in and syncing your data across Apple devices easier.

* **A Google Account,** like "john.doe@gmail.com," gives you access to various Google services on Android devices, including the Google Play Store for downloading apps and Google Drive for storing files.

* **A Microsoft Account,** like "john.doe@outlook.com," lets you access the Microsoft Store on Windows devices, as well as services such as OneDrive for file storage.

- **Payment Options:** App stores provide a range of payment methods for buying apps and in-app items. While many apps are free to download, others require payment. This flexibility lets users choose what suits them best. *Below are some examples of different app types based on their pricing:*

***Freemium apps:** These apps are free to download but include in-app purchases for additional features. For example, **Candy Crush Saga** is a free puzzle game where you can buy extra lives or boosters.

***Paid Apps:** Some apps require a one-time upfront payment to download and use, giving users full access without additional charges. For example, **Procreate**, an iPad app for digital painting, offers a one-time purchase option that unlocks all its features.

***Subscription-Based Apps:** These apps require a recurring payment, either monthly or yearly, to access their features or content. For example, **Spotify** is a music streaming service that offers a free version with ads and a premium plan for ad-free listening and offline access.

- **Update Notifications:** App stores provide information about updates for installed apps, including new features and bug fixes. This helps users keep their apps current and functioning well.

- **Security Measures:** Both default and brand-specific app stores prioritize security by vetting apps before they are made available for download. This reduces the risk of malware and ensures a safer experience for users.

App Listing Page

Also called the product or detail page, it's where you find all the information about an app before downloading. The components you can find there are:

1. App Identity

App Name and Subtitle: The official title plus a short tagline that emphasizes its purpose (e.g., "PhotoMaster – Easy Filters & Collages").

2. Categorization & Popularity

Category and Chart Ranking: shows the app's genre (Games, Productivity, Health) and, if applicable, its position in the top charts.

Download Count or Install Range: displays overall popularity in millions, hundreds of thousands, or the current number of installs.

3. User Feedback

Star Ratings: An average score (out of five stars) based on all user ratings.

Written Reviews: Brief comments from users pointing out likes, dislikes, or common problems.

4. Developer & Support

- Lets you know who built the app.
- Provides a way to reach support, view a privacy policy, or explore other apps by the same creator.

5. Privacy & Permissions

- Outlines what data the app collects (location, contacts, usage data) and how it's used.
- List device features the app will access (camera, microphone, storage).

6. Features Overview

Full Description: A detailed rundown of what the app does, key selling points, and any special instructions.

"What's New" Notes: Lists recent improvements, bug fixes, or new features in the latest update.

In-App Purchases & Pricing: Shows optional extras you can buy inside the app—subscriptions, one-time unlocks, or consumable items.

7. Visual Previews

Screenshots: A set of images that display the main screens and steps you would use in the system, making it easier to understand how it functions.

Video Previews: Short videos lasting 15 to 30 seconds that help you see what the app can do in a quick and easy way.

8. Additional Technical Info

App Version and Last Update Date: Helps you know how actively the app is maintained.

File Size: Indicates how much storage space the download will use.

Compatibility & Languages: Which devices, operating system versions, and languages that the app supports.

Age Rating: The maturity level (e.g., "Everyone," "12+," "17+") to help guide family-friendly use.

Who Is The App's Developer?

The Developer Information, also known as **Developer, Seller,** or **Publisher,** is where you can find out who is behind the app and how to contact them. Elements you should pay attention to:

* **Name:** The person or organization responsible for creating and distributing the app.

* **Website Link:** A clickable URL that takes you to the developer's official homepage.

* **Email, Contact Info, or Support Form:** A way to ask questions, submit product inquiries, or report issues.

Using Developer Info to Judge Trustworthiness

- If you visit the developer site and encounter issues such as broken links or "under construction" signs, it indicates unprofessionalism and suggests they're no longer supporting their apps. Without a functioning site, help isn't available for issues, and updates or security fixes are uncertain.

- Check the app's website address (like www.myapp.com). Then, verify the support email address (e.g., support@myapp.com). If both end with "myapp.com," they match. This matters because emails ending in @gmail.com or @yahoo.com can be created by anyone, so they don't prove official site operation.

- Does the website's logo, colors, and style match what you saw in the app store listing? This is important because consistent branding—using the same logo and design—reassures you that it's the official developer.

The Privacy Policy

A privacy policy is a clear statement explaining how your personal information is used for the apps you're about to install. You can usually find it by clicking a link starting with https://, listed under **“Privacy Policy”** in the app’s details, or in the option **“Additional Information.”** This link will open the page where the policy is stored.

Here's what to look for and understand from the policy.

- ➔ Which types of data are collected (for example, name, email address, location).
- ➔ Why the data is collected (for instance, to improve features, send notifications, or show personalized ads).
- ➔ Who the data may be shared with (such as analytics providers or advertising partners).
- ➔ How the data is stored and protected (including details on encryption, servers, and retention periods).
- ➔ What control you have over your data (how you can view, correct, or delete your information).

Before downloading an app, take a moment to read the privacy policy. This helps you understand what you’re agreeing to and decide if you’re okay with sharing your information. If you see an error message like “404 Not Found” or if the connection isn't secure (you'll know if there's no "HTTPS"), it's a red flag. This could mean the policy is outdated or was published incorrectly, which means the information might not be reliable.

What Permissions Does The App Require?

Apps may ask for permissions to function properly, add features, or collect data. Some apps might request permissions they don't actually need. Here's what some of those permission requests mean:

- **Zoom** asks for permission to use your microphone and video so you can speak in a meeting or turn on your video for others to see.
- **Google Maps** asks for your location so it knows where you are and can guide you turn by turn to your destination.
- Texting apps like **iMessage** or **WhatsApp** request access to your contacts so they can display who's already in your address book.
- **Gallery or Photos** requests access to your storage so it can save new photos you take and let you choose existing ones to view or share.
- **Facebook Messenger** asks for notification permission so it can display an alert when someone sends you a message or calls you.
- Caller-ID apps like **Truecaller** or your phone's dialer request Phone & SMS access to show you who's calling, block spam numbers, and manage text messages if you use them.
- **Calendar** asks to view and add events so it can remind you of meetings, birthdays, and anything else you schedule.
- **Fitness apps** like Google Fit request sensor data—such as step count and heart rate—to track your activity and health.

Ultimately, you can choose whether to grant or deny an app permission. When an app asks for permission, you'll see options like:

* **Allow Once**: You're saying "yes" just this one time. The next time the app needs that access, it'll ask again.

* **Allow While Using the App**: You're saying "yes" whenever the app is open. You won't get asked again until you close it.

* **Don't Allow (Deny)**: You're saying "no" completely. Any feature that needs that access simply won't work.

When you tap **"Not Now,"** you're simply postponing the decision. The app won't access that feature today, and it won't mark your answer as a clear "no" either. Next time you try to use whatever needs that permission—like snapping a photo or checking your location—it will ask again. It's like telling the app, "Let me think about it," so you don't have to decide immediately.

Other permissions let you select between "none," "just a little," or "full" access. For instance,

- When an app asks to see your phone gallery:

* **None**: The app can't view or use any of your pictures. Features that require photos—like selecting an image to share—won't work.

* **Select Photos Only**: You select a few images or albums for the app to see. Everything else in your gallery remains private.

* **All Photos**: The app can browse, upload, or save any picture or video in your library. You get full convenience, but it has access to every photo.

- When an app asks to see your contacts:

* **Allow Selected Contacts:** you pick which people it can see.

* **Allow All Contacts:** full access to your address book.

- When an app asks to see your files:

* **Allow Selected Files:** you hand-pick specific docs or folders

* **Allow All Files:** it can browse, open, or save anything

Examples of situations where permission isn't related to the app's main function and is mainly used to gather extra data are:

- ➔ A simple flashlight app asks for access to your contacts. A flashlight only needs permission to use your camera flash, but some apps request access to your entire address book. That extra reach doesn't help turn on your light — it's just a way to collect phone numbers and names.
- ➔ A basic calculator app requesting your precise location. A calculator doesn't need to know where you are on the planet to perform calculations. If it asks for GPS data, it's solely collecting location information to build profiles or sell to advertisers.

Remember, you can always revisit your device's "Settings" under "Apps" → "Permissions" to adjust which permissions each app has, ensuring they only access what you're comfortable with.

DEFINITIONS

***Ad-free** means “not containing any advertising”. In everyday terms, using an ad-free app or service means you won’t see banner ads, pop-ups, or video commercials while you’re using it.

- **Banner ads** are graphic ads you see on websites or apps, usually in rectangular shapes at the top, bottom, or sides of a page. They act like digital billboards.
- **Pop-ups** are small windows or banners that suddenly appear on top of a website you’re viewing. They grab your attention by covering part of the page and often invite you to do something.

***Analytics providers** are outside services that apps and websites use to track and study how you interact with them—like which buttons you tap, how long you spend on a page, or what features you use most.

***App store listing** is the page you see in an app marketplace—like the Apple App Store or Google Play—where an app is showcased.

***Bugs** in technology are errors in software, causing unexpected behavior or malfunction. They can lead to crashes or non-functioning features. Developers fix these through updates to improve performance and user experience.

- **Developers** are people who create software and applications for computers and devices. They write the code that makes programs work, whether it's a mobile app, a website, or a video game.
    - **Software** is a collection of programs and instructions that tell a computer or device how to operate. It includes apps, games, and operating systems.

***Built-in** in technology means that certain features or tools are already included in your electronic device. You don’t have to add or install them separately; they are ready to use right away.

***Broken link** is simply a link you click that no longer goes anywhere—when you tap it, instead of opening the page you expect, you get an error message (often "404 Not Found") because the webpage, file, or resource has been moved or deleted.

***Clickable** is any text, button, or icon on your screen that you can tap or click to make something happen—just like pressing a doorbell or flipping a light switch. When you see a button or underlined text, that's your cue that touching it will open a new page, start an action, or reveal more information.

***Default** is the preset choice a device or program uses when you don't pick anything else. It's the standard setup you get straight out of the box, so you can start using your phone, computer, or app without configuring every detail yourself. For example, your web browser might open new pages in tabs by default.

***Encryption** is a way of scrambling your information—like messages, passwords, or photos—so only someone with the right key can read them. It's like putting your data in a coded envelope that appears as gibberish to anyone else.

***Google services** are free apps like Google Maps and Google Calendar that Google offers to help you with daily tasks on your phone or computer. Think of them as different sections in a single digital toolbox.

***GPS data** is the information your device collects to determine your exact location on Earth.

***Hardware** refers to the physical parts of a computer, phone, or tablet—everything you can touch. It's like the device's body, while the **software** you run (apps, programs) is the set of instructions that tells that body how to work.

***iOS** is the software that makes your iPhone (and, until recently, your iPad) come to life. Think of it as the "brain" and "control center" of your device.

***In-app purchases** are extra content, features, or subscriptions purchased within an app after downloading. They allow free trials and payment for items like new game levels, premium tools, or ad-free experience—all without leaving the app.

***Memory,** also referred to as RAM (Random Access Memory), is where your device temporarily stores information it needs to use right away.

***One-time unlock** is a feature or tool inside an app that you pay for just once, and then it's yours forever—no monthly fees or extra charges. Think of it like buying a paperback book: you pay the price up front, and you can read it anytime without needing to rent or subscribe.

***Operating System (OS)** is the main program on your phone or computer that makes everything work together—running apps, organizing files, and controlling the screen, keyboard, and other parts. You can think of it like a restaurant manager who takes orders from apps and tells the kitchen (the hardware) how to prepare and serve them.

***Outdated operating program (or operating system)** is simply an older version of the main software that runs your computer, phone, or tablet. It's considered "outdated" when the company that made it has stopped sending updates, so you no longer receive the latest features or security patches.

- **Security patch** is a small software update that fixes a hole or weakness hackers could use to sneak into your phone or computer. Think of it like sewing a tear in your coat: you cover the rip so nothing cold can get in.
    - **A hacker** is someone who breaks into computer systems or networks without permission by finding and exploiting security weaknesses.

***Personalized ads** are advertisements tailored just for you by looking at things like which websites you visit, what you search for, or items you buy, so you see offers that match your interests rather than random ads.

***Phone dialer** is the part of your device that allows you to make and manage calls. On a smartphone, it's the app you open—often represented by a green phone icon—to access a keypad, enter numbers or select contacts, and press "Call."

***Processing power** refers to the speed and capability of your device's processor (CPU) to handle tasks and calculations.

- **CPU,** or Central Processing Unit, is the "brain" of your device, responsible for executing instructions and calculations that enable your programs and apps to run.

***Retention times** are simply how long an app or service retains your data before automatically deleting or wiping it clean.

***SMS** stands for Short Message Service and is your phone's built-in texting feature. Most messages hold up to about 160 characters (around three short sentences).

***Storage space** is the space on your device for apps, photos, videos, music, and documents—like a digital closet. Larger space means more storage. When full, you can't add or install new files until you clear some.

***Streaming** is a method to watch videos or listen to music directly on the Internet without needing to download the entire file first.

***Sync,** short for "synchronization," means automatically keeping the same information—like contacts, photos, or emails—updated and matched across all your devices.

***URL,** Uniform Resource Locator, is the web address you type or click on to visit a specific page or file on the internet. It's a unique label that tells your browser exactly where to go, much like a street address directs a delivery driver to your home.

***Web browser** is a program on your phone or computer that turns web addresses into the content you see, like text, images, and videos. It's like a window to the Internet: you enter an address or search, and it loads the page.