Building Apps That Market Themselves

The Playbook behind 23M organic downloads

Bria Sullivan

RevenueCat App Growth Annual 2026

Poll

What stage is your app?

1. App is already launched and getting a lot of downloads
2. App is already launched, needs more downloads
3. App is not launched yet, being developed
4. App is not developed yet
5. I have apps at different stages

Apps that market themselves?

Marketing = ?

Marketing = Downloads

Apps that market themselves = No Work



Topics today

YES

- Building apps and features so good that they get people to talk about your app to other people

NO

- App Store Optimization
- Growth Hacks
- Getting Featured by Apple/Google
- Going Viral*

INTRO

Bria Sullivan



Boba Story - 18 Million Downloads - Launched 2021



Focus Friend - 5 Million Downloads - Launched 2025

App Store Award 2025
Google Play’s Best App of 2025
RevenueCat Shippie



Agenda

THE BEGINNING

BOBA STORY

VALIDATING

FOCUS FRIEND

THE PLAYBOOK

1 SURVEYS

2 CUSTOMER INTERVIEWS

3 FEEDBACK

Q&A

Boba Story



MOBILE GAMES ABOUT BOBA/ BUBBLE TEA



Female
Age 16 - 35
Plays Mobile
Games

Which character does this demographic like better?



A



B

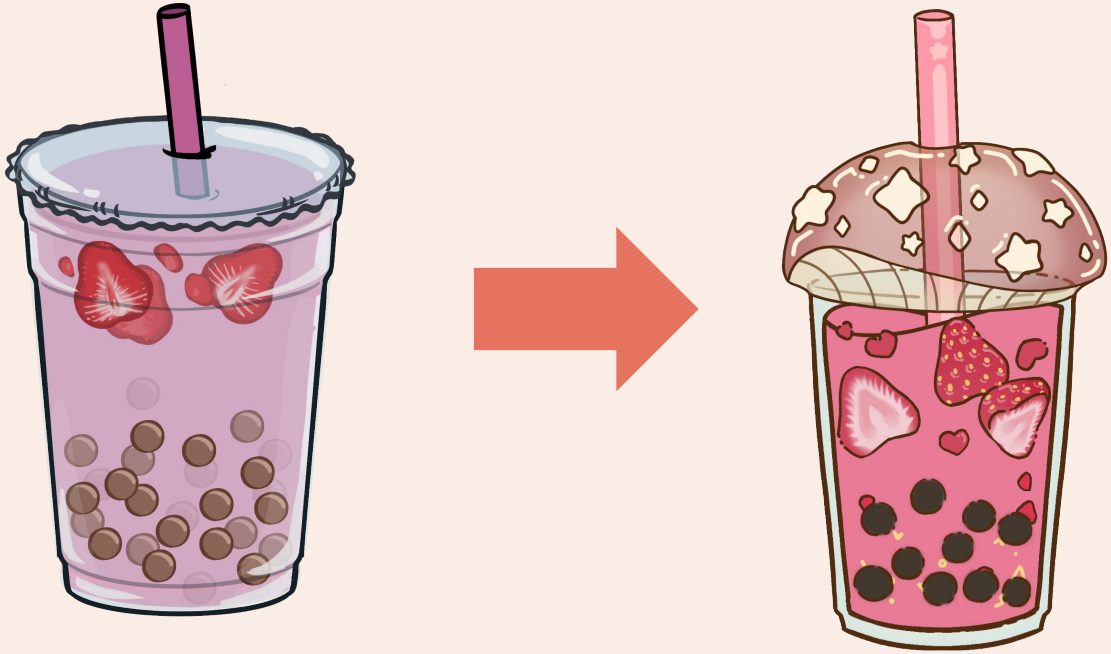
Which character does this demographic like better?

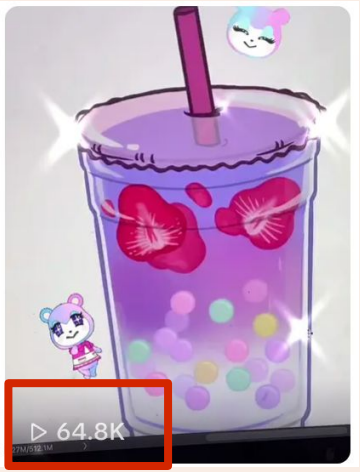


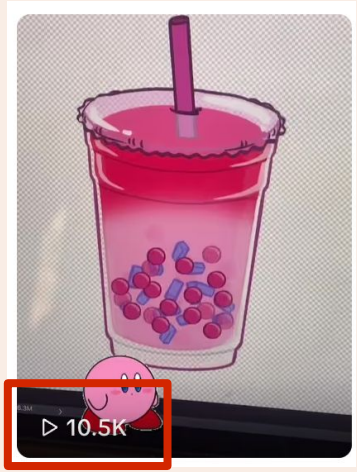
A

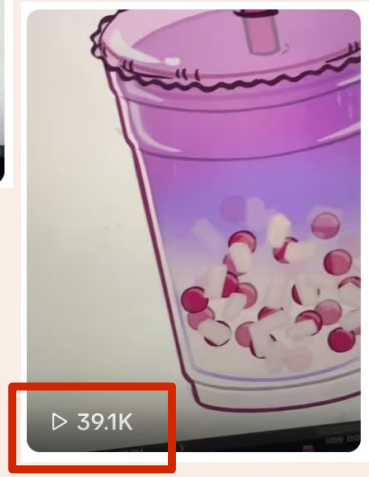


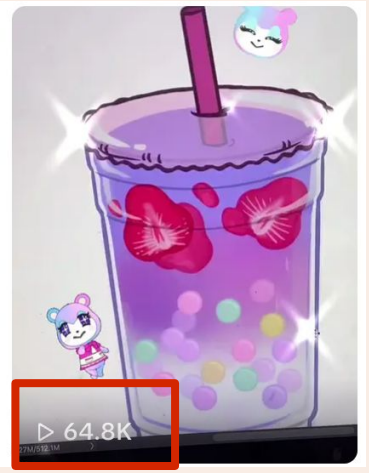
B

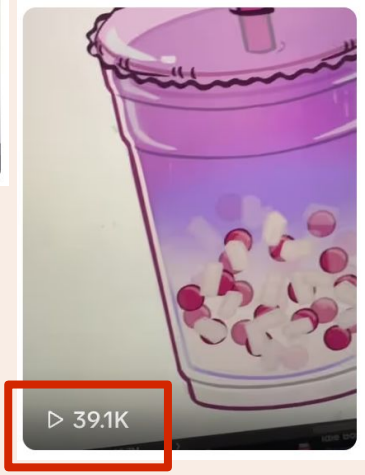


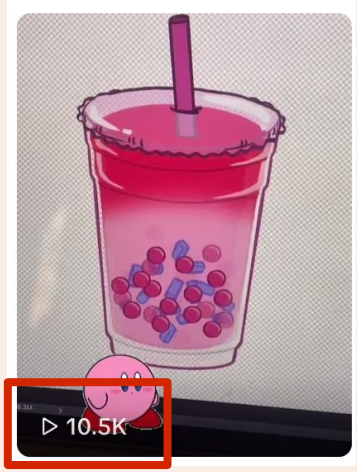

64.8K


10.5K

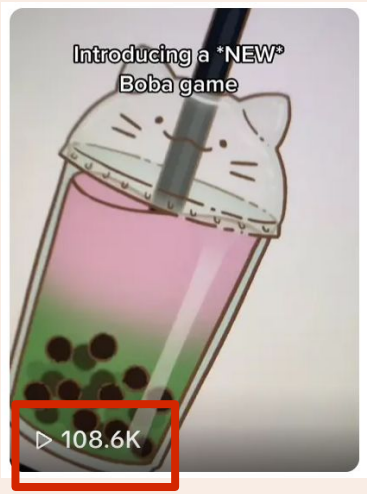

39.1K


64.8K

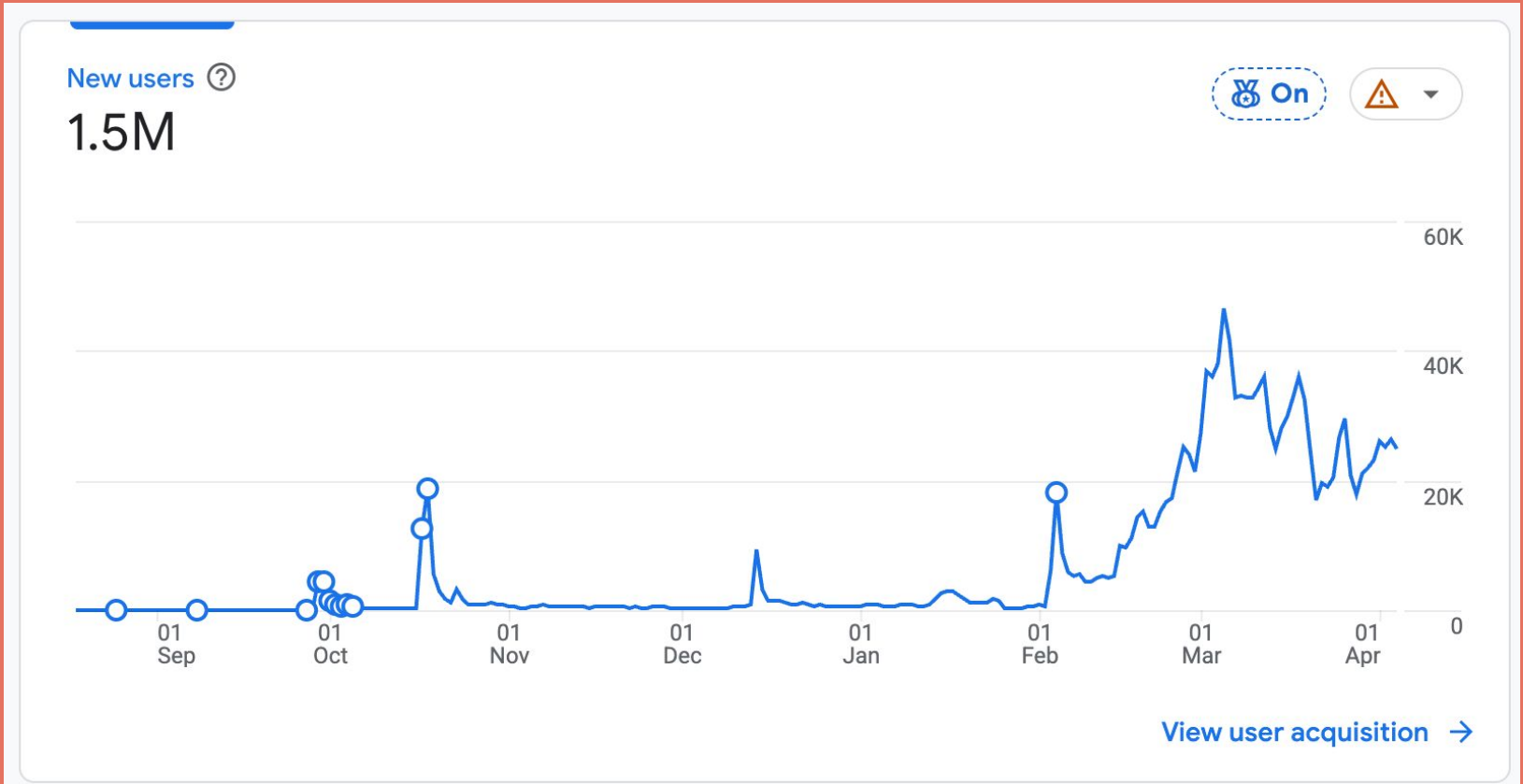

39.1K


10.5K


4 new lids for my
unreleased mobile game
539.1K

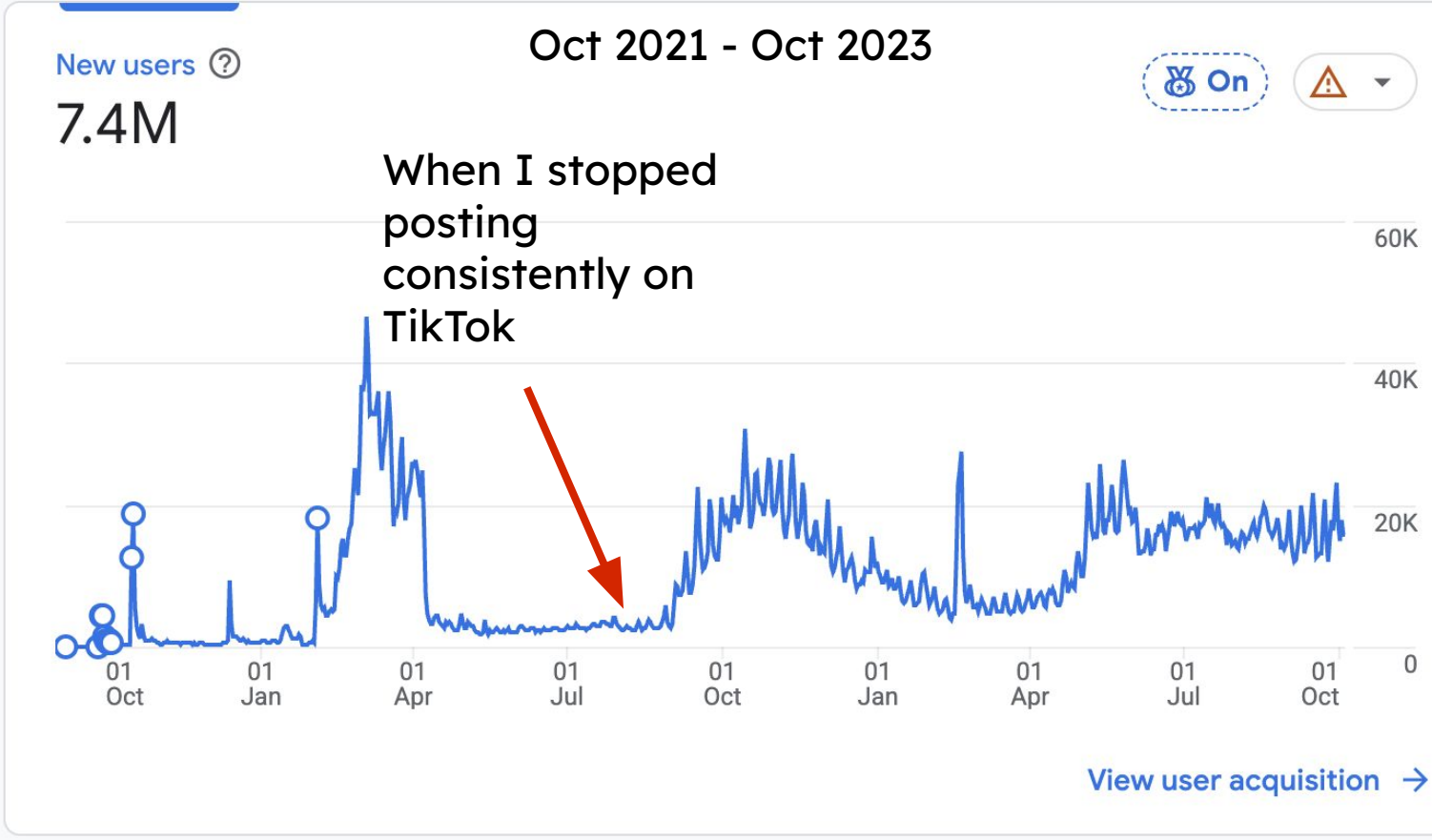

Introducing a *NEW*
Boba game
108.6K

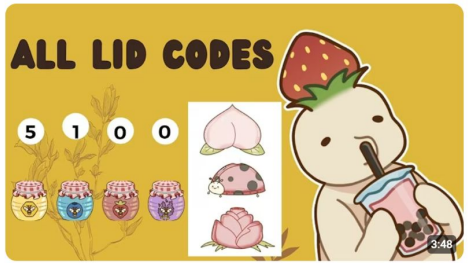

504.2K


New users
1.5M
On
60K
40K
20K
0
01 Sep
01 Oct
01 Nov
01 Dec
01 Jan
01 Feb
01 Mar
01 Apr
View user acquisition


New users
1.5M
Oct 2021 - April 2022
On
Launch
New Feature
60K
40K
20K
0
01 Sep
01 Oct
01 Nov
01 Dec
01 Jan
01 Feb
01 Mar
01 Apr
View user acquisition

Oct 2021 - Oct 2023



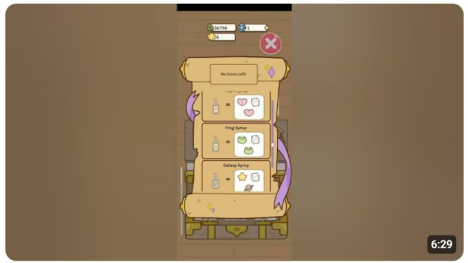


ALL LID CODES - Boba Story Gameplay

283K • 3y ago

AliGames

Boba Story UPDATE LIDs CODES NEW! | **Boba Story** Game Guide Walkthrough **boba story** experiment combinations **Boba Story** ...



🔮🍓 EVERYTHING UNLOCKED! ✨ The Ultimate Boba Story Guide: All Recipes & Cute Lids! 🧋✨ (2026 Ver.)

431 • 3mo ago

Gabriela Manotas

Welcome to the ULTIMATE and most complete **Boba Story** guide on YouTube! ✨ Stop wasting your time switching between ...

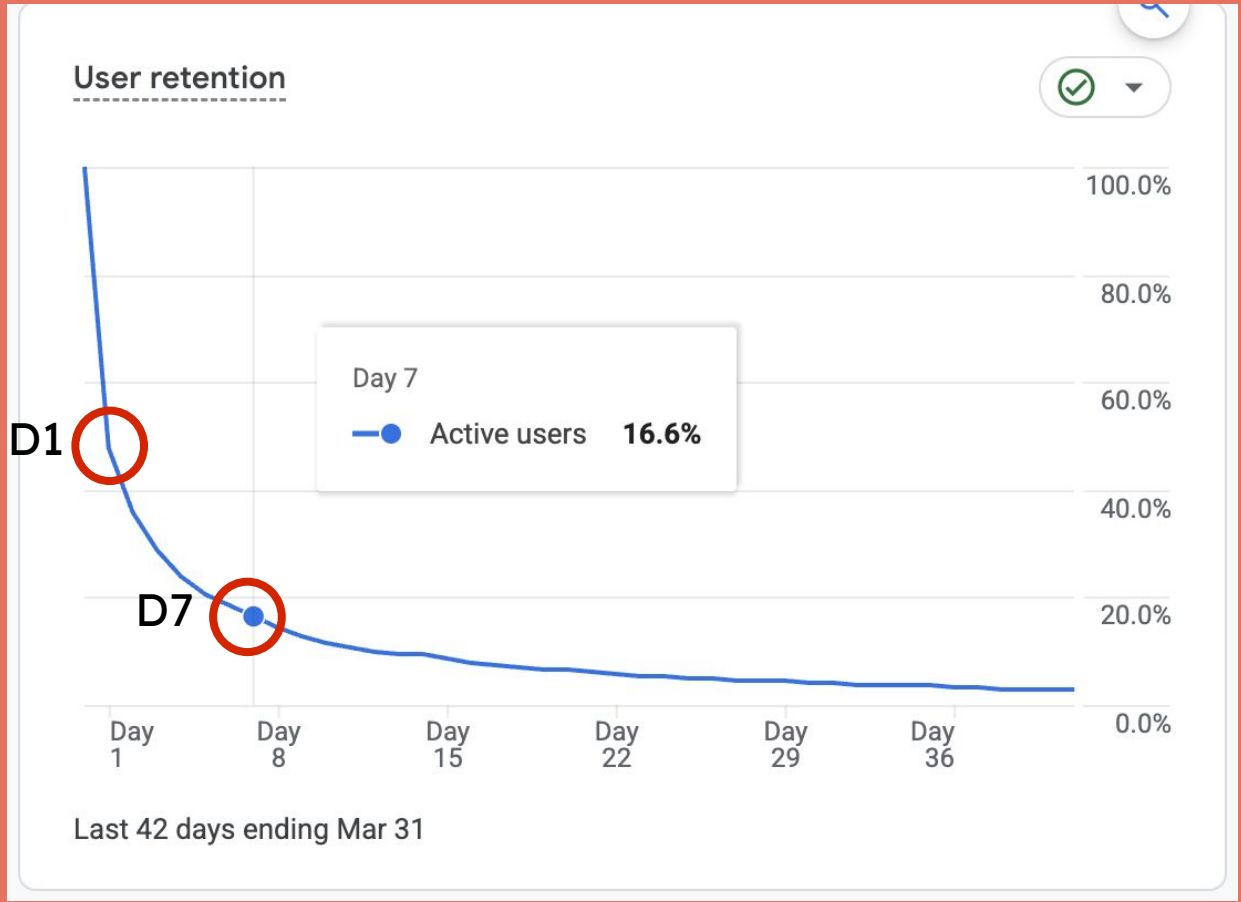


Boba Story Game: 10 New Recipes [July 2024 Update]

56K • 2y ago

AliGames

Welcome to the July 2024 update for **Boba Story**! This update brings 10 delightful and creative boba recipes to enhance your ...


User retention
100.0%
80.0%
60.0%
40.0%
20.0%
0.0%
Day 7
Active users 16.6%
D1
D7
Day 1
Day 8
Day 15
Day 22
Day 29
Day 36
Last 42 days ending Mar 31

TAKEAWAYS

1. HOW IT LOOKS
2. HOW EASY IT IS FOR PEOPLE TO TALK ABOUT

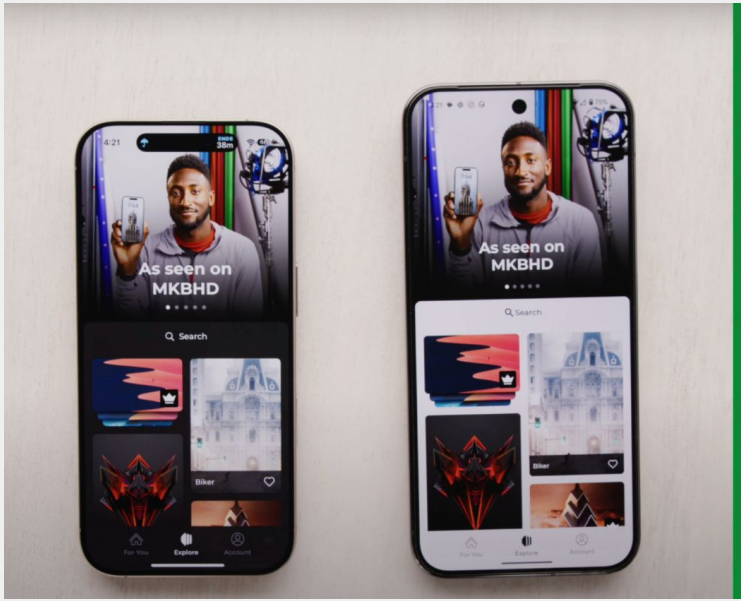
FOCUS FRIEND



FOCUS FRIEND

HANK GREEN





APPS

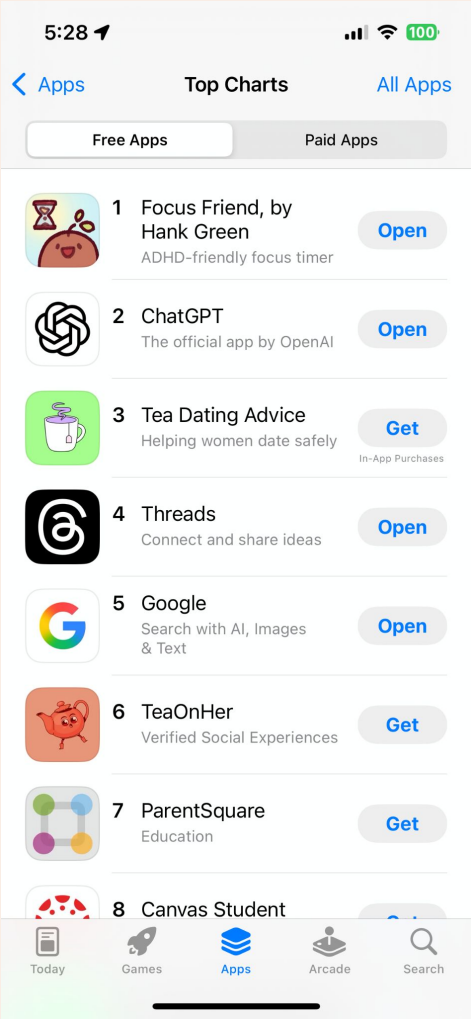
MKBHD’s wallpaper app Panels is shutting down

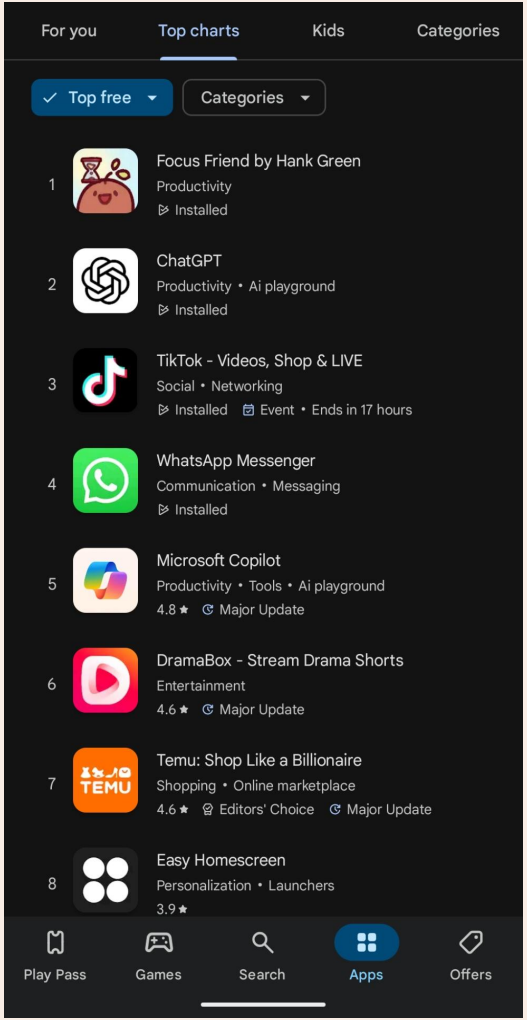
Amanda Silberling — 12:13 PM PST · December 1, 2025

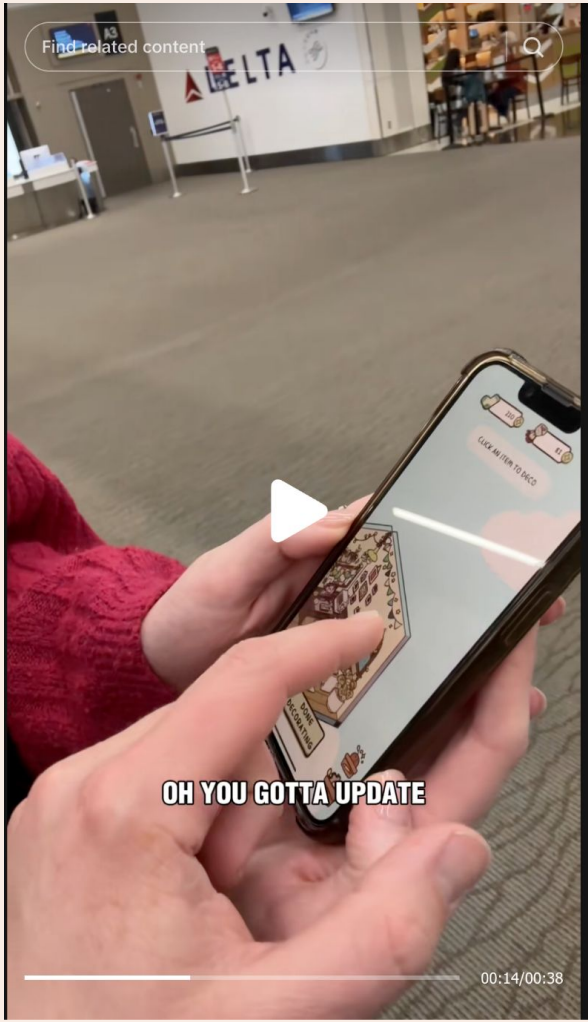
FOCUS FRIEND

HANK GREEN




5:28
Apps
Top Charts
All Apps
Free Apps
Paid Apps
1 Focus Friend, by Hank Green
ADHD-friendly focus timer
Open
2 ChatGPT
The official app by OpenAI
Open
3 Tea Dating Advice
Helping women date safely
Get
In-App Purchases
4 Threads
Connect and share ideas
Open
5 Google
Search with AI, Images & Text
Open
6 TeaOnHer
Verified Social Experiences
Get
7 ParentSquare
Education
Get
8 Canvas Student
Today
Games
Apps
Arcade
Search


For you
Top charts
Kids
Categories
Top free
Categories
1 Focus Friend by Hank Green
Productivity
Installed
2 ChatGPT
Productivity • Ai playground
Installed
3 TikTok - Videos, Shop & LIVE
Social • Networking
Installed Event • Ends in 17 hours
4 WhatsApp Messenger
Communication • Messaging
Installed
5 Microsoft Copilot
Productivity • Tools • Ai playground
4.8 ★ Major Update
6 DramaBox - Stream Drama Shorts
Entertainment
4.6 ★ Major Update
7 Temu: Shop Like a Billionaire
Shopping • Online marketplace
4.6 ★ Editors' Choice Major Update
8 Easy Homescreen
Personalization • Launchers
3.9 ★
Play Pass
Games
Search
Apps
Offers



Hank Green
hankgreen1 · 2025-10-14
Follow

Focus Friend has some cool new stuff AND WE'RE MAKING MORE! People really like it, and you can download it today.

original sound - Hank Green · 72 visits

54.1K 411 2187

https://www.tiktok.com/@hankgreen1/video/756117695... Copy link

Comments (411) Creator videos

andyoddball
Focus friend is a what now?



2025-10-15 Reply 48

View 1 reply

flindberg1
I would love to use this app but it is not accessible for blind people who use screen readers

2025-10-14 Reply 70

View 2 replies

Democracy Officer Rhu
I named mine flick.

Log in to comment

The Playbook

A Funnel




Florals? For spring?
Groundbreaking.

A Funnel



Surveys

Problem: What problem are they facing that your app or feature solves

Solution: Your App or Feature

Focus Friend

Problem: Need help focusing

Solution: Gamified focus timer

SURVEYS

PURPOSE

Screen people who would be good candidates for customer interviews

SURVEYS

GOAL

Find out if they are in your ideal customer profile

SURVEYS

4 sections

1. Initial Screening Question
2. Problem-focused Questions
3. Demographic
4. Ask for Customer Interview

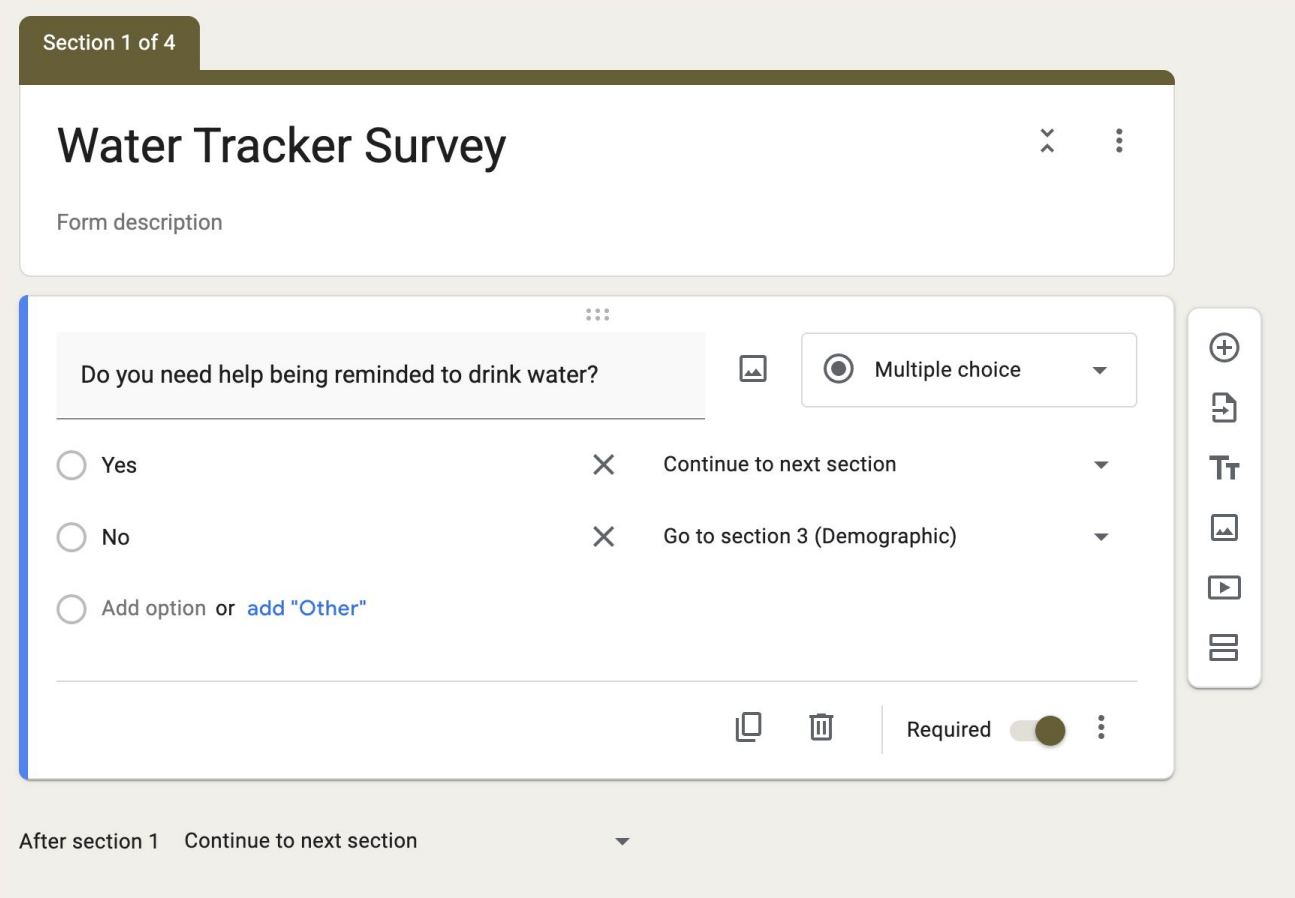
SURVEYS

Water Tracker App

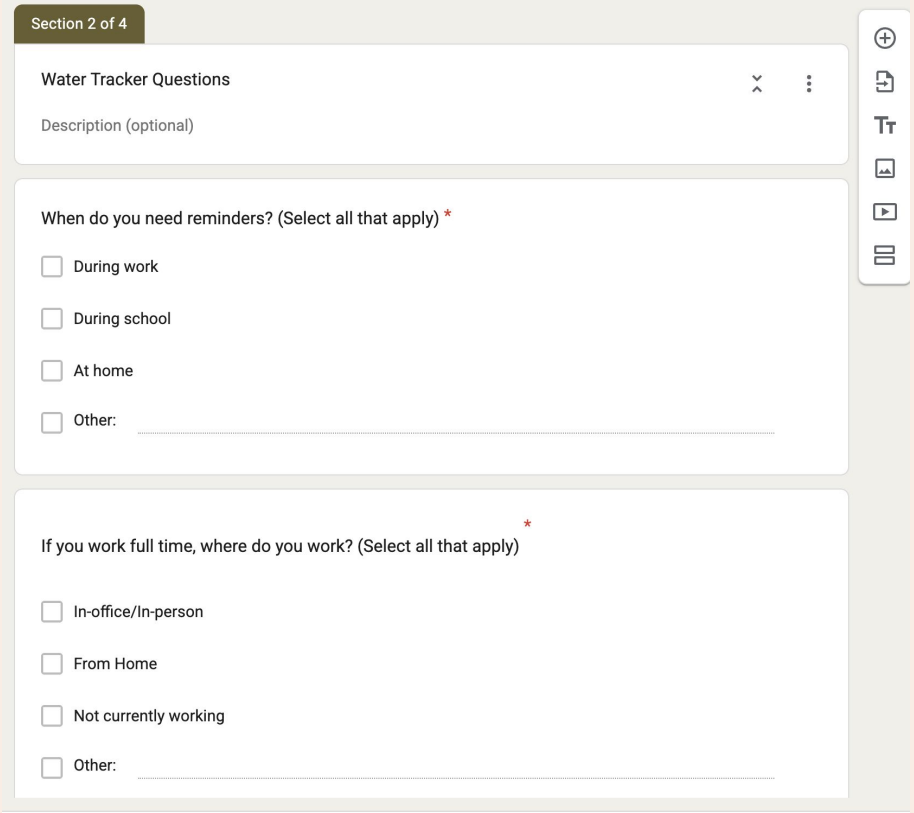
People who work away from home
Men and Women, Age 25-45

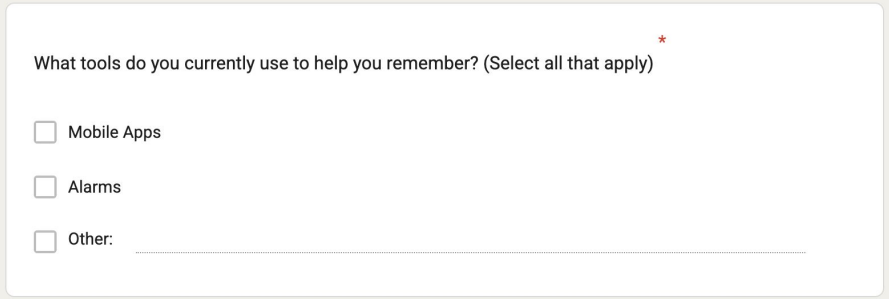
Problem: Need help remembering to drink water. Wants to drink more water

Solution: Water tracker app with differentiating feature


Section 1 of 4
Water Tracker Survey
Form description
Do you need help being reminded to drink water?
Multiple choice
Yes
Continue to next section
No
Go to section 3 (Demographic)
Add option or add "Other"
Required
After section 1
Continue to next section

SURVEYS


Section 2 of 4
Water Tracker Questions
Description (optional)
When do you need reminders? (Select all that apply) *
During work
During school
At home
Other:
If you work full time, where do you work? (Select all that apply) *
In-office/In-person
From Home
Not currently working
Other:


What tools do you currently use to help you remember? (Select all that apply) *
Mobile Apps
Alarms
Other:

Please list all the apps, websites, or methods you use to help you remember to drink water *

Long answer text

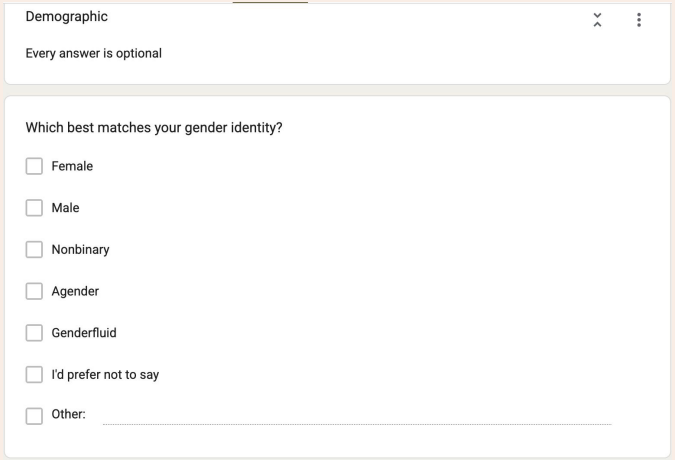
What do you like about these methods? *

Long answer text

What would you change about the methods you use? *

Long answer text

SURVEYS


Demographic
Every answer is optional
Which best matches your gender identity?
Female
Male
Nonbinary
Agender
Genderfluid
I'd prefer not to say
Other:


Which best matches your age?
Under 18
18 - 24
25 - 35
36 - 45
Over 46
I'd prefer not to say

Section 4 of 4

Final Question

Description (optional)

Can we reach out to you to ask you more? If yes, please drop your **email**!

Short answer text

Survey Q&A

Customer Interviews

PURPOSE

1. Find out more about the person and their relationship to the problem
2. Feedback about your solution
3. Ideas for how it should look and work

2 part structure

1. Problem Focused Questions
2. Proposal Questions

Part 1: Problem Focused Questions

Why/How/When

Part 1: Problem Focused Questions

Why/How/When

Don’t show them ANYTHING in this section

Part 2: Proposal Questions

Your App/Screenshots/Mockups/Opinions

Part 2: Proposal Questions

Your App/Screenshots/Mockups/Opinions

If I told you this app did _____ what would you expect?

Part 2: Proposal Questions

Your App/Screenshots/Mockups/Opinions

If I told you this app did _____ what would you expect?

Art Styles, Colors, Mockups

If each was a thumbnail, which would you click and why?

Customer Interview Example: Focus Friend

Part 1: Problem Focused Questions

1. Why did you turn to focus timers in the first place?

2. What does your break look like?**

3. When you use them, how often do you finish a full focus?

4. How often do you use your focus timer?

Transition in part 1

If I told you I was making a gamified focus timer with beans, what would you expect?

Part 2: Proposal Questions

CUSTOMER INTERVIEW EXAMPLE



CUSTOMER INTERVIEW EXAMPLE

Which art style did interviewees prefer?

ART STYLES

A



B



C



D



E



F



CUSTOMER INTERVIEW EXAMPLE

ART STYLES

A



B



C



D



E

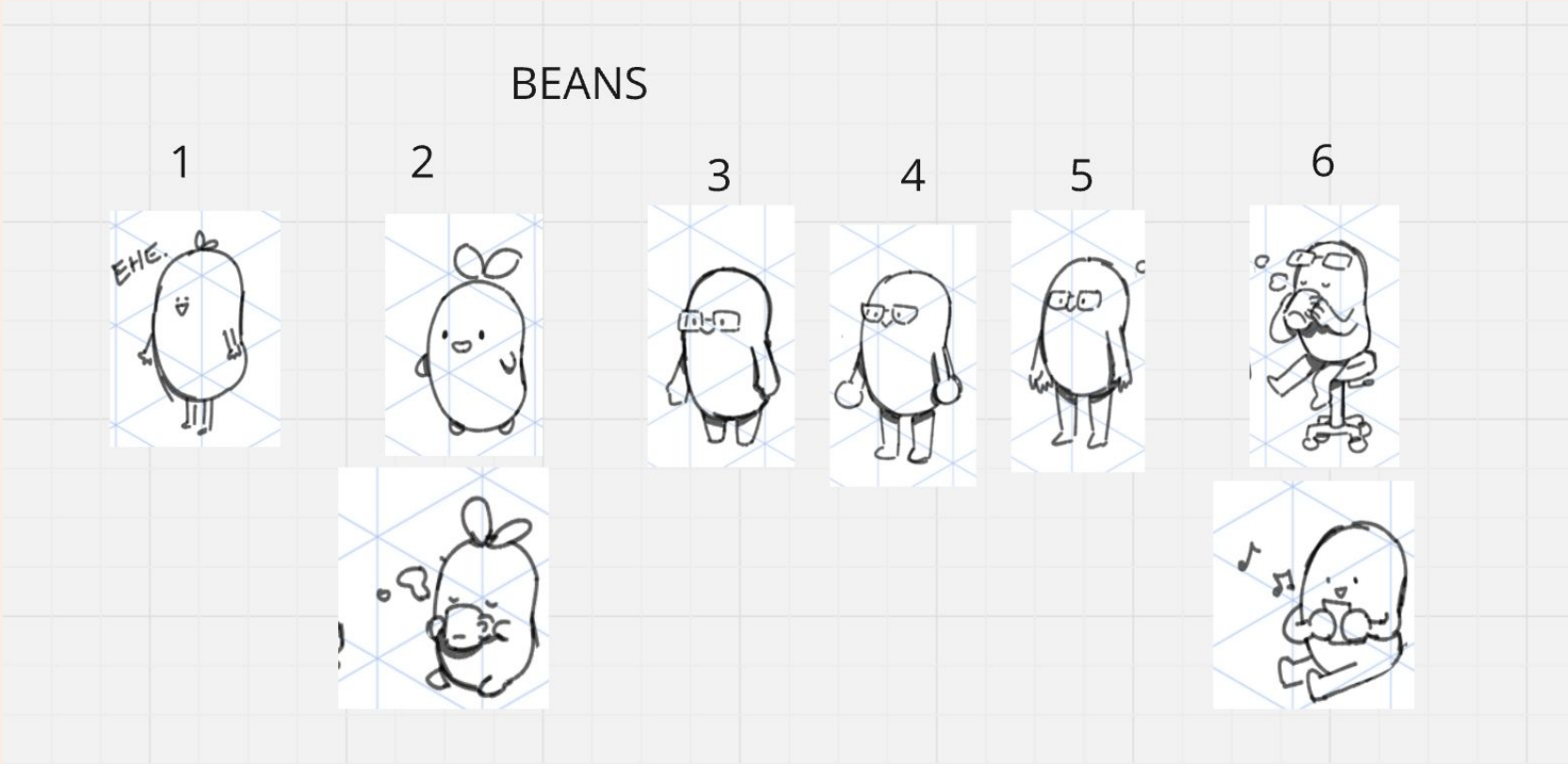


F



CUSTOMER INTERVIEW EXAMPLE

Which Bean did interviewees prefer?



CUSTOMER INTERVIEW EXAMPLE

BEANS

1



2





3



4



5



6





Customer Interview Q&A

Feedback

Timestamp	Do you use tools to	When do you use th	What tools do you u	Please list the apps,	What do you love ab	What would you cha	Which best matches	Which best matches
2/9/2024 9:15:47	Yes	Working, Doing Chores	Mobile Apps, pomodoro	Android Clock app, Prod	The visual nature, always	Sometimes I get distracte	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 9:17:12	Yes	Studying, Working, Exerc	The time timer (physical	None. I stay as far away	I love my time timer beca	If there was a watch-size	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 9:32:05	Yes	Studying	Mobile Apps	onesec	It makes it impossible to	I wish I had better blocke	Male	18 - 24
2/9/2024 9:34:38	Yes	Studying, Randomly, to n	Mobile Apps	Digital Detox	I can have different categ	I would like if it would wa	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 9:38:09	Yes	Working, Doing Chores	Mobile Apps	Pomodoro app, YouTube	Simple, straightforward	Have to use my phone, n	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 9:48:49	Yes	Studying, Working	Mobile Apps, physical tir	Forest, SelfControl	Rewards for successful u	More encouragement/hig	Female, Nonbinary	18 - 24
2/9/2024 10:10:46	Yes	Studying, Working, Doing	Mobile Apps, Websites	Clock app and YouTube	They are relatively flexibl	For the clock app I would	I'd prefer not to say	18 - 24
2/9/2024 10:31:18	Yes	Studying	study with me videos on	youtube	feeling like there's somet	More variety of timer leng	Female	18 - 24
2/9/2024 10:37:35	Yes	Studying, Doing Chores	setting timers (clean the	timer? like the timer app	the candle works! it's so	i don't love that the timer	Nonbinary	18 - 24
2/9/2024 11:04:43	Yes	Studying	Mobile Apps	Forest	Forest team partners with	N/A	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 11:12:28	Yes	Studying, Working, Doing	Mobile Apps, Microwave	Forest, pre installed clocl	Simplicity	Nothing really	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 11:13:10	Yes	Studying, Working, Hobb	Mobile Apps, Timery time	Toggl, Timery, study-with	Toggl: data. Getting to se	Toggl/online time trackers	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 11:13:44	Yes	Studying, Doing Chores	Mobile Apps	Forest	They're pretty	I would like more task ba	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 11:41:10	Yes	Studying, Working, Doing	Apple Watch [I use the p	Apple Watch Timer	I can set three timers at t Also, it's all on my wrist.	I would want to be able t	Nonbinary	25 - 35
2/9/2024 11:41:17	Yes	Studying, Working, Hobb	Mobile Apps	Productivity Timer (Pomc	It's simple and customiza	More choice/customizatic	Male	25 - 35
2/9/2024 12:11:25	Yes	Studying, Working, Doing	a physical timer with a vis	apps that block me using	it doesn't tick and is easy	I would like the option of	Nonbinary	36 - 45
2/9/2024 12:16:53	Yes	Doing Chores	Mobile Apps	Waking Up	Alters my worldview and	Maka the content less	Female	36 - 45
2/9/2024 12:19:48	Yes	Working	Mobile Apps, Websites	Pomodoro Kitty (Website	I like Pomodoro Kitty bec	It's easy to turn HabitNov	Male, Nonbinary, Gender	25 - 35
2/9/2024 12:27:51	Yes	Doing Chores	I'm not happy with my ph	just the Timer, an old and	The Interval timer has a r	I wish I lived in the Portla	Male, Nonbinary	Over 46
2/9/2024 12:57:50	Yes	Studying	Windows	Timer	I should switch	Use something else	Male	Under 18
2/9/2024 13:41:30	Yes	Studying, Working	Mobile Apps	Forest App	I love seeing all the new	Nothing	Nonbinary	25 - 35
2/9/2024 13:54:12	Yes	Studying, Working	Mobile Apps, Browser ex	Forest (mobile app), Mar	Clean interfaces, direct a	Nothing, I believe they're	Male	18 - 24
2/9/2024 14:09:32	Yes	Studying	Mobile Apps	The tree app	It keeps me from using m	I'd make it free for ios, ar planted actual trees in er	Female, Nonbinary	18 - 24
2/9/2024 14:36:41	Yes	Studying	Mobile Apps	Spotify deep focus playlis	Noise that is not distracti	/	Female	18 - 24
2/9/2024 18:43:12	Yes	Studying	Mobile Apps	Flora	I love the design and that	It has a social feed and o	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 20:03:21	Yes	Studying, Working, Doing	Mobile Apps	Forest app :)	I can plant virtual trees th	More new tree designs w	Female	18 - 24

Patterns Emerge

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2/9/2024 12:57:50	Yes	Studying	Windows	Timer	I should switch	Use something else	Male	Under 18
2/9/2024 13:41:30	Yes	Studying, Working	Mobile Apps	Forest App	I love seeing all the new	Nothing	Nonbinary	25 - 35
2/9/2024 13:54:12	Yes	Studying, Working	Mobile Apps, Browser ex	Forest (mobile app), Mar	Clean interfaces, direct a	Nothing, I believe they're	Male	18 - 24
2/9/2024 14:09:32	Yes	Studying	Mobile Apps	The tree app	It keeps me from using i	I'd make it free for ios, ar planted actual trees in en	Female, Nonbinary	18 - 24
2/9/2024 14:36:41	Yes	Studying	Mobile Apps	Spotify deep focus playli	Noise that is not distracti	/	Female	18 - 24
2/9/2024 18:43:12	Yes	Studying	Mobile Apps	Flora	I love the design and that	It has a social feed and o	Female	25 - 35
2/9/2024 20:03:21	Yes	Studying, Working, Doing	Mobile Apps	Forest app :)	I can plant virtual trees th	More new tree designs w	Female	18 - 24

Patterns to look for

- Common apps people use
- Common things they like about what they currently use
- Common things they don’t like
- Common characteristics they have

FEEDBACK

FOCUS FRIEND PATTERNS

- ADHD mentioned
- Privacy mentioned
- Design was important to them
- Wanted a better relationship with technology
- On their breaks they'd get water, doom scroll, or exercise
- They cared a lot about their career or doing well. High achievers
- Generally liked option B and a specific bean

Wrap Up

How to Apply the Playbook

- Tweaking your app
- Screenshots
- Ideas
- Going Viral

WRAP UP

How to Apply the Playbook to Go Viral

- What could I add to this app that would make you want to share it with your friends?
- Is there any part of this app that you'd share to your instagram story?
- Is there any part of this app you'd want to use while collaborating with another person?

Continue to use The Playbook

Thank you!