

10 Insights You Can Uncover From Spying on Your Competitors' ASO Strategies



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App store optimization

(ASO) is the process of improving an app's visibility in the app stores with the objective of driving organic downloads. Apps are most visible when they rank highly on a wide variety of search terms (keywords), maintain a high position in the top charts, or get featured on the store. However, with millions of apps on both the App Store and Google Play, gaining and maintaining visibility is not a simple task.

Monitoring your competitors' ASO strategies is a valuable exercise for many reasons.

First, the app store algorithms consider different ranking factors when choosing which apps to place in a particular order in the search results or top charts. These ranking factors not only include changes that you make to your app's metadata (title, subtitle, description, etc) but also changes that your competitors make to their app store listing.

Second, spying on your competitors can be a source of inspiration to determine the elements of your app store listing that you should test (or not). For instance, if a competitor recently updated their app icon and you simultaneously saw their downloads increase, you could subsequently test the effect of updating your own icon.

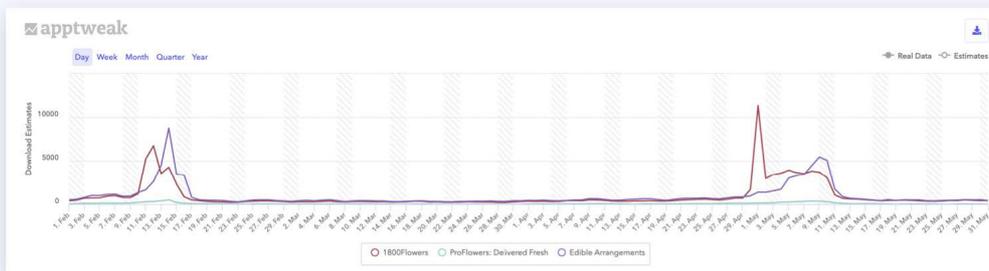
Third, getting into the habit of monitoring and responding to your competitors can increase the agility and reactivity of your team's ASO strategy. As a result, your app can become much better equipped to adapt to sudden changes in the external environment.

However, it is not always easy to know what to look for when spying on your competitors! In this guide, we present you with **10 straightforward insights you can uncover from spying on your competitors' ASO strategies**, using data from AppTweak.

1. Determine Seasonality Trends

Monitoring the download estimates of similar apps is a major element of spying on your competitors' ASO strategies. Tracking how many downloads your direct competitors get over time can help you set realistic key performance indicators (KPIs), understand your competitors' marketing activities (such as paid user acquisition campaigns), and refine the scope of apps that constitute your main competition.

Monitoring your competitors' downloads also allows you to uncover relevant **seasonality trends** in the app stores. For example, on AppTweak, we observe interesting movements in the download estimates of flower and gift delivery apps - here, we use the example of 1800Flowers, ProFlowers and Edible Arrangements. On the US Apple Store, we see that **each app gains a boost of daily downloads leading up to major events each year**, such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day.



Download estimates for flower & gift delivery apps can highlight seasonality trends (Valentine's Day and Mother's Day) on the US App Store.

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Noting these changes in download estimates could help a similar app identify opportunities to react to such events by:

- updating its creative assets (icon, screenshot, etc)
- changing its metadata (title, subtitle, description, etc)
- increasing paid promotions to publicize the app in preparation for an event

We also see that the amount by which each app's downloads increase differs from app to app. This helps similar apps understand the **varying intensity of competition** in the market, whereby some apps may represent more threats than others.

2. Decide Where Next to Localize Your App or Game

Spying on your competitors' ASO strategies can help you **decide the best country for which you should next localize** your app or game.

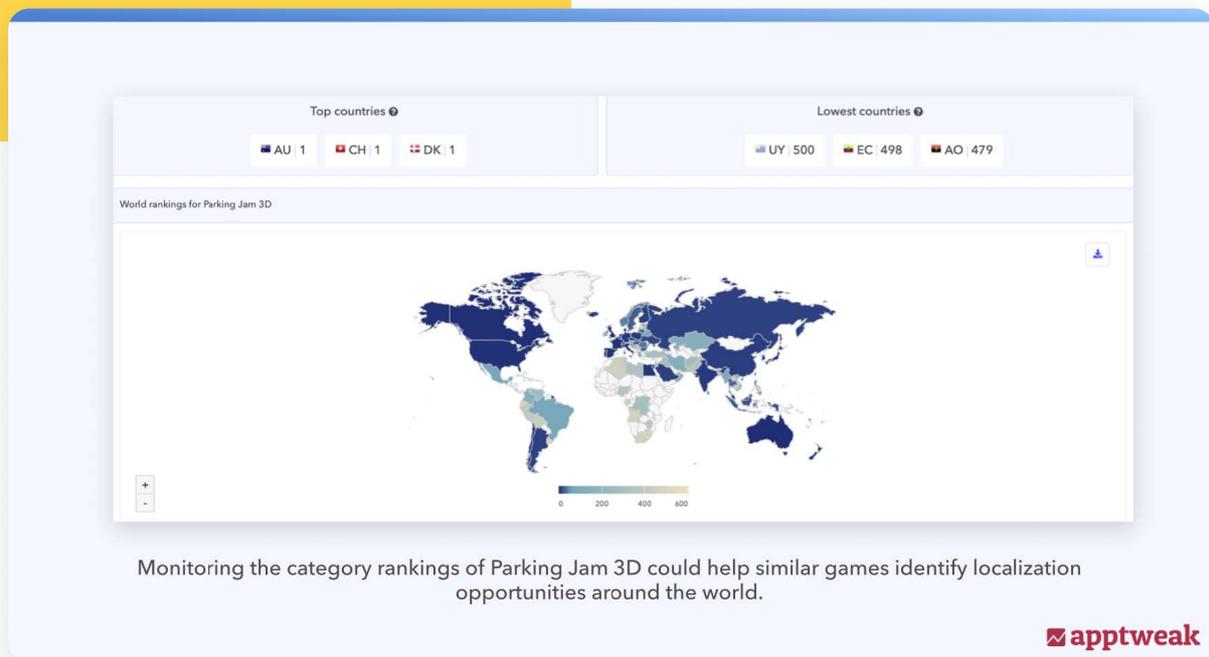
App localization is fundamental to **strengthen your app or game's international store presence**. Localization goes beyond simple translations - it implies a deeper understanding of your target market's cultural norms and best practices.

On the next page, we take an example from the popular game, Parking Jam 3D. Using AppTweak, we are able to monitor the game's growth in the Puzzle category on the Google Play Store around the world. In the past 6 months, we see that Parking Jam 3D's top countries include Australia, China, and Denmark, where the game frequently holds the #1 position in the category. For a competing app, **these markets may represent the highest priorities for app localization**.



We also see that the game gained popularity in a number of countries over the timeframe. For instance, the game's category ranking jumped in:

- Ukraine → #496 to #14
- Malaysia → #379 to #9
- Hungary → #286 to #16
- India → #144 to #7

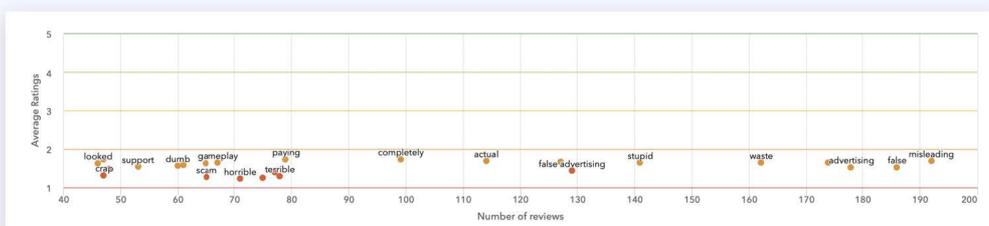
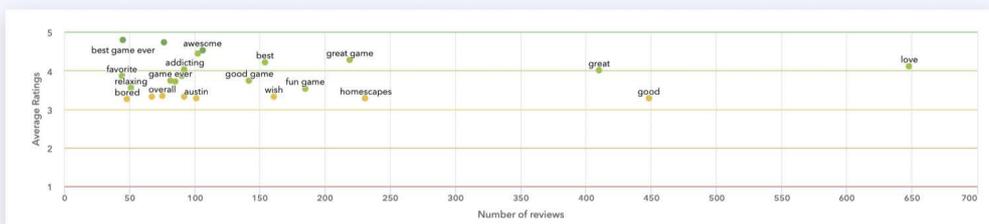


These impressive changes in category ranking may suggest the app has localized its store listing for these international markets. As a result, a competing app could infer that **these regions represent high-growth opportunities**. Therefore, it would be worthwhile for a similar app to conduct **localization research** concerning the same markets in an attempt to reap similar benefits.

3. Pinpoint Your Competitors' Strengths & Weaknesses

Identifying your competitors' strengths and weaknesses can allow your app to excel in areas in which your competitors lack; **the more you understand what users like or dislike about a competing app, the better your understanding of how to improve your own app or game.** For this, mining your competitors' reviews and ratings can play an essential role in driving downloads and retaining future customers. For example, on AppTweak, we easily find the **most positive and negative keywords** used in App Store reviews for Homescapes over the past 6 months:

- We observe that users frequently considered the game **"addicting"**, **"relaxing"**, and **"fun"** - as a result, a similar game could consider these elements as important to incorporate.
- On the other hand, some users expressed frustration regarding **"false advertising"**. This keyword, pertaining to ads that don't accurately reflect gameplay, could serve as motivation for competing apps to avoid similar complaints.

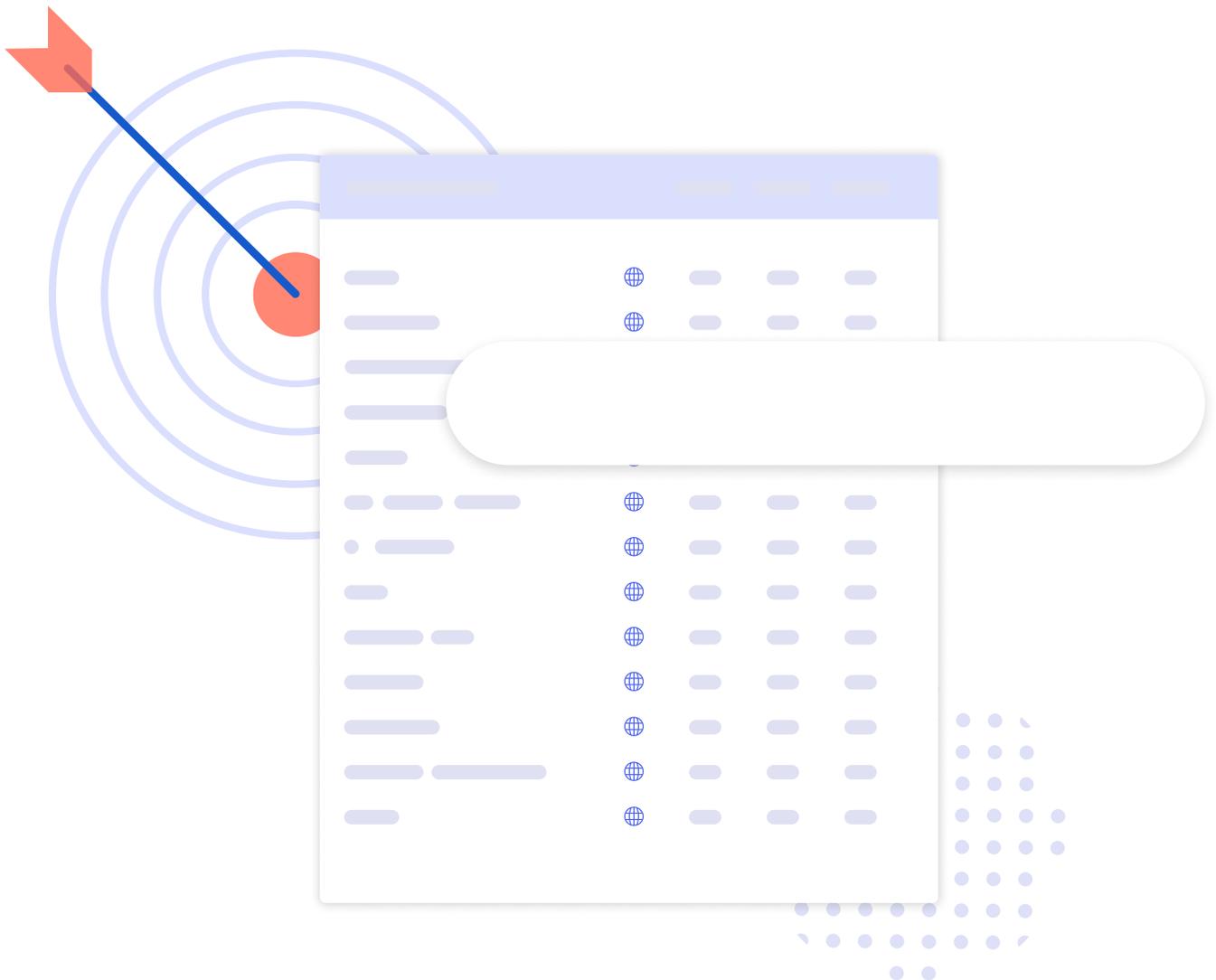


The most positive and negative reviews left for Homescapes (iOS) depict users' perceptions of the app's strengths and weaknesses.

4. Monitor the Keywords Your Competitors Target in Their Metadata

Next, spying on the keywords that your competitors target in their app metadata can be valuable to **increase your own app's visibility** in the app stores.

Keywords that your competitors use in their app title, subtitle (iOS), short description (Google Play), and long description are public and reveal the search terms that your competitors consider as priorities (remember, **keywords placed in the app title hold the most weight** in the stores).



Duolingo - Language Lessons		
1. duolingo	14. english	27. quizlet
2. language learning	15. duo mobile	28. ✓ learn italian
3. language-learning	16. duo lingo	29. duolingo free
4. learn spanish	17. lingo	30. learning languages
5. spanish learning app	18. french	31. learn a new language
6. ✓ japanese 🇯🇵	19. duolingo	32. +babel
7. ✓ 🇯🇵 japanese	20. ingles	33. 🇯🇵 babel
8. spanish	21. learn french	34. how to learn spanish
9. doulingo free	22. learn languages	35. learning spanish
10. duo	23. french learning app	36. 多语言
11. doulingo	24. dualingo	37. duolingo plus
12. language	25. dolingo	38. duolingo
13. duolingo for kids	26. duolingo for ipad	39. درسیز

Although Duolingo targets Spanish, French and German in its subtitle, the app also receives traffic for the keywords "japanese" and "learn italian" (and so may also target these terms in its iOS keyword field).

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For instance, the language learning app, Duolingo, targets Spanish, French, and German in its subtitle on the App Store ("Learn Spanish, French, German"). Nonetheless, when we examine the app's top search terms - keywords that AppTweak estimates drive the most downloads - we also see that the keywords "japanese" and "learn italian" generate a lot of traffic for the app.

This suggests that **Duolingo also targets these search terms elsewhere in its metadata** (i.e., in its keyword field, which is hidden from the public). As a result, a competing app may choose to promote similar functionalities in their metadata as, thanks to the evidence, we see that such keywords drive traffic on the app stores. This can provide an opportunity to **gain an edge and increase your competitive advantage**.

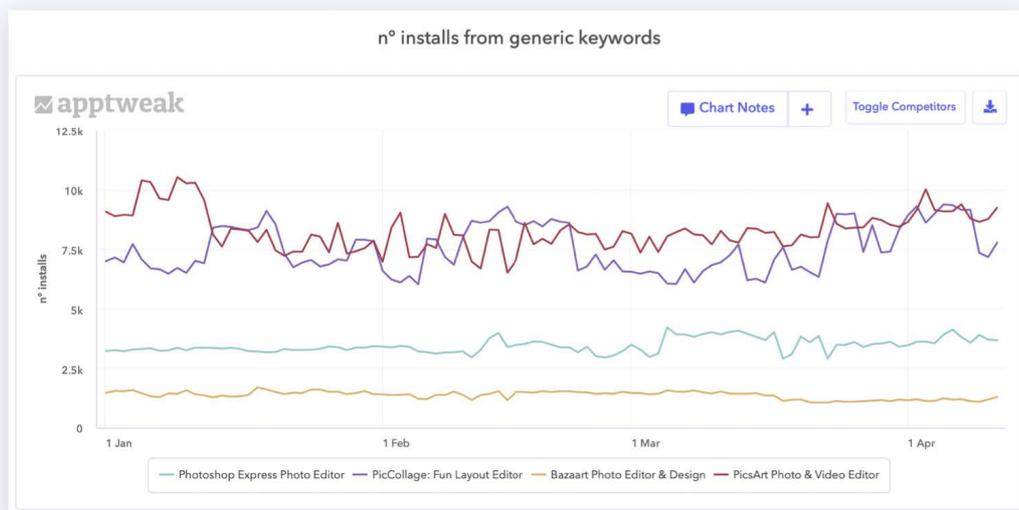
5. Discover Which Keywords Drive Organic Downloads to Competitors

Be careful! Both Apple and Google frown upon adding (other apps') brand names to your app's metadata. To measure the real impact of your ASO work, you should **focus on monitoring your app's performance for generic (non-branded) keywords.**

Similarly, competition monitoring can highlight the generic keywords that drive the most organic downloads to your competitors. Using AppTweak's Keyword Research tools, we are able to estimate the number of organic installs driven by generic keywords for iOS photo editing apps, PicsArt, Bazaart, Photoshop, and PicCollage.

The tool graphically represents each app's **evolution of installs from generic keywords** since the beginning of 2021. This may help a competing app understand when and how generic keywords perform best. The tool also offers the **specific generic terms that drive the most downloads:** for instance, the keywords "photo editor", "collage maker", and "editing apps" performed best throughout the timeframe and could therefore be added to a similar app's metadata.

Monitoring the generic and branded keywords for which each app gains downloads can also help you spot if a major competitor is using your brand name to drive installs. If so, this could encourage you to adopt a **roadblock strategy** and aim to have all your apps rank for their own respective brand names in order to **push competitors down in the search results.**



Monitoring your competitors' organic downloads from generic keywords can help you understand when and how generic keywords would work best in your app's metadata.

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6. Understand Which Keywords You Should Exclude From Your Metadata

Competition monitoring can also highlight the **keywords you should exclude** from your app's metadata. For example, many games in the Word category on the App Store target the keywords "brain" and/or "brain training"; in particular, the game Word Connect targets these keywords in its subtitle.

However, through an analysis of AppTweak's Live Search feature, we see that **the game does not rank very highly for such keywords** in search results. Instead, games with better chances at ranking highly for these terms are those specifically marketed as brain training games, targeting the keywords "brain" and/or "brain training" in their titles.

As a result, we can conclude that Word Connect's metadata could be better optimized to **replace low-opportunity keywords with terms demonstrating more potential to increase the app's visibility.**



Word Connect targets the keywords "brain" (left) and "brain training" (right) in its app metadata. However, a live search of these keywords shows that the app does not rank highly for either.



7. Choose the Best Creatives for Your Target Market

Spying on your competitors' ASO strategy can help you **choose the best visual assets** for your app in a number of ways.

The creative assets you include on your app page play a very important role in converting store visitors and persuading them to download your app. Your creatives **include the icon, screenshots, video, and feature graphic (Google Play only) and should all be optimized for your target market.**

First, competition monitoring can highlight the elements in your creatives that you should **A/B test**. A/B testing is a research methodology that involves producing **two versions of the same creative and testing which version generates the best results** and appeals to the market the most.

A great example of A/B testing comes from the popular game, Empires & Puzzles on the Google Play Store. On AppTweak, we notice that the game frequently tests different versions of its icon, such as:

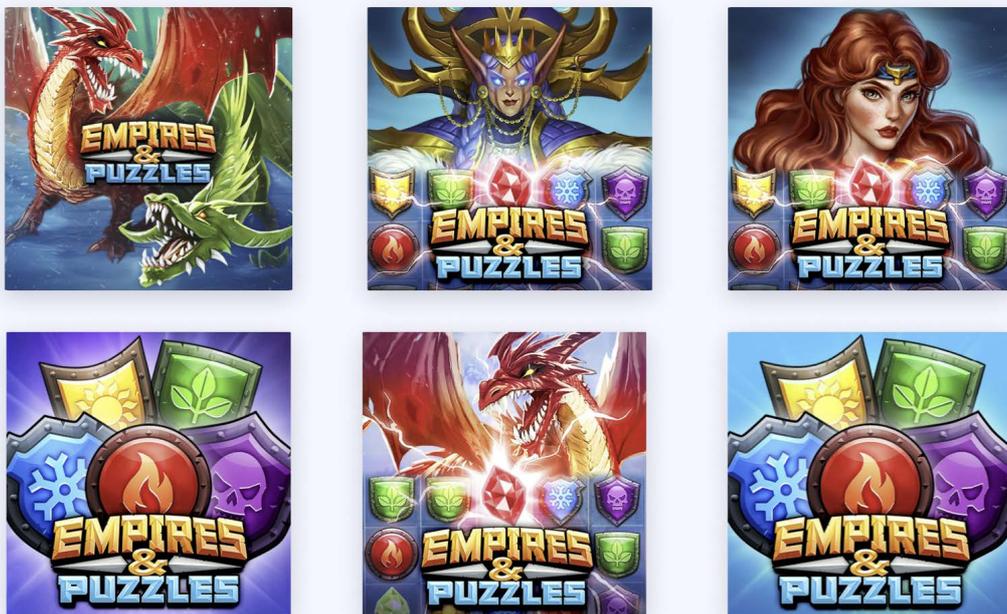
- Adding game **characters**
- Including gameplay **elements** (i.e., gems)
- Changing background **colors**
- Adjusting the placement of the brand **name**

Such frequent updates can provide inspiration for your own creatives as you infer what works best (or what doesn't work) for your competitors.





If you observe that a competitor's A/B test was **successful** (for instance, if they applied the new creative), this could be an opportunity to decide whether or not to replicate these experiments for your own app or game. If your competitors' A/B test was **not successful**, this can provide a deeper understanding of market trends so you can decide whether to focus on another idea or to test the same element regardless.



Empires & Puzzles regularly updates its icon on the Google Play Store, testing the addition of game characters and/or elements (i.e., gems), background colors and the placement of the brand name.

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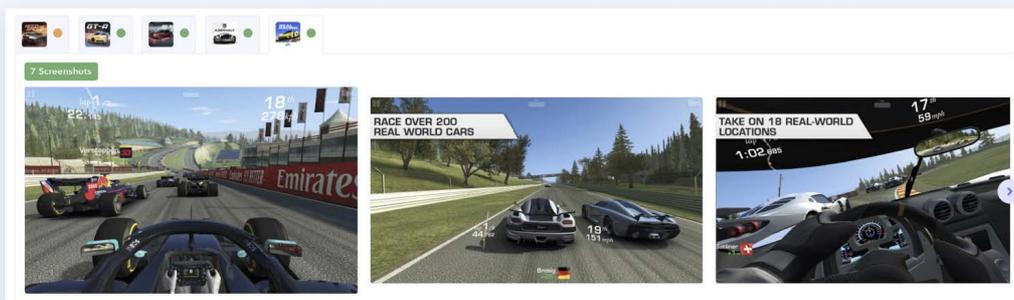


Monitoring your competitors' creatives can also help you identify industry best practices, such as choosing whether to incorporate **portrait or landscape screenshots** on your app page. The choice between image orientations strongly depends on the app or game:

- On the one hand, portrait images immediately present store visitors with a lot of content, without requiring them to scroll across to see more.
- On the other hand, landscape screenshots allow you to concentrate more intensely on one distinct message.

For example, we see that **racing games mostly add landscape screenshots** to their Android product page, representing the landscape gameplay that is typical of such games. As a result, a competing app may choose to stay aligned with this trend or to go against it.

In the example below from Real Racing 3, we also see that the game incorporates **landscape images of different sizes**. This versatility is only possible on the Google Play Store; however, noticing that competitors make use of size variations could be exploited to highlight particular features of your own app or game.



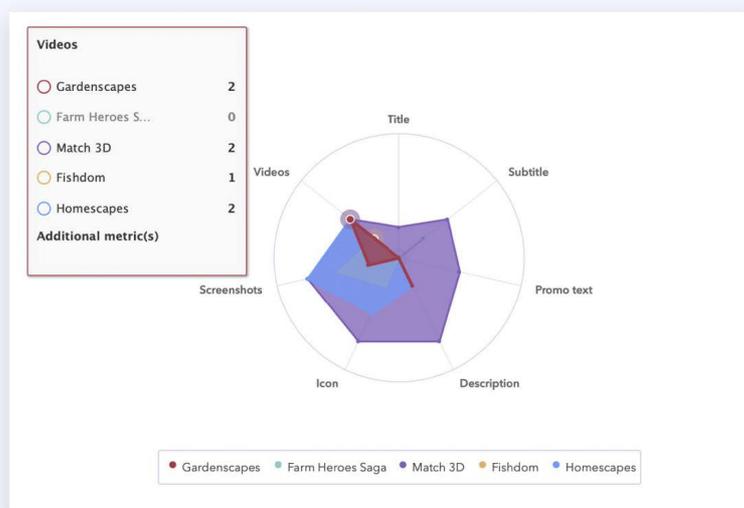
Many games in the Racing category add landscape screenshots to their Google Play Store page, suggesting an industry best practice.

8. Establish an Effective Metadata Update Frequency

How often you should update your app metadata can depend on your competitors and/or on your category benchmarks. In particular, **knowing how often a competitor updates their metadata** can deepen your understanding of how they conduct ASO and what exactly they focus on.

For example, when we observe the metadata updates of Gardenscapes, Farm Heroes Saga, Homescapes, Match 3D, and Fishdom, we see that each game has employed a different strategy in the past year. We generally notice that **updating screenshots, the app icon, and videos seem to be of the highest priority**. We also see that Match 3D goes further and updates more elements of their metadata than the other games, including the subtitle, promo text, and description.

Observing and comparing the past metadata updates of competitors can therefore provide valuable insights as you determine what works best for similar apps, and what would work best for your own app.



Tracking your competitors' metadata updates can help you determine an efficient and effective metadata update frequency.

9. Track Your Competitors' Featurings

Being featured on the App Store or Google Play Store is an amazing opportunity to increase your app's visibility and drive traffic. On the flip side, **having a competitor featured can be dangerous!**

As a result, you should be sure to monitor how often and in which collections your competitors are featured on the stores. This can help you better understand what kind of visibility your competitors get outside of search results, and assess if your app has a similar shot at being featured.

Depending on your findings, you may then be able to determine the in-app content or external activities that could **attract the attention of store editors** and convince them to feature your own app.

For example, we see that Cash App and Venmo are both regularly featured on the Google Play Store. The apps have a number of feature collections in common, including "popular apps and games" and "budgeting tools". For competing apps, these collections can help to **refine the goal of being featured** on the Play Store.

The screenshot shows two screenshots of the Google Play Store interface. The top screenshot is dated 07 April 2021 and shows four collections: 'Recommended for you', 'Popular apps & games', 'Based on your recommendations', and 'Budgeting tools'. Each collection features the Cash App icon (a green square with a white dollar sign) and a 4.2 star rating. The bottom screenshot is dated 27 March 2021 and shows five collections: 'Recommended for you', 'Popular apps & games', 'Top Charts', 'Based on your recommendations', and 'Budgeting tools'. The 'Top Charts' collection is specifically labeled 'Top free' and features the Venmo icon (a blue square with a white 'V') and a 4.4 star rating. Other collections also feature the Venmo icon and a 4.4 star rating.

Cash App and Venmo are often featured in collections on the Google Play Store. Monitoring your competitors' featurings can help refine your ASO goals and better understand your competitors' visibility.

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10. Understand the Keywords Your Competitors Bid on With Apple Search Ads

Finally, iOS developers should be sure to **monitor whether their brand is targeted by competitors on Apple Search Ads (ASA) or if competitors' brands are vulnerable** and could drive additional traffic at a reasonable price. Since the launch of ASA, targeting other brands has become a popular practice to boost an app's visibility. In turn, this has forced many brands to **bid on their own name** to protect their brand traffic from competitors.

However, bidding on a competitor's brand name is not a guaranteed strategy for success as different apps and brands have varying levels of consumer loyalty. Nonetheless, identifying a vulnerable competitor can allow you to **examine whether their brand traffic is cost-efficient** or not. Similarly, discovering that competitors are bidding on your brand name could push you to run a cost-benefit analysis on either 'cannibalizing' organic brand traffic or risking a portion of your traffic being diverted towards a competitor.

AppTweak highlights the top paid keywords that apps have bid on in the past 90 days. Taking the example of Lyft, a vehicle-for-hire app, we observe that the company bids on a number of interesting keywords with high search volumes on the App Store.

- **Defensive strategy:** Lyft bids on its own brand name and occupies almost half of the share of voice (SOV) for this keyword.
- **Offensive strategy:** Lyft bids on the brand name of a main competitor, Lime, again holding the majority of the keyword's SOV.
- **Offensive strategy:** Lyft also bids on other popular search terms on the App Store (e.g., 'transit'), giving the app a great opportunity to increase its visibility in search results.

Top Paid Keywords	Rank	Vol.	Diff.	SOV	All Apps SOV Spread
lyft	1	79	58	Lyft 41%	Lyft 41% TikTok 29% The Weather Channel 11% +3
lime	5	63	50	Lyft 46%	Lyft 46% The Weather Channel 26% VSCO 6% +3
booking.com	19	63	88	Lyft 1%	Uber 16% Lyft 11% Expedia 10% +23
waze navigation & live traffic	12	62	44	Lyft 2%	Uber 25% The Weather Channel 8% Google Maps 7% +24
lyft driver app	2	61	66	Lyft 4%	Uber 75% Google Maps 4% YouTube 4% +5
transit	6	58	36	Lyft 66%	Lyft 66% Google Maps 13% Uber 13% +1
car rental	Unranked	53	58	Lyft 2%	jf. 16% Lyft 12% Uber 11% +23
curb	4	49	38	Lyft 16%	Lyft 16% The Weather Channel 16% Uber 12% +10
citi bike	Unranked	49	20	Lyft 75%	Lyft 75% Uber 25%

Lyft's Apple Search Ads strategy involves bidding on keywords with high search volumes, including its own brand name and that of a main competitor.

TLDR

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Spying on your competitors' ASO strategies provides many opportunities to increase your app's visibility and drive organic downloads on the app stores. AppTweak's wide range of ASO tools can facilitate your competition monitoring efforts, provide you with valuable insights and help you:

1. Determine seasonality trends
2. Decide where next to localize your app or game
3. Pinpoint your competitors' strengths and weaknesses
4. Monitor the keywords your competitors target in their metadata
5. Discover which keywords drive organic downloads to your competitors
6. Understand which keywords you should exclude from your metadata
7. Choose the best creatives for your target market
8. Establish an effective metadata update frequency
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