

MiB Beta: Observations for developers and for the Nokia MiB dev team

This article presents observations on the Marketing in a Box application marketing resource offering from Nokia, which is in Beta as of April 2013.

 Note: This is a community entry in the [Series 40 Webinars - Contribute and Win Competition 2013Q1 with Marketing in a Box](#) competition.

Introduction

The [Marketing in a Box](#) ("MiB") app marketing resource offering from Nokia provides marketing guidance and free marketing asset generation tools to help developers market their apps. In this wiki article, we briefly touch on some of the realities of the app marketplace, in order to make the case for developers to take marketing seriously. The remainder of the article presents observations and suggestions both for developers using MiB, as well as for Nokia on ways to improve and extend this resource during and after its beta development phase.

Marketplace realities

When the mobile application marketplace exploded about five years ago, a gold rush mentality took hold. Everyone loves to read a success story that makes them feel like they too could achieve fame and fortune armed with nothing more than a laptop and some coding skills. And so today we find ourselves with mobile app marketplaces saturated with hundreds of thousands of apps with which to compete for people's attention.

Seth Godin's talk at the 2008 [Business of Software](#) conference has been widely shared, and is well worth your time to study. You can find the video here: "[Why Marketing Is Too Important To Be Left To The Marketing Department](#)". This is a fast-paced and wide-ranging presentation that covers the very important issues of marketplace clutter, how your product is effectively invisible unless people are searching for it, why you need to build marketing into your actual product (and how to do so), and why you can still be successful in an essentially infinite marketplace if you build a product that is exactly what someone wants (AND they can find it, AND it motivates them to talk to other people about it, AND the more people are connected by it, the better it works).

One of Seth's key quotes was:

"If you're going to bother building a piece of software, you better build the marketing into it." - Seth Godin, at Business of Software 2008

We'll come back to how this relates to MiB in a moment.

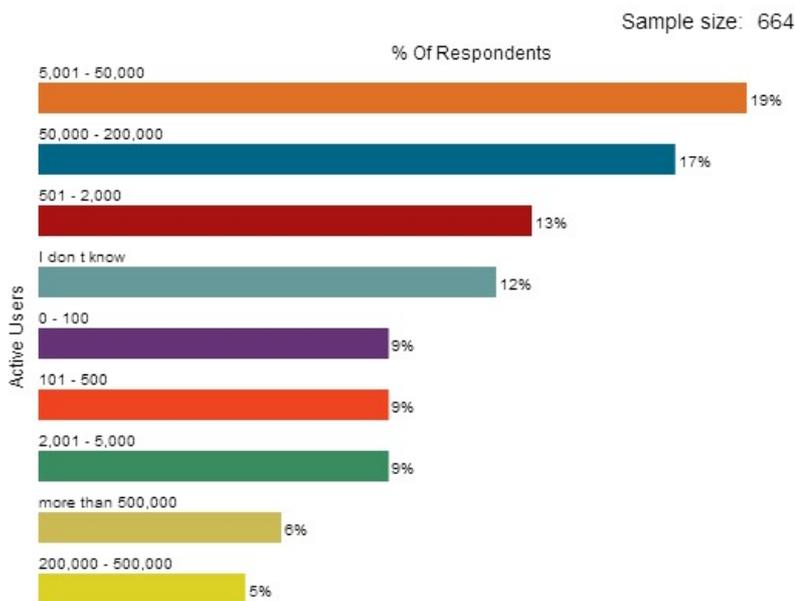
In a recent article titled "[How many users is realistic?](#)", survey data from market analysis and strategy firm [VisionMobile](#) suggested that:

"... there is a threshold level somewhere near 200,000 users, such that if you break that level you're likely to "get noticed" and end up with significantly more users. "

The below chart from this report illustrates the distribution of user base sizes found in the survey, and the report goes on to suggest that the patterns in the data are due to *"the difference between apps which are not (effectively) marketed and those that are."*

Active User Base Distribution

Filter by category and/or revenue model



Source: Developer Economics 2013 | www.DeveloperEconomics.com | January 2013
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The implication here is clear: If you want to cross the gulf between having an inconsistent trickle of downloads/sales/ad revenue and having real app revenue momentum that feeds on itself, ignoring marketing is simply not an option. In the mobile app marketplace, if all you do is just build it, they may never find it. They only come to what you build in [The Field of Dreams](#).

So, about this ... "box"

We will not be giving any walk-throughs of the process of using the kit in this wiki article, as for the most part, the instructions are quite clear and readable, and because there are already other wiki articles written for the occasion of the "Contribute and Win Competition 2013Q1" that handle that task quite well. We will instead give observations on the "box", how developers might use it, and how Nokia can refine and build upon it.

The choice of words for Nokia's free marketing resource kit is quite interesting and apropos, from more than one angle. MiB is a "box" in the sense of being a collection of useful things pulled into one convenient container. However, we take issue with comments we've seen in other wiki articles advocating that MiB is "all a developer needs" to be successful. If a developer looks at MiB as a panacea, then the "box" becomes an artificial constraint that one would do well to think outside of. Because of the clutter in the marketplace, and because - in spite of its significant utility - MiB is going to necessarily produce marketing materials that look very similar from one app to another, it is most certainly not, in our opinion, the end of a developer's marketing efforts, but rather a very cost effective jump start for one phase of marketing efforts. Recall the Seth Godin quote above about building marketing into the actual software product itself. Marketing is an end-to-end activity; it should permeate the entire application development cycle, from product ideation to maintenance releases and ongoing social network engagement with app users. So, make good use of the box, but make sure you don't [get stuck in it](#). In particular, we would suggest that the speed and low effort of generating and re-generating digital marketing assets make MiB well suited to being part of an iterative, [Lean Startup](#)-oriented development and marketing workflow, where some amount of co-design between marketing assets and application graphics can take place.

As you'll see at the [MiB link](#), the MiB web page has tabs for *Overview*, *Marketing Guidance*, and *Digital Marketing Toolkit*. Our only comment here is that you should make sure you read the 46 page PDF under the *Marketing Guidance* tab, cover to cover.

Many coding-centric developers will likely be tempted to go straight to the *Digital Marketing Toolkit* and start typing, clicking, and generally doing things that they consider to be "generating results", while skipping the alien-sounding marketing-speak in the *Marketing Guidance* document. *Don't do this*. The document is a great overview and jumping-off point for learning unfamiliar topics. Particularly useful is how the document tags suggested marketing activities based on whether they should be done before and/or during and/or after product launch. Good marketing is not a push-button, no-thinking-required activity; skipping the guidance and going straight for the digital asset generation risks [jamming your head in the box](#).

Observations on the Digital Marketing Toolkit components

We intend to make the bulk of our contribution to improving MiB in this section. Suggestions for how developers can use particular features or cope with quirks and bugs, and suggestions for how Nokia can improve/extend/fix MiB are offered. Because we have yet to use FaceBook, we're refraining from comment on the FaceBook tab asset generation for the time being.

Promo video

- Issue: The final asset generation for the promo video is a synchronous blocking operation in the web browser. Video generation can fail for too many common scenarios (user must disconnect or power down to go somewhere, internet connection has sporadic dropouts, etc.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Generate the video asset asynchronously and place a URL in the user's marketing kit where the completed video can be picked up at a later time.
 - Suggested action for Developer: Absent the above fix from Nokia, create a dedicated kit for just the video, so that generation of other final assets cannot be affected by a failure of the long-running video creation task.
- Issue: The list of adjectives to be placed in the video is small enough that promo videos for different apps run the risk of looking the same to potential app users.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Instead of tasking one or a few people on the MiB dev team to be creative enough to think of all useful words on demand, let the developer community contribute candidate words via an automated submission form. Then have MiB dev team weed out the few pranksters who want to put offensive words on the list. Only allowing word submissions from authenticated login sessions will promote accountability for offensive submissions. Augment the drop-down picker with a predictive search box so that users do not have to scroll through pages of words if they know what they want to use.
- Issue: All asset creation requires a URL of a published app. This means that marketing materials cannot be published prior to app release date. For app releases that are deliberately timed to events (e.g. holidays/sports events etc.) it may be desirable to publish marketing materials well in advance to build a buzz.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Allow asset creation based on a non-public draft-status app URL. For asset (e.g. banner) creation with embedded app link URL's, when assets are created off of the non public draft app URL, create a parked "coming soon" page for the app and use the URL for that page. Then once the app is released, place a redirect on the "coming soon" page.
- Issue: The promo video must be uploaded to YouTube before a developer can download it. Subscribers to the developer's YouTube channel may see the video before the developer wants them to. For some launches the complete opposite of a "market buzz first" may be desirable - the developer may want to instead do an unannounced soft launch if e.g. there are concerns about bugs that could lead to early bad publicity with a splashy launch.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Allow direct download of video to developer's local computer.
- Issue: The opening sequence of all promo videos is identical, and emphasizes the Nokia brand for several seconds before the identity of the app is revealed. Users have an infinity of choices and a short attention span. They may assume that they have already seen the entire video before, and close it before they get to the first video frame that shows the actual app.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Even a small edit to the existing video sequence could help this issue. Just take the first app screenshot to be featured in the video sequence and make it show full size as the opening frame of the video, and then do a quick transition (e.g. fly out/fade/shrink/etc) to the rest of the existing video sequence.
- Issue: The promo video shows static app screen shots, which do not give the user any sense of the flow of the app.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Implement a small set of simple animations that could simulate how the user flows through the app:
 1. A simulated finger tap, perhaps with a circular area flashing a lighter color
 2. Ability for a screenshot taller than the phone screen to scroll up or down in the phone screen viewport
 3. Ability to do a simple slide-in transition of the next screen in a typical user interaction sequence
- Issue: The dwell time (i.e. the number of video frames) for the actual app screen shots is very short, so the person viewing the

video does not get much chance to examine them, which lessens the ability to get a sense of what the app is about.

- Suggested action for Nokia: Increase the dwell time on each of the app screenshots; emphasize the app more than the Nokia brand and the phone's appearance.
- Suggested action for Developer: Absent the above fix from Nokia, view your video very carefully and multiple times. If your selected screen shots are too busy, too detailed, or otherwise fail to convey meaning about your app in the small dwell time afforded to them, consider selecting different screen shots and/or creating additional screenshots that are simplified to be more understandable at a very quick glance than a static image. If your app's essence is not coming across via screenshots of what the app looks like, consider creating a screenshot that just has your splashscreen, logo, or something else that is very simple and conveys your brand image.
- Issue: The video does not show the phones in landscape orientation. It is less easy for the viewer of the video to get sense of apps (typically games) that only make sense in this orientation.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Make phone orientation an option for the video creation tool, and insure that the auto-import of screenshots from the app stores preserves the intended viewing orientation so that landscape games show properly and naturally in the video.

Website

- Issue: There is at least one bug in the CSS generated for Asha 311 web pages. The CSS rule for the body of the first paragraph makes it black (on a very dark blue background), when all other paragraph titles and bodies are white. The rule is found in the `css/innerCode/index.css` file of the generated web page, and is this one: `#mainAsha311 .firstParagraph p {color:#000}`. We did not attempt to guess the MiB dev team's intentions as to how their rule cascades were set up; this comment is from a cursory inspection in Chrome dev tools.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Of course fix this bug, but beyond that, create a regression suite for the web page generation tool, so that whenever the html and css templates for web page generation get updated, a full set of web pages for all supported devices and options is generated and verified to not have introduced styling problems.
 - Suggested action for Developer: Download and very carefully inspect your generated web page before uploading to a server where visitors to your domain name will see it. If you don't know html/css/Javascript, pledge to yourself to learn these technologies over whatever timeframe works for you, as long as it's not infinity. Seriously. It's more likely than not that not knowing these technologies will become a career liability over time for any developer.
- Issue: Character limits on paragraph bodies don't alert in real time. If you exceed the 900 character limit for one or more paragraph bodies, you don't get any feedback until you click "Continue", and then at that point, red error text tells you you are over the limit, but not by how much. You have to go back and guess, or copy your text out of the textarea box on the web page generation form and into a text editor that can do live character counts.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Replace this outdated error checking modality with a live characters-remaining count for all fields (paragraph titles, bodies, etc) like you get when composing a tweet or SMS.
 - Suggested action for Developer: Absent the above fix from Nokia, compose your paragraph body text in a text editor that can give you a live character count, then paste the character limit compliant text into the web page creation form fields.

Banners

- Issue: Similarly to the screen orientation issue above for the promo videos, generated banners do not show the phones in landscape orientation. For apps (typically games) that only make sense in this orientation, the banners show the app rotated.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Implement a similar option as for this same issue, above, for the promo videos.
- Issue: Creating banners in multiple languages entails creating a banner kit for each language and doing a lot of repetitive data entry.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Allow publishers to associate a global and a per-app list of supported languages in their publisher account, and have the MiB tools pick this up and use it wherever multiple language options exist.
- Issue: Banner customization options offer a limited, fixed set of colors.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Consider creation of banners as Photoshop/Gimp/Inkscape layer files that can be tweaked further if the developer desires.
- Issue: A generated banner asset will have a link back to an app URL in Nokia's or Microsoft's app store - let's make that banner work as hard as it can for us.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Consider how app store servers might be able to track analytics on which banner designs get the most clicks.
- Issue: The banner generation tool allows selection of language under both the "Application" option and the "Copytext options" option. The copytext options seem to suppress the Application option.

- Suggested action for Nokia: If the presence of a language selection in two places provides an intentional function then add clarity for the user as to what is supposed to happen if the two language selections don't match. If this is in fact a logic error in the design of the banner creation tool, then eliminate the language selection box under one of the "Application" option or the "Copytext options" option.
- Suggested action for Developer: Absent the above fix from Nokia, avoid confusion for yourself by carefully noting your language selection under the "Application" option and making sure you select the same language under the "Copytext options" option.

Miscellany

- Issue: In general, even though the Digital Marketing Toolkit provides a lot of automation for asset creation, the amount of typing and clicking when creating digital assets seems like it will start to get repetitive and error prone if the developer needs to regenerate the assets frequently. And changing options is purely a GUI based process, which is not easy to track and log under revision control.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Make the Digital Marketing Toolkit capable of importing/exporting an XML or JSON file that fully describes all the choices made by the user. This way the state of the marketing kit can be revision tracked in the developer's repo and perhaps even updated by their build flow.
- Issue: Once you create a kit, going back and changing/adding/deleting assets is apparently not possible. You can compensate by creating more than one version of your kit but this quickly introduces opportunity for assets to get out of sync, if e.g. your app screenshots need to be updated.
 - Suggested action for Nokia: Audit the Digital Marketing Toolkit web application state flow so that all "Back" (in history and/or process) buttons work in more intuitive fashion.

We shouldn't have to talk about this, but ...

 Tip: (For developers) - Because your goal is to draw attention to your app, make sure you are not going to get the wrong kind of attention - from the law. MiB (in banner creation step) and Nokia Publish both ask you to confirm that you have the legal right to distribute the content. Make sure you understand the basics of copyright law, and do not casually check off the box just because you are in a hurry. You are going to feel quite foolish if you are financially successful with your app and end up turning all of the money over to a lawyer.

Summary

The Marketing in a Box ("MiB") offering from Nokia is off to a great start in Beta. The marketing guidance document provides a broad range of topics for developers who are new to marketing to drill down into, and the Digital Marketing Toolkit provides a quick and easy way for novice app marketers to hit the ground running with professional quality digital assets. In this article we provided a couple of links to some though provoking material on marketing that we hope will serve to help broaden the horizons of more code-focused developers, and contribute to their success. We gave some opinions on where we feel MiB fits in to overall app marketing strategy, and we also provided detailed feedback on many issues found in the present state of the Digital Marketing Toolkit, in the spirit of helping Nokia take this resource to the next level, to the benefit of the overall ecosystem. Lastly, we managed to work a cat video into the conversation. Don't laugh - cat videos are kind of a big deal on the internet.

