

Ultimate Digital Product Playbook

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Tips and tricks for
building great mobile
apps and websites

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Ultimate Digital Product Playbook

As a product design and development agency, we have designed and developed software for companies and startups from all over the world. Here are the lessons we have learnt along the way:

1 Digital products must solve a problem

Organisations should develop products that solve problems instead of falling in love with the solution. Products that identify a problem they are solving generally have a higher success rate than products that came with the solution first.

That said, there have been digital products that came up with the solution first that has worked well. The bigger the problem and market size of the problem, the better the idea.

2 Execution is key

Having an idea only takes you halfway. A digital product is only truly successful with the right execution. Do not be over-protective of your idea. Instead, please share it with your peers and garner their feedback, whether good or bad.

That said, there will be copycats in the market. The best way to stay ahead is to stay innovative and constantly ship new features in your product.

3 Test the market

Start with developing an MVP (minimum viable product) before launching the full features of your product. An MVP means launching a simple version of your product idea that solves the key problem. Ship it and see if there are users who adopt the idea. Even if no users pay or use the product, it's great feedback for you.

One of our favourite tactics; launch a landing page and run some ads on it. If there are sign-ups for it, start building. Sign-ups show that people are interested and are willing to use the product. This is the lowest-cost way to test the market.

4 It's okay to be a niche

Many startups try and address the entire world in their startup idea. In reality, niche markets are much more addressable as you have a specific market to speak to. The competition in niche markets is much lower than if the problem you are solving is for the general public.

Facebook started out in Harvard; a niche market at first, that grew to billions of users of public.

5 Try to stand out

Whatever idea you might have, it's very likely that somebody has already thought of a similar idea and has executed the idea. Try to think of a unique advantage that puts you ahead of the competition.

Maybe you could offer a service at a cheaper rate, faster rate, more convenience, with a unique feature, or significantly improved quality compared to your competitors. As Peter Thiel says, "Competition is for losers".

6 Plan for monetisation early

Monetisation should be a priority for a startup or a business when developing digital products. Not only should you plan for monetisation, but also plan for profitability. Some companies aim for growth instead of profitability, but we feel that that's rare cases where it worked out with massive fund-raising.

7 Gather feedback and iterate fast

After your product launch, get the right users' feedback ASAP and make the changes accordingly. These will be the most valuable feedback that you will receive. Iterate quickly and make another launch based on the feedback that you have gathered. The right data is crucial in iterating quickly, learning quickly and shipping quality products quickly.

How to design for growth:

8 Keep a consistent brand identity

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9 Don't try to redefine the norms

We always will try to be fanciful and unique in our products. However, it is important to not re-invent how users use products. E.g. in modern social media apps, users are accustomed to scrolling through social media vertically. Therefore, don't create a new social media where users have to scroll in a circle to view more content.

Users will generally use products like they have used other similar products before.

10 Keep things simple

We need to define our message clearly and provide the best user experience for the users instead of building something that looks mega-futuristic yet hard to use. At times, keeping designs simple might be the secret to building a great product. Having flashy graphics and fanciful animations might overcomplicate the product.

11 Animations make things fun

That said, minor animations will still make the app interactive, especially in transitions. It's awkward to look at a product that doesn't animate, and everything snaps into place. A great example of animations in action is the loading animation. Loading screens should have interactive animations to prevent users from leaving the app when the app is loading.

12 Creative copywriting

The market of digital products has evolved over the years. Products are now made by the best talents in the world. Therefore, the copy in apps has improved drastically. We need to keep up by implementing great copywriting in our products.

For example, on an empty screen, instead of "No data found", we can write "No posts found, write your first post today!" with a little illustration at the side. This can make the user experience great for the users along with improving usage.

13 Design for users first

Always put users at the centre of your thought process while designing an app. We must put ourselves in the shoes of the users using the app. This can help us understand the needs they are trying to solve with the app and the priorities when interacting with it.

This can also help to find open loops we might have yet to consider while researching.

14 Mobile responsiveness; a MUST

Whether you are building a web-based or app-based product, we must ensure that it can work well on mobile devices, as that is the most commonly used device that people are using. Sure, making it work on a desktop is also a must, but the priority should be on mobile to accelerate the app's adoption.

Think about the last time you accessed a website on your mobile phone that wasn't mobile-responsive.

15 Keep up with the latest trends

A product owner needs to keep up with trends in the market consistently. Whether it is design trends, tech trends or marketing trends, we must keep up with them to apply them to our products. For example, ChatGPT has become popular in recent months, and we as entrepreneurs need to find a way to integrate these into our app to make it better.

Development: Things to take note

16 Tech Stack

To a non-tech person, you might think that the tech stack of the platform doesn't affect anything. However, the chosen tech stack affects development in more ways than you might think.

Building the startup with something scalable is important. It is important to build it with something that gives a better user experience and marketability.

That said, it is completely fine to ignore the tech stack if you are just building our the MVP for market validation purposes. However, when you have reached product-market fit, it's best to optimise your tech stacks.

Find below the recommended stacks that we have from our experience:

For web, we recommend the modern Javascript frameworks. These are frameworks such as React and Angular for frontend and ExpressJS (node.js) for the backend. If you are looking at a SEO-friendly way to build websites, Nextjs is a good alternative that is an add-on to React.

We also use PHP in some situations where PHP servers are provided.

For simple websites that don't require custom coding, WordPress is always the next best alternative.

For mobile apps, native apps are always the best performance out of all the options. However, we use a lot of Flutter and React Native to keep costs lower and timelines shorter.

17 Development project management

The number 1 killer for failed projects before launch is poor project management. The product might only see the light of day if a company or agency has a good project management process. It is better to either develop a proper project management process or find a company with a good one. This includes issue tracker, updates of development, using of repository, development process and task tracking.

18 Development process

Generally, products should adopt the development process: Exploration, Wireframe, Design, Development of frontend, Development of the backend, Integration of backend and frontend, QA and UAT, Final bug fix, deployment and post-deployment support. Some companies do things differently from others, but this is the general rule of thumb for building products.

19 Server architecture

Good server architecture can help you bring better performance to your apps and products. The preferred server companies are Vercel, AWS, Azure or GCM. Selecting the correct server for you can create a better user experience for developers and users.

20 Test cases

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Monetisation ideas:

23 Monetisation strategies

Freemium model - Offer a free version with limited features and charge a premium for extra features.

Subscription model - Charge users a recurring fee for ongoing access to your product.

In-app purchases - Sell virtual goods, extra features or additional content within your app or SaaS.

Transaction fees - Charge a percentage of the total transaction value for enabling payments or transactions.

Licensing - Charge other companies to use or resell your technology or intellectual property.

Consulting or professional services - Provide consulting, training or implementation services to help companies use your product more effectively.

Advertising - Display ads within your app or SaaS and earn money from impressions, clicks or conversions.

Sponsorships - Get paid by other companies to promote their products within your app or SaaS.

Affiliate marketing - Earn a commission by promoting other companies' products and services to your users.

Physical products - If you have a digital product, you can also sell complementary physical products.

Events - Put on live or virtual events, conferences, workshops or meetups and charge attendees to attend.

Data licensing - License your data, analytics or insights to other companies.

White labelling - Allow other companies to rebrand your product and resell it under their own name. You charge an upfront fee and/or ongoing revenue share.

API access - Provide an API for your data or services and charge companies to access it.

Since 2017, SleekDigital has worked with corporations, startups and organisations from all over the world. We strive to build great products for the our clients and for the users of those products.

If you would like to know more about how SleekDigital can help you develop or grow your digital product or startup, visit our website at <https://www.sleekdigital.sg>.