

MASTERING APPLE SEARCH ADS

Drive omnichannel value and business growth using the most critical channel for app marketers

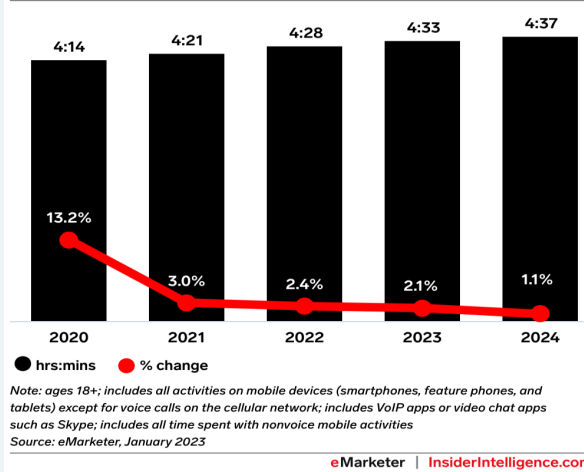


Executive Summary

Despite the widespread popularity of mobile apps, it is remarkable that not all brands prioritize app promotion in their marketing strategies. In the last decade, it has become increasingly evident that **brands cannot solely rely on their brand reputation and existing customer base** to cultivate a robust app user base.

Apple Search Ads is an essential channel for app promotion. Brands should prioritize it as part of their media mix to maximize apps' impact in their omnichannel marketing strategy. Part of this focus includes becoming more sophisticated in the nuances of running Apple Search Ads campaigns.

Average Time Spent per Day with Mobile
US, 2020-2024



[88% of time spent with mobile devices is within apps](#), making Apple Search Ads a critical marketing channel for brands



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Introduction: The post-pandemic era and the evolving role of apps in omnichannel

App usage growth may have slowed slightly compared to the second quarter of 2020. However, it is essential to consider that this period marked the height of COVID-19 lockdowns, which resulted in a surge in app usage across various categories. Users relied on apps for work, shopping, banking, gaming, education, and virtual events during this time.

Despite the gradual return to normalcy in 2023, data suggests that the pandemic has resulted in long-lasting effects on app usage. Mobile consumers who adopted new apps and behaviors during the pandemic may have continued to use them, leading to sustained growth in app usage in some markets.

The opportunity created by this recent change in consumer behavior is staggering. Brands can strategically use apps to generate sales, strengthen brand awareness, increase customer engagement, and drive traffic to their online and offline properties.

As the marketing world evolves to a more omnichannel approach, apps represent a unique touchpoint between brands and their customers. It's an incredibly intimate channel found in almost every pocket and purse. People take their phones to the bathroom and to bed with them.

Companies that don't fully embrace how apps complement an omnichannel marketing strategy won't extract the total enterprise value from their app investments.

Average Daily Time Spent Using Mobile Apps Among Android Users in Select Countries, 2019-2022

hours

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Indonesia	3.9	5.0	5.4	5.7
Brazil	4.1	5.2	5.4	5.3
Saudi Arabia	3.2	3.7	4.4	5.3
Singapore	3.3	3.9	4.5	5.3
South Korea	4.1	4.8	5.0	5.0
Mexico	3.9	4.7	4.8	4.9
Australia	2.9	3.4	3.9	4.9
India	3.7	4.5	4.7	4.9
Japan	3.7	4.3	4.6	4.8
Thailand	3.4	4.1	4.7	4.7
Canada	3.2	3.8	4.4	4.6
US	3.3	3.8	4.2	4.4
Turkey	3.2	4.3	4.4	4.3
UK	3.0	3.7	4.0	4.2
France	2.7	3.4	3.6	3.9
Argentina	3.2	3.8	3.6	3.9
Germany	2.6	3.0	3.4	3.6
China	3.2	3.5	3.2	3.6

Source: Data.ai, "State of Mobile 2023," Jan 11, 2023

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eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com

"The vast majority of mobile time is spent while connected to the internet. We estimate that U.S. adults will spend, on average, more than four hours with mobile internet, with 88% of that time within apps. The app percentage continues to increase year over year."

- eMarketer

But brands cannot rely on just their name to drive app adoption

Apps have little value without an audience. Brands must get customers to install, keep, and use their apps on their mobile devices. Even when a brand is already well established in its industry, there's no guarantee that it's enough to compete in the mobile world.

The rapid rise of app-first category disruptors that are challenging major brands in verticals like financial services, travel, and ecommerce—and displacing them in terms of app adoption—proves that in order to win in the app store, big brands need to market themselves differently. Hungry challengers know that the app landscape is a much more open playing field than the brick-and-mortar retail space and sometimes bank their entire growth strategy on app adoption first. If they can get consumers to use their app, the business can branch out from there. App marketing is not just a best practice but a core strategy.

With the vast majority of their business value derived outside the app, established brands may not be pushing as hard as they should on the app front as they prioritize marketing budgets elsewhere.

The truth is becoming increasingly clear: **companies cannot rely on brand recognition alone to drive app adoption.** They must have an aggressive marketing strategy to derive the full potential their apps can bring to the enterprise.



Where to start with app search advertising? It's clearly on iOS.

Even though Android dominates globally, as of January 2023, [Apple's share of smartphone operating systems in the U.S. is 58%](#), edging out Android's 42% market share.

But, that's not the only statistic app developers should consider when planning mobile app campaigns.

For the last few years, even though Android users downloaded almost three times as many apps as Apple users, **iOS apps generated twice as much revenue!** (see chart)

[Other data suggests](#) that iOS users are a more affluent demographic for brands with more household discretionary spending, favored by people with higher educational attainment and more willing to spend on luxury goods.

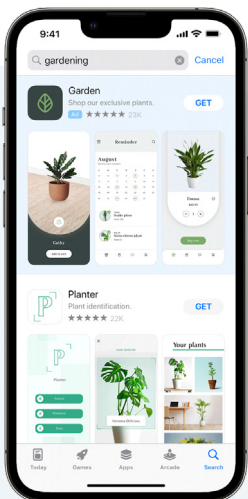
With iOS users ahead in terms of value per install, it makes sense that brands looking to maximize their revenue opportunity should start by focusing on the App Store.

And the best way to take advantage of the iOS app opportunity? Apple Search Ads.

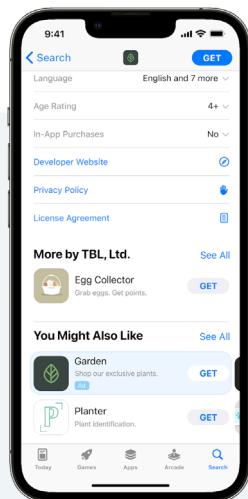
What is Apple Search Ads?

Apple Search Ads helps people discover your app on the App Store, matching customers with your app at the right moments. As the exclusive advertising channel of the App Store, brands looking to grow their business via apps have prioritized it as a fundamental piece of their app marketing strategy.

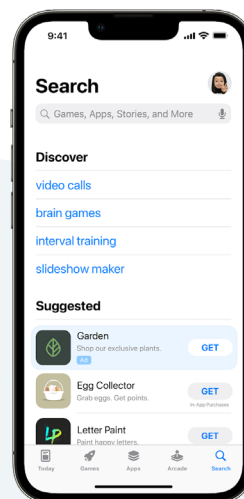
The sheer number of apps available to consumers is staggering, which is probably why [the majority of downloads—almost 65%—happen directly after a search](#). Apple Search Ads take full advantage of the real estate within the App Store with ad placements that help reach users as they search and browse.



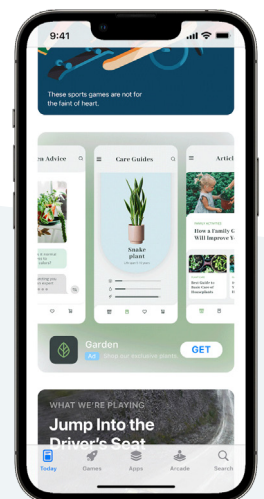
Search results ads



Product page ads



Search tab ads



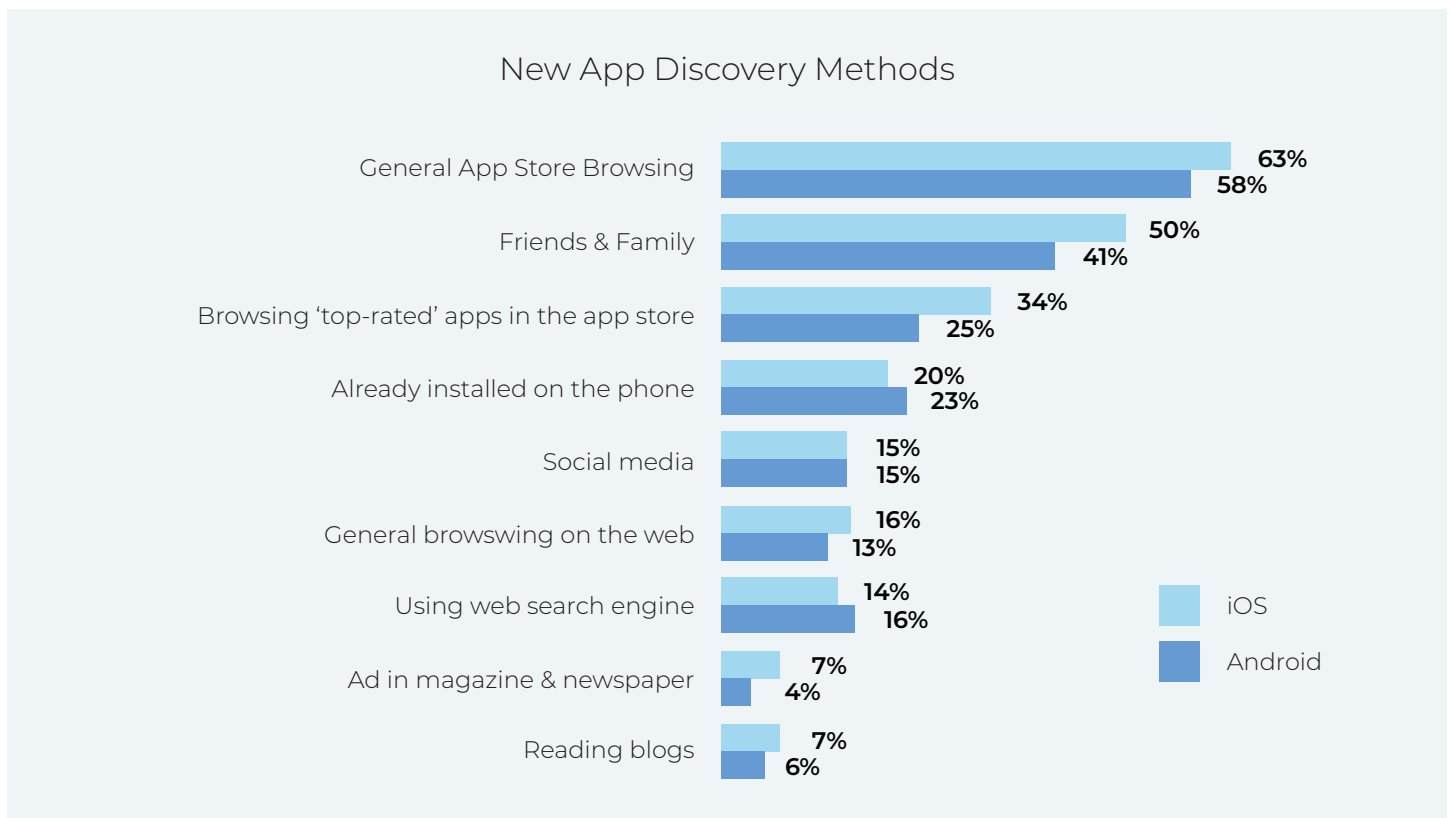
Today tab ads

Search results ads: Reach users at the right moment

To ensure their app is found, brands must understand how consumers discover apps. [In a study on how apps are found](#), by far, the top method was via general browsing on the App Store, even more popular than via friends & family or browsing “top-rated” apps. This indicates that many users on the App Store are undecided about which app they will install to meet their needs. For app owners, this opens up the opportunity to reach these users with Apple Search Ads at a key consumer inflection point.

For an app marketer, it’s clear that optimizing for discovery on the App Store is undoubtedly one of the most critical areas of focus. While app store optimization (ASO) is an organic way to get into the top listings—the same way that search engine optimization (SEO) is used on the standard web—Apple Search Ads search results ads is quickly becoming one of the most important channels for brands to master.

Search results ads lets app marketers immediately gain visibility on searches within the app store when specific keywords are queried. For newer apps that have yet to achieve high organic rankings, search results ads can ensure that they appear on the App Store search results pages while simultaneously building up an organic presence.

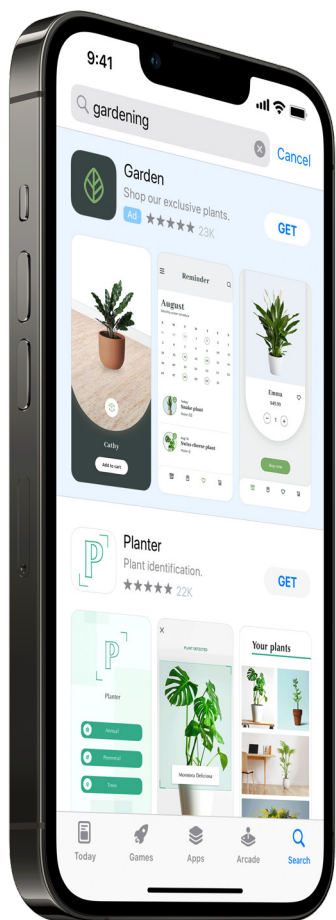


Just as marketers discovered a few decades ago that search engines were an important inflection point to impact and influence consumers, search result ads on the App Store are now becoming today’s critical arenas for brands.



Search results ads

Search results ads provide an opportunity for customers to discover your app at the exact moment they're searching for a new app to download. When a user conducts a search on the App Store, your ad can appear as the top result, making it highly visible and accessible to the user.



Creating ads

Ads are created from the information on your app's product page or through custom product pages that you set up in App Store Connect. Ad variations allow you to tailor your ad's creative content to specific audiences and keyword themes.

Matching ads to search queries

Ads are matched to relevant search queries through keywords. You can either choose your own keywords or utilize the ones suggested by Apple Search Ads. The technology uses these keywords to match the user's search term with the promoted app, resulting in an average conversion rate of 60%.

Ad display and keyword bidding

The display of a search results ad over other advertisers bidding on the same query is based on a combination of factors, including the app's relevance to the search query and the amount of the keyword bid. If your app is irrelevant to the user's search, it will not be displayed, even if you are willing to pay a higher bid. Apple Search Ads prioritizes relevance and bids to ensure that only high-quality matches are presented to users.

Search results ads best practices

As with paid search, search results ads have options and settings for marketers to finely tune to get the best ROI. Because these ads appear above the organic app results, they can be a way for challenger apps to instantly leapfrog category leaders and give their apps a chance to be installed. Marketers can even bid on competitor app names and garner attention away from their rivals.

Search marketers have learned over time to write ads that attract the right kinds of users and discourage the wrong ones so that they don't click and spend your budget without converting. App search marketers should follow suit. For example, a brand may discover that promoting its app's free features brings in low-value users. In contrast, ads promoting its paid features could potentially bring in customers who make purchases or use the app more often.

Sometimes in search marketing—whether on the standard web or the app store—it's as essential to keep the wrong clickers from wasting your budget as it is to get the right people to engage.

Case Study: DraftKings scales app installs by 280%

280%

Apps Installs Growth

6%

CPA Decrease

Challenge

DraftKings isn't your average Apple Search Ads advertiser. They're a fantasy sports giant with a massive program consisting of hundreds of campaigns and ad groups, and thousands of keywords. DraftKings' lean growth marketing team sought out an Apple Search Ads Partner to help them streamline workflows, analyze data with ease, and accelerate campaign performance at scale.

Solution

DraftKings onboarded their Apple Search Ads to Skai, unlocking advanced automation, reporting, and optimization capabilities.

Skai's™ Ad Creator enabled DraftKings to build many new campaigns at once and duplicate ad groups with ease. In addition, Smart Tags helped the team label and categorize entities at scale, helping them to effortlessly monitor performance across many critical dimensions. Cutting down the time required to launch and manage campaigns allowed the team to focus on more strategically important tasks. This included deploying timely bid and budget optimizations to adapt quickly to demand spikes.

Results

Skai helped the DraftKings' team execute with agility, drive efficiencies, and accelerate performance. Across their portfolio of apps, Installs grew by 280%, all while reducing CPAs by 6%.



"[Skai™]'s advanced suite of capabilities helped us drive growth & take our Apple Search Ads program to the next level."

Julia Zheng, Growth Marketing Manager, DraftKings



Ten tips to master search results campaigns in Apple Search Ads

Here are some tips from Skai's App Marketing team that can help you raise your game when it comes to this advertising opportunity:

1 DON'T JUST BID ON BRAND TERMS. While bidding on your brand terms is extremely important, you also must build out ad groups with competitor and category terms. Like with standard SEM, an ad can displace the organic listing at the top of the page. So, it's wise to own that top position with an ad to protect your rivals from appearing ahead of you.

2 UNDERSTAND HOW APP USERS SEARCH One of the most significant differences between app searches and general web searches—such as on Google—is that they are generally very short queries. On the standard web, if someone is looking for food delivery, they may use a long phrase like “Thai food delivery in Chicago near me.” However, on the App Store, they may just search for “delivery” and go from there. Keep this in mind when building out your keyword lists.

3 MASTER YOUR MATCHING Apple Search Ads offers broad match and exact match—and search engine marketers are already very familiar with these options. However, there's also an Apple Search Ads proprietary keyword discovery tool called Search Match, where your ads may be matched automatically to search terms without you having to figure out all keyword possibilities and actively bid on them.

Here are examples of match types used with the search term *photo edit free*.

Exact match and broad match applicable:

- Words in order: *photo edit free*
- Close variants: *photo editor free, photo edit free, photoeditfree*

Note that close variants may not work in some languages.

Broad match applicable only:

- Not in order: *edit photo free*
- Partial words: *photo edit, edit free*
- Other words: *photo edit collage free, free crop photo edit*
- Synonyms/related words: *picture edit, picture edit text*

4 USE DISCOVERY CAMPAIGNS TO EXPAND YOUR KEYWORD LISTS With Search Match, you can let Apple Search Ads match your ads to users based on their search terms. To discover keywords to add to your campaigns, you can then mine these results periodically (our experts recommend at least every two weeks). You should also look for irrelevant keywords you discover from Search Match and prune them out from future user searches with negative keywords.

- 5 GAIN MORE CONTROL OVER HOW APPLE SEARCH ADS MATCHES KEYWORDS**

When expanding keyword lists, exclude terms you add to your exact match ad groups from your broad match ad groups using negative keywords. This will ensure that when a user searches for one of those important terms, the system won't be confused about which ad group to pull ads from. The concept here is that your exact ad groups will probably be tighter and offer more relevant messaging.
- 6 SKAI APP MARKETING CLIENTS CAN UTILIZE KEYWORD MANAGER**

This feature helps you find new keywords and add new ones across multiple ad groups by tag and in bulk. This makes the keyword-building process quicker, so you don't have to add them one at a time.
- 7 USE AD VARIATIONS**

Instead of just being able to change the images of your product page, app marketers can create full additional versions of their App Store product page to highlight specific features or content within their app. Marketers can now tailor screenshots, promotional text, and app previews for different audience groups. Advertisers can use custom product pages for their ad destinations and each new product page has a unique URL that can be shared externally in ads, emails, etc.
- 8 NO NEED TO DAYPART**

It's recommended as a best practice to not restrict search ads campaigns with dayparting the way some marketers may target other channels for specific hours or days of the week. While there may be seasonal or time-sensitive marketing campaigns that require this control, generally the rule of thumb is to capture as much of this opportunity as your budgets allow.
- 9 DON'T FORGET SEASONALITY**

Most businesses need to change with the seasons. If your brand is impacted by the various holidays and key calendar events throughout the year, make sure to run on those related terms during those times. Extra tip: Load those up into their ad groups so you can pause them and reactivate them in subsequent years.
- 10 KNOW WHERE YOU STAND AGAINST THE COMPETITION**

Use the impression share report to better understand how your Apple Search Ads perform compared to your competitors.

[Apple Search Ads defines this](#) as the share of impressions your ad(s) received from the total impressions served on the same search terms or keywords in the same countries and regions. Impression Share is displayed as a percentage range, such as 0-10%, 11-20%, and so on. This metric is only available in predefined Impression Share custom reports and on the Recommendations page.

Marketers can benchmark their impression share over time and optimize their campaigns—especially ones with brand terms—to ensure they show as often as possible for their most important terms. One strategy might be to decide upon an Impression Share goal and optimize campaigns to always stay above that waterline.

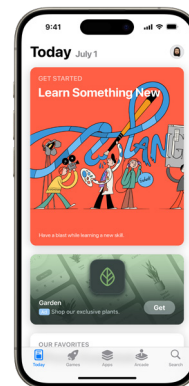
New ad formats expand the options for app marketers

While Apple Search Ads started as keyword-triggered ads, Apple has recently released new ad formats that do not require a user to search in to search on the App Store.

Today tab ads make your app visible to users when they explore the App Store

By placing your app in a Today tab ad, you can ensure it is prominently displayed on the front page of the App Store, among the first content users see when they visit. This prime placement is ideal for promoting new app releases, special events, and seasonal promotions, helping drive awareness and interest.

Each Today tab ad is created from a custom product page that you set up in App Store Connect. To be eligible for this ad placement, the custom product page must include a minimum of four portrait or five landscape assets.



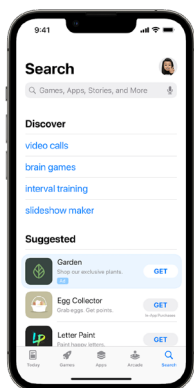
Example use case: You absolutely need attention for your app in a hurry.

Search tab ads attract customers at the start of their app search journey

Ads on the App Store Search tab provide an opportunity to promote your app at the top of the suggested apps list, increasing awareness and downloads. Over 70% of App Store visitors use search to discover new apps, making the Search tab a crucial location to capture their attention.

Ads on the Search tab are created using the assets uploaded to your App Store product page, featuring your app name, icon, and subtitle.

Example use case: Expand your reach outside users already searching for you.

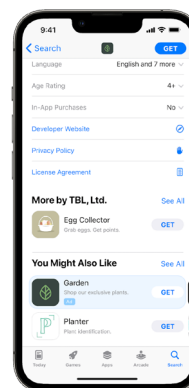


Product page ads reach users as they explore apps

Product page ads allow you to promote your app to users who are actively researching and browsing different pages on the App Store. These ads appear at the top of the “You Might Also Like” list for users who have scrolled to the bottom of relevant product pages, providing a valuable opportunity to capture their attention. You can run your ad across all relevant app categories or refine the categories where they appear.

Product page ads are created using the assets uploaded to your App Store product page, featuring your app name, icon, and subtitle.

Example use case: Reach users checking out apps like yours.





Conclusion: Integrate your app marketing plan into your omnichannel strategy

App marketers are focused on driving installs, reinstalls, and in-app engagement. However, these strategies should also align with the brand's overall omnichannel marketing approach to create a seamless customer experience.

Here are three ways to ensure successful mobile app integration with an omnichannel strategy:

Keep the brand-consumer relationship consistent and logical

One of the key concepts of the omnichannel marketing approach is to treat every touchpoint with a customer as an ongoing discussion rather than a series of unrelated messages. Apps represent a significant part of the customer experience and are a rather intimate communication channel each user keeps on them at all times. Don't treat your customers on apps as a standalone destination. Remember that those same users interact with your paid, owned, and earned media across the plan, so use your app to build trust and mindshare while continuing the conversation begun on other channels.

Integrate your app and broader marketing teams to facilitate a holistic approach

In nearly every survey on the challenges of omnichannel marketing, practitioners cite organizational silos as one of the primary roadblocks to success. The biggest hurdle ahead of marketers to omnichannel operationalization is the current structure of today's marketing teams. This is especially true for app teams which can sometimes be disconnected from the marketing organization. Once a brand stops thinking channel-first and starts thinking customer-first, the unique role of apps in the customer journey can be addressed.



Connect all your data before making data-driven decisions

Marketing decisions for the mobile app should be based on all available data, including data from other channels. Combining data with customer profiles and automation tools helps marketers optimize and refine their strategies. Marketers need solutions that allow them to deliver exceptional experiences across all channels, including the mobile app, to drive traffic, leads, engagement, and revenue. Tracking customer interactions and behavior in the app provides valuable personal data and allows marketers to measure the performance of mobile marketing strategies. The data gathered from app events, such as installs and critical interactions, can be used in omnichannel decision-making, triggering targeted campaigns across channels.

Master Apple Search Ads to master omnichannel marketing

The rapid growth of mobile technology has transformed how consumers interact with brands. With 88% of consumer time on mobile spent within apps, brands must have a robust app marketing strategy to compete in this highly competitive landscape. Simply relying on brand recognition and existing customer bases is no longer enough. Brands must prioritize app promotion and discovery through targeted marketing efforts.

One of the most valuable opportunities for reaching engaged users is through Apple Search Ads, which offers four different ad placements to promote your app throughout the App Store user journey. To fully integrate your mobile app into your omnichannel marketing strategy, it's essential to personalize the app experience, track user behavior, and make data-driven decisions. By combining the data collected from all channels, brands can optimize and refine their strategies to deliver exceptional experiences that increase traffic, leads, engagement, and revenue.

About Skai

Skai (formerly Kenshoo) is a leading omnichannel marketing platform that uniquely connects data and performance media for informed decisions, high efficiencies, and optimal returns.

Its partners include Google, Meta, Amazon Ads, TikTok, Snap, Walmart Connect, Instacart, Roundel, Criteo, CitrusAd, Pinterest, Microsoft, Apple Search Ads, and more.

For over 15 years Skai has been trusted by an impressive roster of brands including Pepsico, Michaels, Reckitt, Daimler, LG and Vodafone.

The company is headquartered out of Tel Aviv, with seven international locations, and is backed by Sequoia Capital, Arts Alliance, Tenaya Capital, Bain Capital Ventures, Pitango and Qumra Capital.

Visit skai.io for more information.