AdMob by Google

NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO NATIVE ADS

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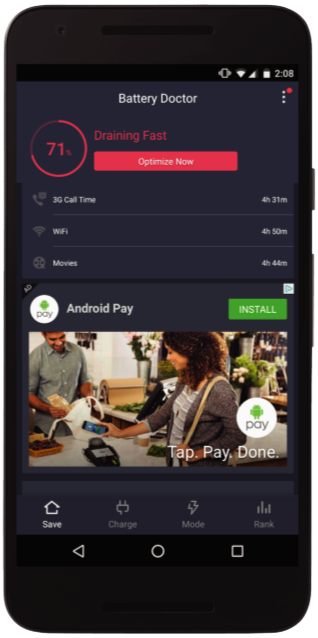
INTRODUCTION

Over the last several years, app users have raised their expectations for a high quality app UX. To meet these expectations, ad formats have evolved accordingly. First there were banner ads, which app publishers placed in fixed positions at the bottom or top of the screen. Next came interstitial ads, which are high-performing, full screen placements that developers placed in natural break points in their apps. Today, the next step in app ad formats meeting user's UX expectations is native advertising.

Native ads are ads that match the look and feel of the surrounding app content. These ads fit seamlessly with the page content and assimilate well into the design. For instance, see an example of a native ad in Cheetah Mobile's Battery Doctor app below. The ad's fonts, colors, and styling all fit in naturally with the content around it.



Native ads are valuable for several key reasons:

Improved user experience - native ads are less jarring than traditional ads and fit in with app content more naturally, providing a better user experience

Increased publisher performance - publishers using native ads saw 3x higher CPMs vs non-native ads in the same apps in our beta ran earlier this year[1]

In this eBook, we'll dive deeper into native ads and how you can get started using them, including:

Guiding design principles that will help you better implement native ads

Practical tips and best practices for implementing native ads with lots of examples

Tips on how to set up a proper A/B test to begin testing native ads

How AdMob can help you implement Native Ads

Vishal Kumar
Product Manager, AdMob

[1]Google Internal, May 2016

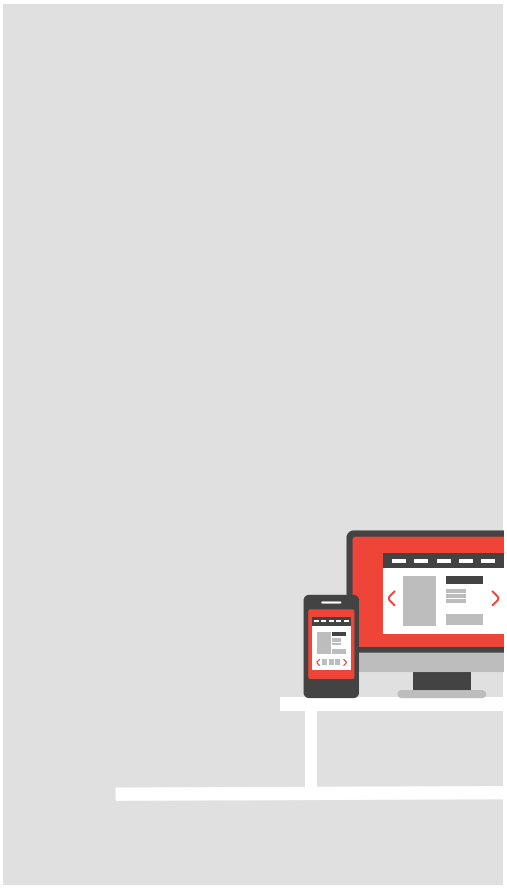
CHAPTER 1

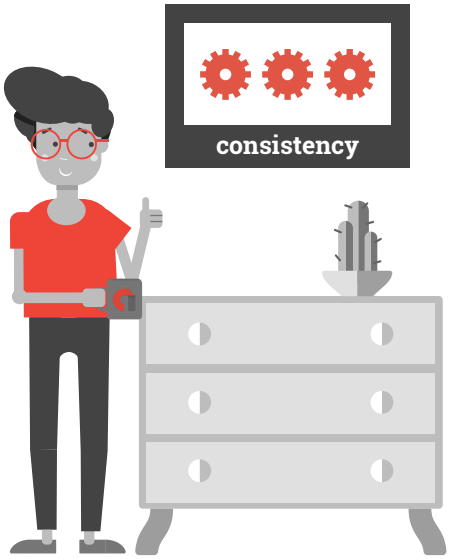
GUIDING NATIVE ADS DESIGN PRINCIPLES

With the limited screen space that mobile devices provide and the proliferation of apps on Android and iOS, it's more important than ever to understand UX principles for mobile apps to successfully monetize them with ads. Many times what makes a native ad compelling to users isn't just the way the ad itself looks, but also how the ad fits into the overall flow of an app. Without a well-designed app, an attractive ad probably won't perform well. Before jumping into specific examples and best practices, we want to start this guide off by covering **three core UX design principles** that you can use to make important design decisions.

Be Consistent

Sticking to predictable UX and design patterns in your app will help your users focus less on navigating your app and more on enjoying your app's content and value. The best way to establish these patterns is to stay consistent with UX and design throughout your app.





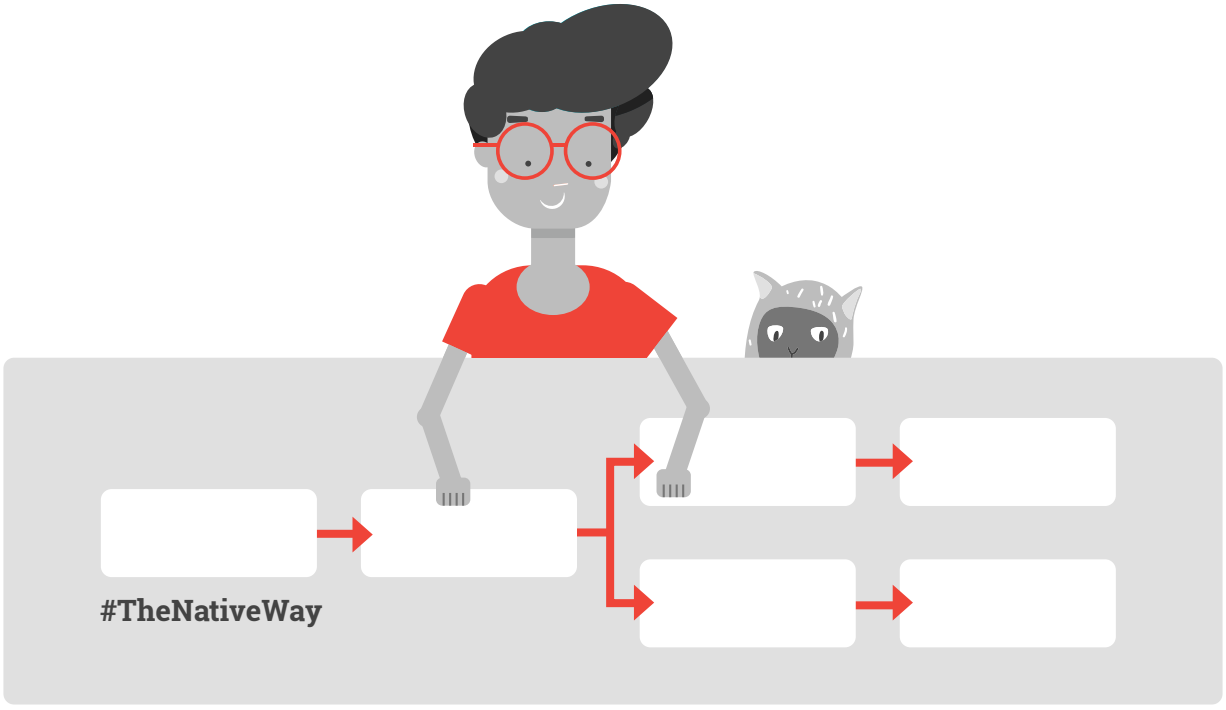
HOW?

Be consistent with your app's user flow:

Start by making sure you have consistency in your app's user flow. For example, you could display a standard **"get ready"** screen before every game level, and a standard **"end of game"** screen after each game level. Or for a news app, if your content feed can be navigated by swiping left, you should also let users exit other screens by swiping left, establishing **"swiping left"** as an easy way to leave the current screen.

Be consistent with your app's look and feel:

You also should be consistent with specific design elements. Each element and call to action should have consistent styling throughout the app. For example, if you use a bold green in your first button, use that same green to indicate desirable calls to action throughout your app. If you use **"14px, Lato, bold, dark grey**" for your most prominent text, use that same styling for important text in your app.



What this means for your native ads:

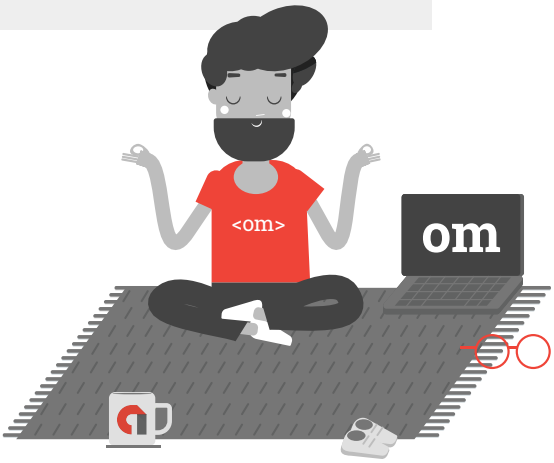
Consistency will help you more accurately predict the best places to implement ads and the best styling decisions to make for your ads to be seen. With consistent UX patterns, you'll form clear breaks in your apps where users are expecting to see engaging ads. You'll also establish a seamless method for dismissing an ad.

For example, if you have a news app and present new cards by swiping left, showing a native ad after **"swiping left"** will be intuitive and expected by users. It would also be intuitive for your users to be able to dismiss the ad by swiping left.

Same applies to ad styling. If you use **"14px, Lato, bold, dark grey"** for your most prominent text, use that font for your ad's headline. Users will expect that styling to be dedicated to important text and will scan it quickly.

Be Clear

Extra clutter can confuse and frustrate your users. Even with good intentions, developers who sacrifice simplicity for the sake of providing more options often disappoint users. Refreshing simplicity in your app communicates that you've deeply empathized with your users and aren't wasting their time showing options that don't matter to them. If you've determined that your app requires displaying several options, bring clarity to your user by highlighting the ones that they'd probably need most.



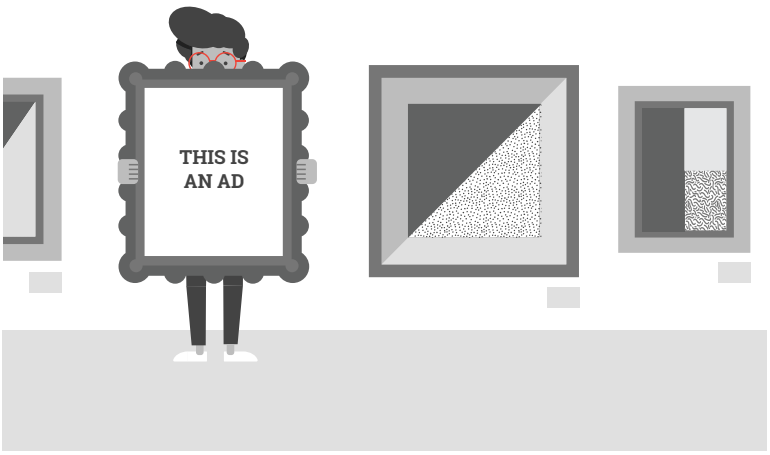
HOW?

Bring clarity to your user:

Begin by removing options that aren't necessary. If you must keep options, visually highlight the ones that will be used most.

Simplify the details:

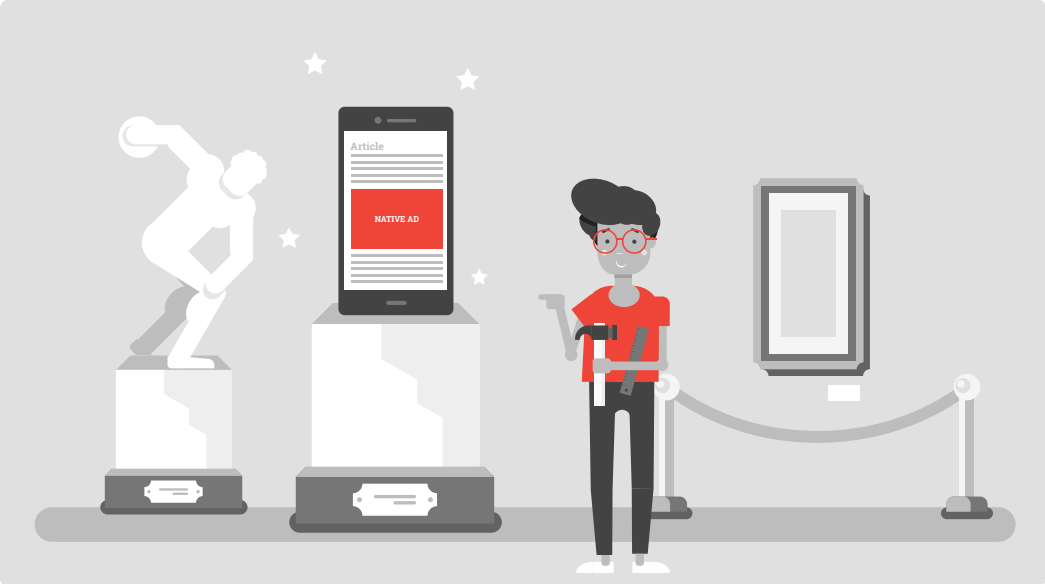
Examples of ways to simplify your app's details include uncluttering your screen, writing concise copy, having a bias towards visual content, designing legible and well spaced elements, and providing single call-to-action buttons when possible.



What this means for your native ads:

Clean, beautiful, single call-to-action ads will likewise communicate that you understand your users, help you to gain their trust, and could possibly help you reach higher ad engagement rates.

In addition to having simple design, you'll also want to be clear with your users that your native ad is an ad. Don't distort or overlap ad components. Trust in the app advertising ecosystem is something that Google cares a lot about and is important for maintaining user trust in your app. To further strengthen the ecosystem, we've built in measures to protect users from accidental clicks.



Be Thoughtful and Appreciative

The best way to thank users for downloading your app is to build something that solves their problem or delightfully entertains them. But even further, small details that seem trivial can add up to convey a sincere appreciation of their time.

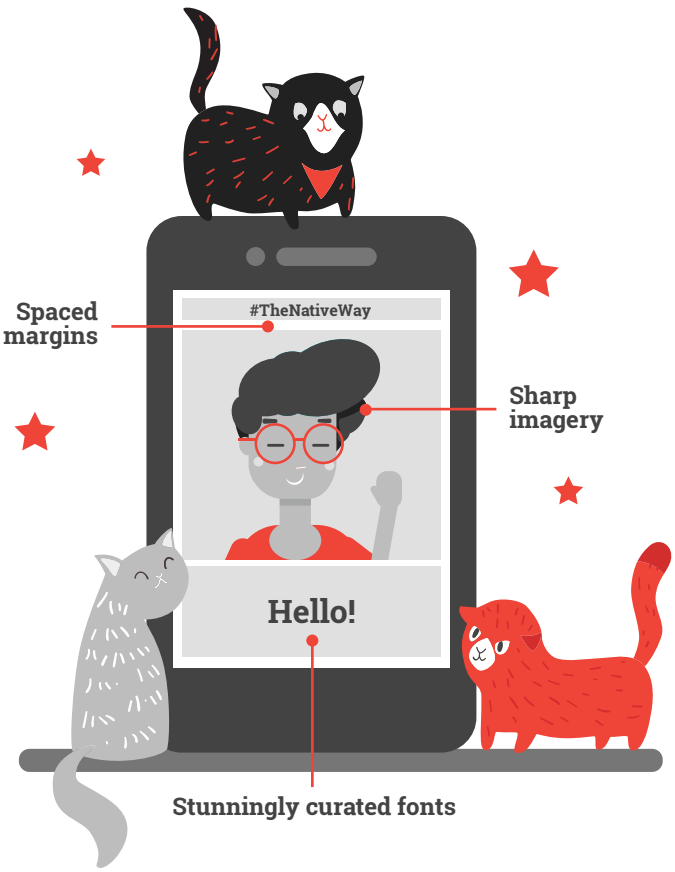
HOW?

Perfect the details:

Finer points like sharp imagery, stunningly curated fonts, thoughtfully spaced margins and even quick loading times can all add up to express thoughtfulness and gratitude.

Respond to feedback:

If your app has been up for a while, this means constantly checking user feedback and iterating to make your app better.



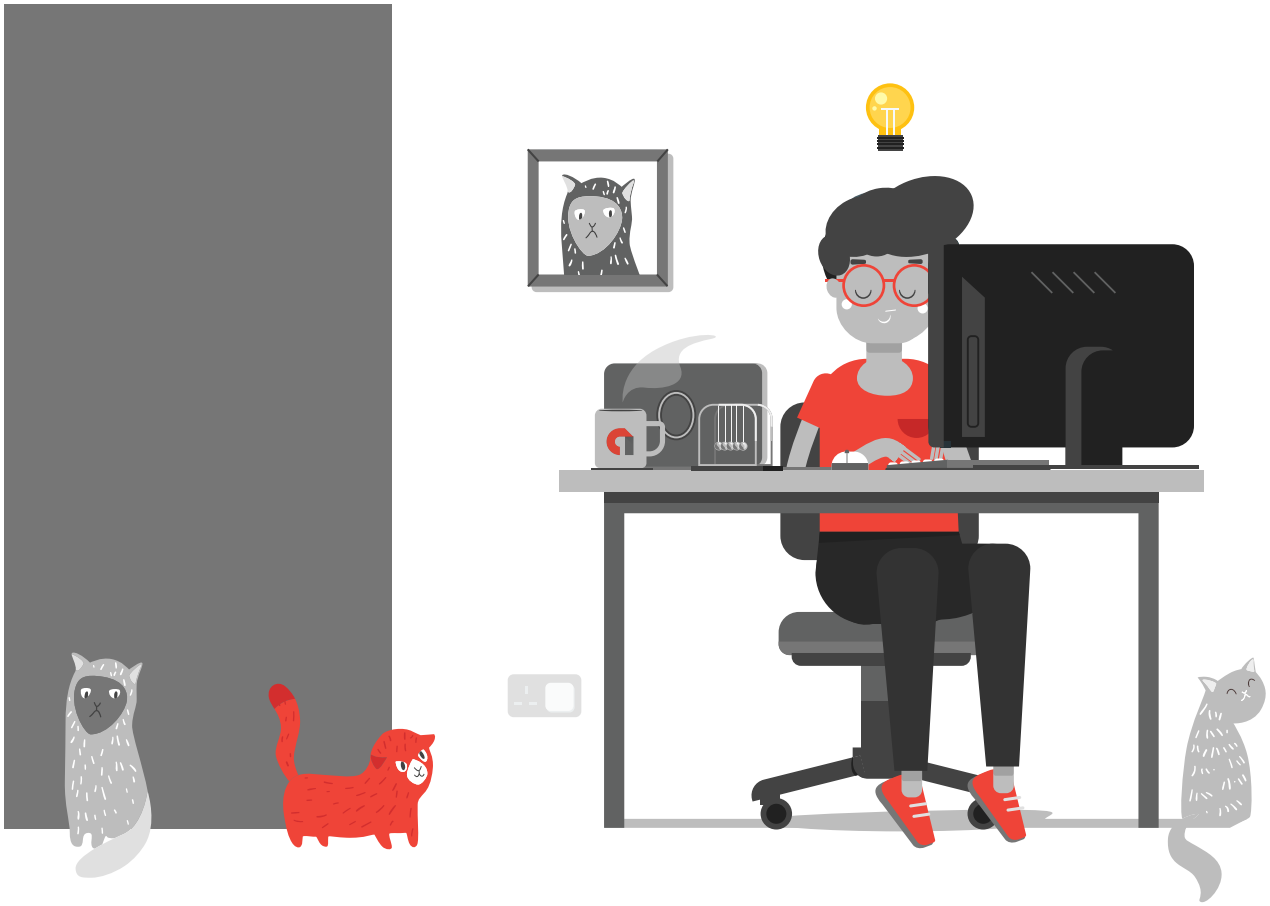
What this means for your native ads:

UUse the same level of care for small details in your native ads design. The polish that works well for your app, like the suggestions mentioned above, would also work well for your ads.

CHAPTER 2

NATIVE ADS INSPIRATION GALLERY AND BEST PRACTICES

When looking for ideas and inspiration for implementing native ads into your own app, a great place to start is to see what other developers are doing with native ads. Here are tips and best practices from featured AdMob developers and a few recommendations we've compiled.



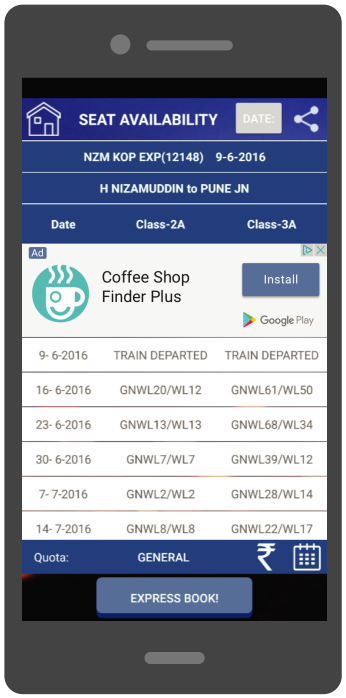
CONTENT HEAVY APPS

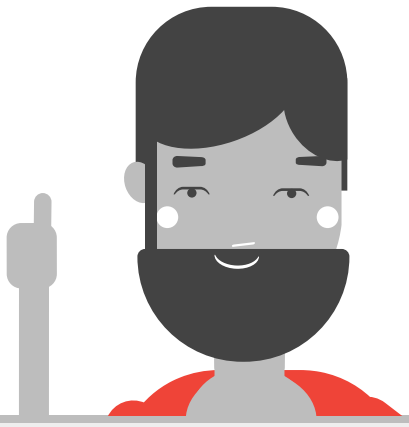
APP INFO
Name: Indian Railway IRCTC Train PNR
Region: Asia Pacific
Average Ratings:
Android: 4.5 stars
iOS: 4.5 stars
Installs: 1,000,000 - 5,000,000
Category: Travel and Local

Description:
Created by SmartApps India, this is a beautiful and fast app that lets users check the status of their train run by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation.

Native Ad Implementation:
When looking at train schedules and available seats, consumers are shown a list of of information cards. This feed presents an opportunity to show non-obtrusive yet visible native ads to users who are scanning through.

Currently SmartApp India is only showing one native ad near the top of the list, but it plans on showing more ads as consumers scroll through the content.





According to SmartApps India's co-founder, Sagar Mutha, "user experience has been the biggest win after implementing native ads. We've received positive feedback from users and CTRs have gone up in comparison to regular banners which has resulted in about a 55% increase in ad revenue."

We've received positive feedback from users and CTRs have gone up in comparison to regular banners.

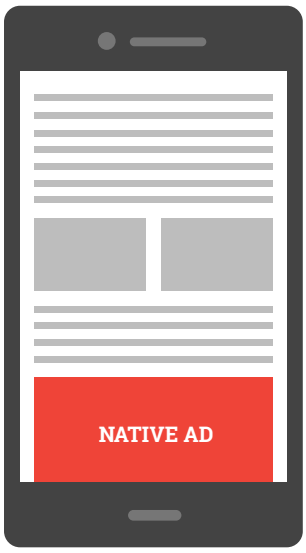
Tip from the developer:

"Pay close attention to the design and make use of the various template customization options available on the native ad express dashboard. Try to place the native ads where there is a natural fit, and keep iterating and A/B testing until you get the desired results and CTRs. Make sure the ads are unobtrusive and deliver a good user experience."

SmartApps India's co-founder,
Sagar Mutha

Other Implementation Ideas for Content Heavy Apps:

Middle of article



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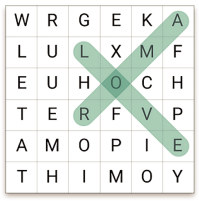
GAMING APPS

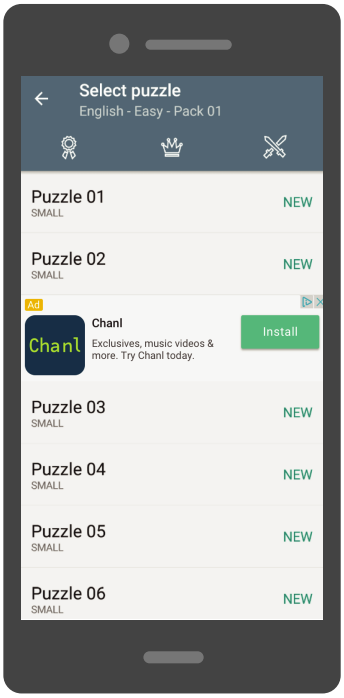


APP INFO
Name: Word Search
Region: Latin America
Average Ratings:
Android: 4.4 average
Installs: 10,000,000 - 50,000,000 **Category:** Word

Description:
Word Search (also known as Word Find, Word Seek or Word Sleuth) is a word search puzzle game with more than 22,000 puzzles distributed in 37 languages.

Native Ad Implementation:
Since native ads work so well in content feeds, Pink Pointer uses them in their feed of puzzles. When consumers log into the app to play a word search puzzle, they see a list of all available puzzles. The native ad is embedded within this list, making it attractive, easy to spot, but never obtrusive.

By replacing banners planted at the top of the page, Thiago Lopes Rosa of Pink Pointer saw an increase of 50% in CTR and 90% in RPM.

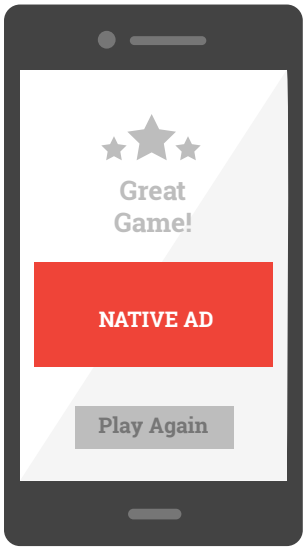


Tip from the developer:

"I recommend creating different ad units for each placement of native ads. This way you can analyze the performance for each one individually and take appropriate actions."

Other Implementation Ideas for Gaming Apps:

In leaderboard feed



After game play

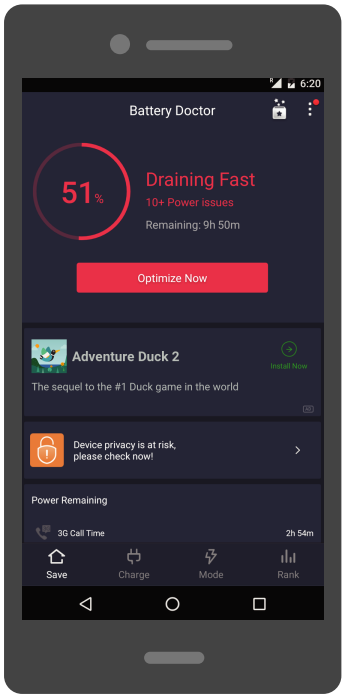
UTILITY APPS

APP INFO
Name: Battery Doctor
(also called Battery Saver by Cheetah Mobile)
Region: Asia Pacific
Average Ratings:
Android: 4.5 average
Installs: 100,000,000 - 500,000,000 **Category:** Tools

Description:
Battery Doctor is a free battery saving app that lets users stop power-consuming apps with a single tap.

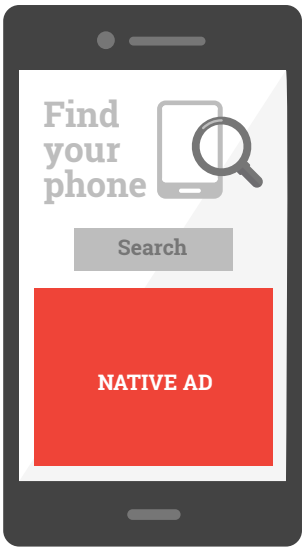
Native Ad Implementation:
After Battery Doctor audits your phone to measure battery usage, an analysis of how well you're using your app's battery, app usage info by app, and a prediction of how much power you have remaining is displayed in a list of informational cards. Within this list, a native ad is shown as its own card.

According to Charles Fan of Cheetah Mobile, "Our Battery Doctor monetization revenue went up 4 times, 400% and those are pretty amazing results."

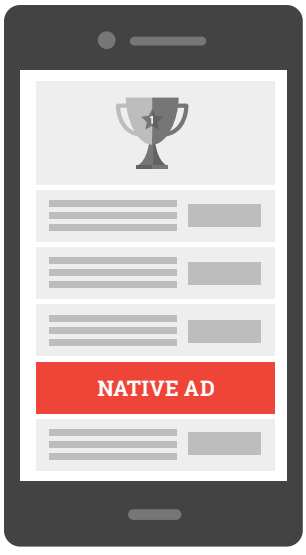


Tip from the developer:
"Look for areas where you can integrate native ads without disrupting app workflow or user flow."

Other Implementation Ideas for Gaming Apps:



Before app's function



In feed of app upgrades and IAPs

LIFESTYLE APPS

APP INFO
Name: Chinese Calendar
Region: Asia Pacific
Average Ratings:
Android: 4.5 stars
iOS: 4.5 stars
Installs: 1,000,000 - 5,000,000
Category: Lifestyle

Description:
This app features the Chinese Calendar, highlighting favorable and unfavorable days and times for important events like weddings, engagements and so on, according to traditional beliefs in China.

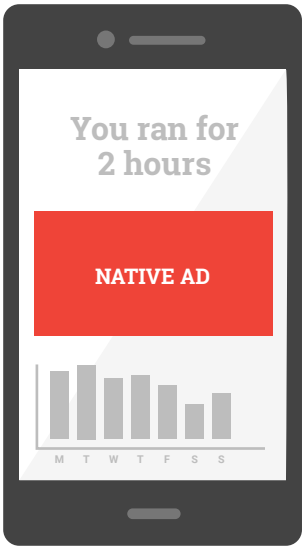
Native Ad Implementation:
Linghit's Chinese Calendar app features facts about each day's festivals, holidays, and lucky "five elements" according to Chinese tradition. The day view of the app is presented as a card and holds an engaging space to display a native ad.

Jinnee Lee of Linghit Limited explains that "after implementing native ads, our ad impressions increased by 114% and ad income increased by 100%."

Tip from the developer:

"Native ads are more appealing so display them in more prominent positions within apps. We were able to view the effects on user click-through rates in real time based on the information in the ad backend. We could make quick adjustments to the native ad to maximize the effect of the ad."

Other Implementation Ideas for Lifestyle Apps:



After app use summary screen

In your e-commerce product feed

While we can't guarantee improved results if you follow these tips, they provide a starting place for you to begin experimenting. In the next chapter, we'll cover how to structure and run successful A/B tests.

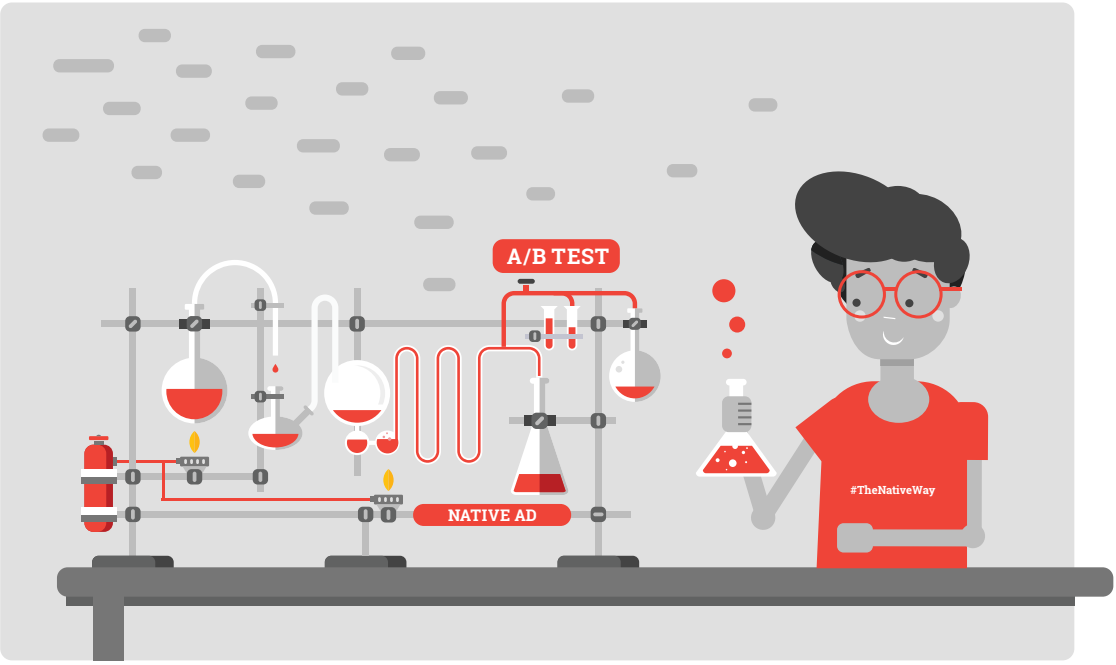
CHAPTER 3

HOW TO TEST YOUR NATIVE ADS

When you implement native ads in your app, it's important to A/B test.

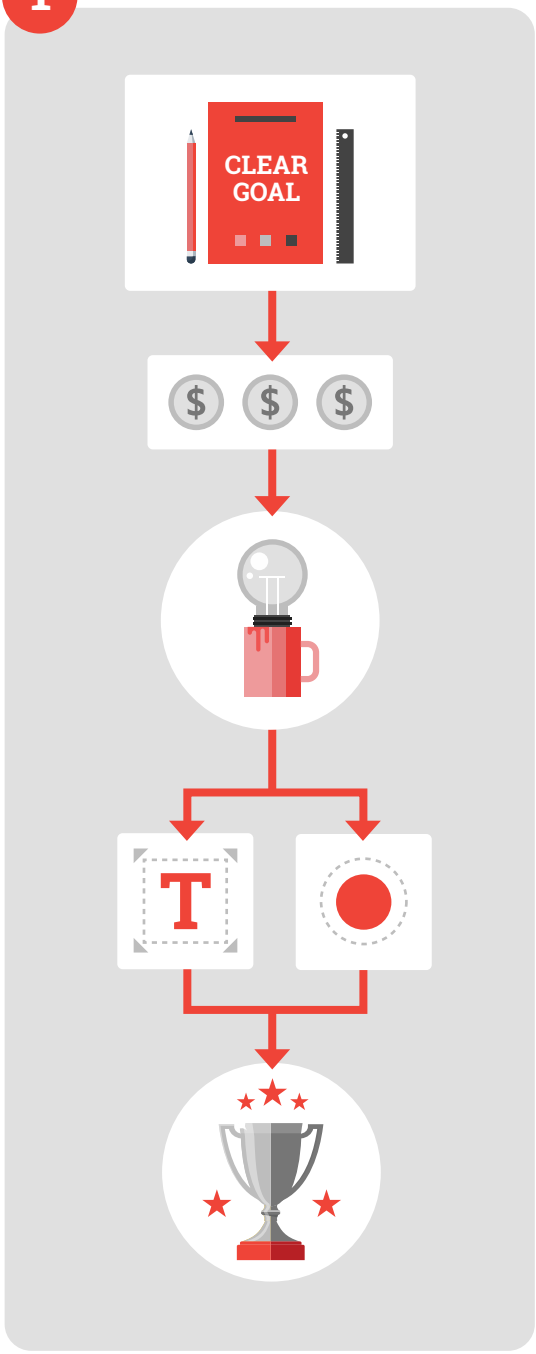
Testing will give you certainty that your creative hunches are right for your business and your users' experience.

This chapter will explain how to run an effective A/B test .



Steps to A/B Testing

1

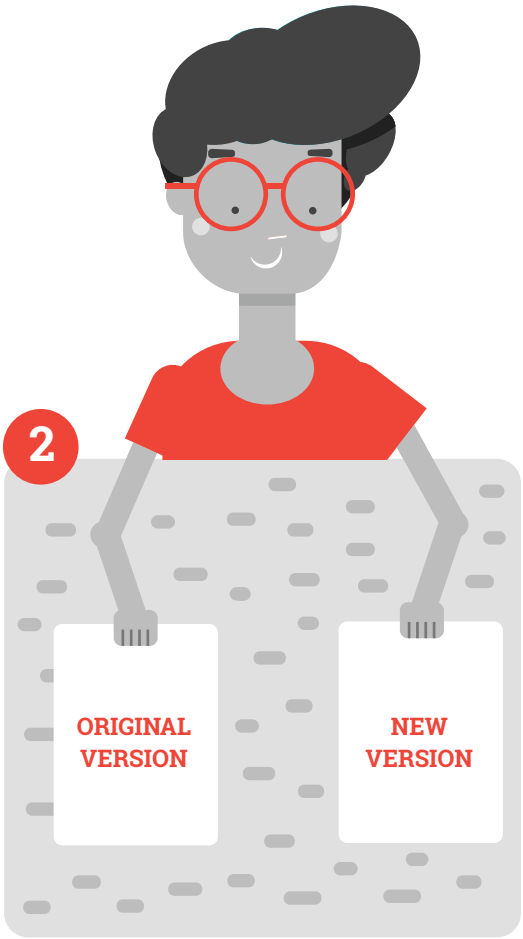


START WITH A DEFINED GOAL AND A HYPOTHESIS.

Before jumping in, take some time to step back and define a clear goal for your app. With ads, it's usually pretty straightforward **– generate more revenue.**

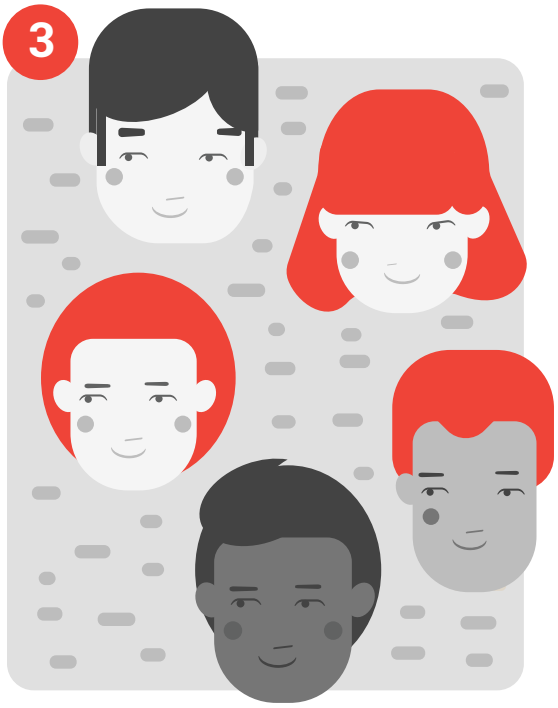
Then, come up with ideas on how to accomplish your goal. Common hypotheses include simple variations like ***changing font sizes*** and button colors. Decide on a single hypothesis that has a lot of potential to improve your business and start there.

FOR EXAMPLE:
Goal: Increase revenue.
Hypothesis: Changing my ad's font size from 10px to 13px will encourage users to engage with the ad more.



SET UP THE TEST.

The test will require 2 variations of your app – the original version of your app and your new version, redesigned according to your hypothesis. When creating these variations, it could be helpful to use an A/B testing platform that will make it easy to design, run, and monitor your tests.

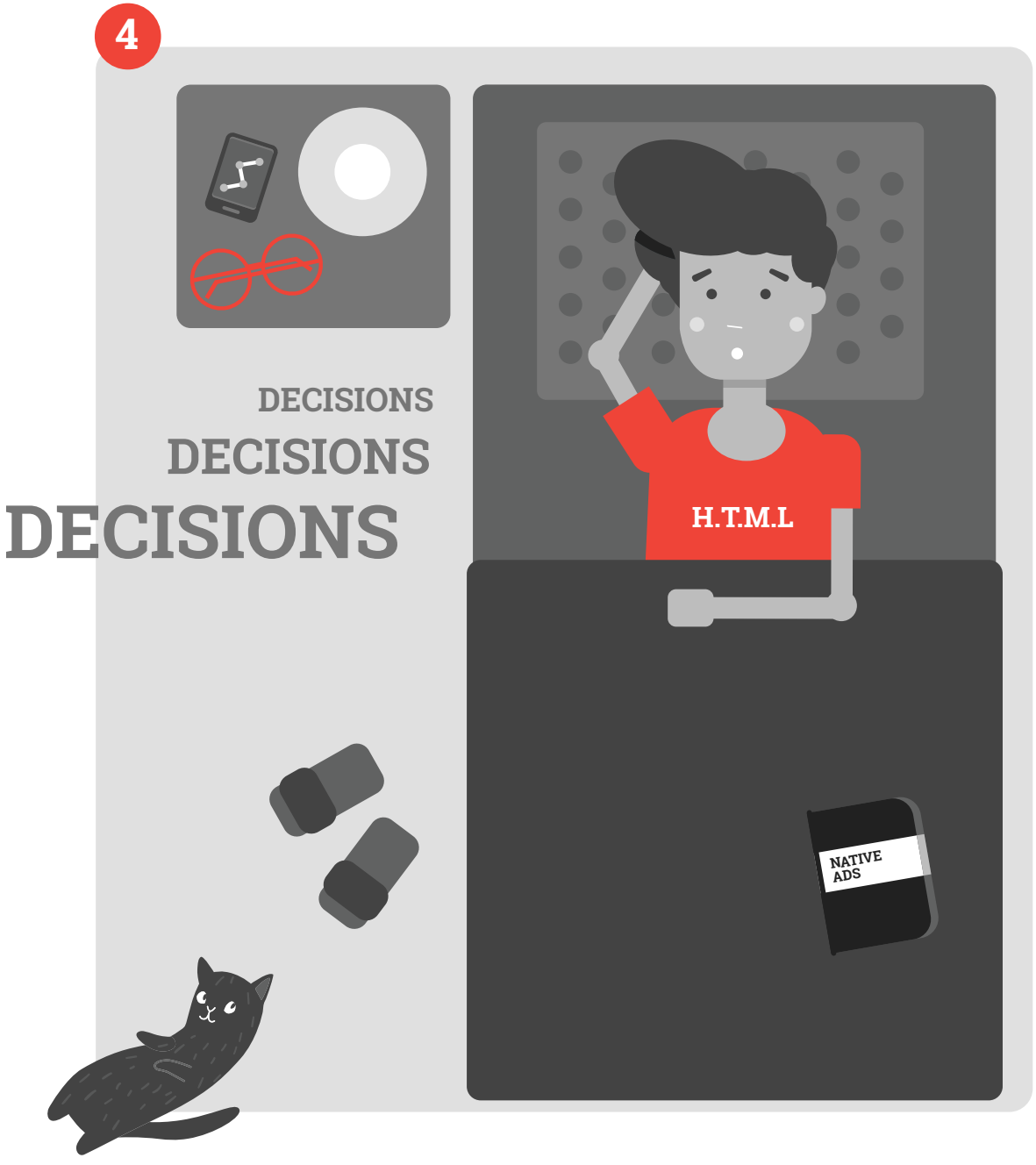


RUN THE EXPERIMENT.

Set up your app to randomly show your original set-up to half of your users (i.e., the **"control group"**) and the second variation to the other 50% (i.e., the **"experimental group"**). By using a control group, you're collecting baseline data to compare against your results. Without it, you can't tell the difference between the response to your new designs or other variables, like seasonal chance.

MAKE A DECISION

Once the experiment is done, you'll have the data to know whether the new variation is worth changing for all users. If the changes are significant, it could be wise to run the experiment over several time periods to ensure that the results weren't due to seasonality, or other variables.



Tips To Keep In Mind While Experimenting

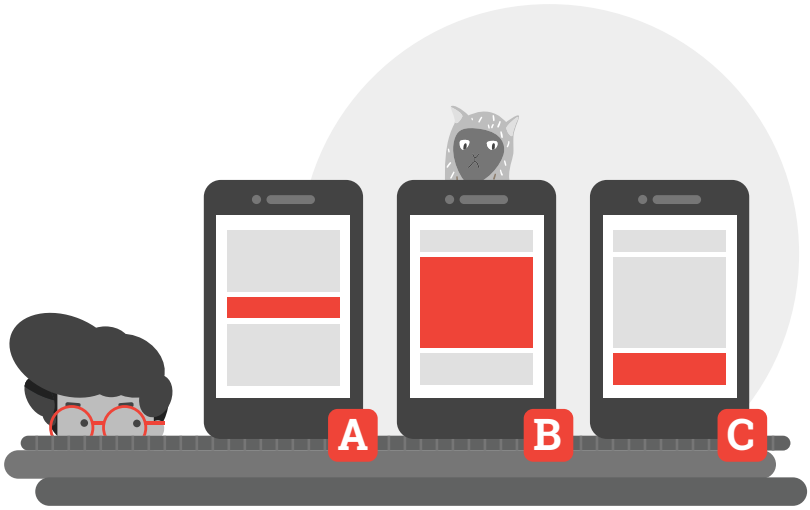
Only test where it matters.

Even with helpful tools, testing takes time and resources. Don't spend time on testing elements that don't have the potential to significantly impact your goal. A good way to do this is to use app analytics data to help uncover spots in your app with a lot of potential (think: screens with high traffic, high engagement, or large user drop off, for example).

Once you've identified a high potential spot, brainstorm experiments that can help you tweak these spots to achieve your goal.

For example, if your analytics show that 85% of your users scan through their photo feed to find photos to edit, you may want to test placing a native ad there. If in the same app you realize that very few users interact with your "draw on your photo" feature, that may not be a good place to invest in testing an ad.

Stick to testing one variable at a time.



Testing several variables at the same time, also known as “multivariate testing,” may seem like a good idea, but is very difficult to executeand probably not a reasonable option for your app.

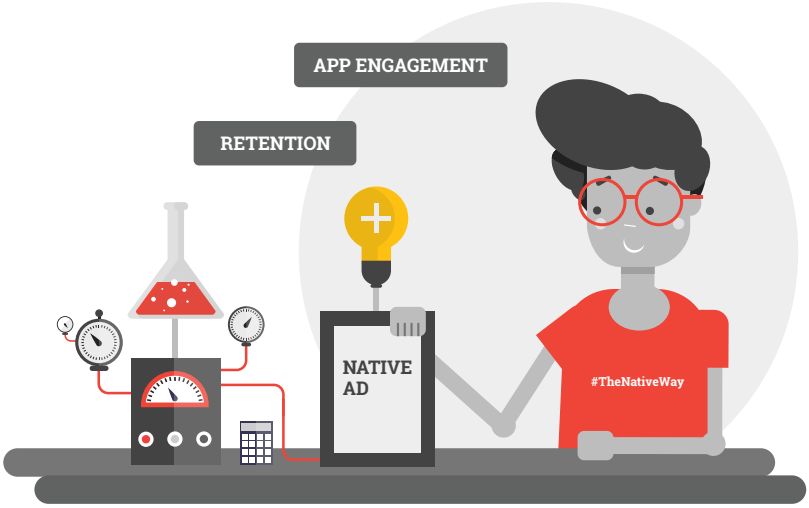
In order to conduct a meaningful multivariate test, you would need a tremendous amount of traffic to be statistically significant.

It’s also much more difficult to set up properly, considering the sheer number of variations that need to be running simultaneously in order to work well. A/B testing may seem slower, but its simplicity can help you discover actionable next steps faster.

Run experiments long enough and with enough users.

Random chance and timing trends can skew your data and give you false confidence in your A/B testing results. For example, if you only run a test during the winter months, the results may not be the same during the summer months. It would be unclear if the difference in outcomes is because of the timing or because of the changes you've made to your ad. The same could be true if you only test with 10 users or if you only test for a week.

Consider testing the entire ad.

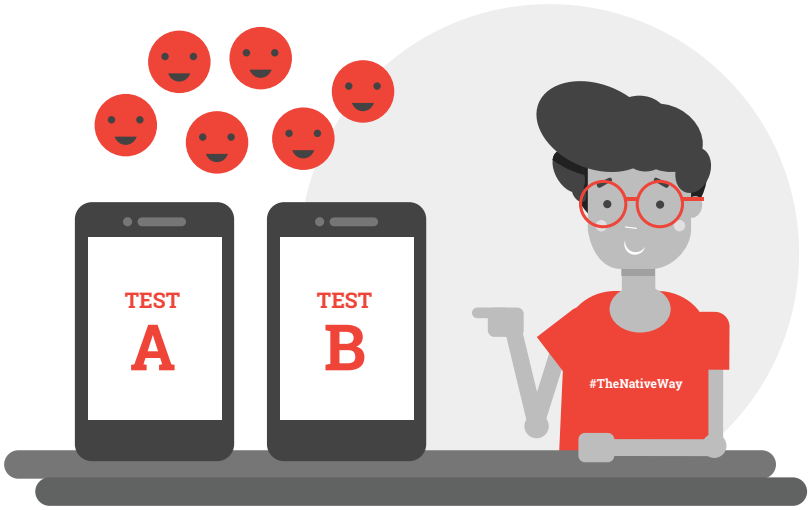


Not only is it possible to test the elements within a native ad (like ad size or button color), but it's also possible to test the entire ad itself.

It might be worth looking into replacing banner ads with native ads to see how that affects your revenue.

In some cases, you may be testing native ads in places where ads weren't shown before. With these experiments, metrics like app engagement and retention may be best to focus on. For example, if you're considering showing ads in your app's messaging feed, you may want to run an experiment that tracks user engagement with your messaging feature. This will help answer whether users are happy with your app experience after implementing redesigned ads.

Don’t leave out the control group.



It might be tempting to simplify things and leave out the control group – showing one variation to all of your users for a month, then another variation for the next month. This setup would be very easy to implement, and wouldn’t need the help of an A/B testing tool. Unfortunately, it’s not a good idea. Similar to the point above regarding running experiments long enough, it’s important to test both the control and variable of your ads at the same time to account for any seasonal trends, or other variables beyond your control.

Also, when testing both your control and experimental group at the same time, it’s critical that you have a system in place that randomly shows a different version to a user.

Not splitting users up randomly will potentially taint your results.

CHAPTER 4

WHY ADMOB?

To make it easy for all developers to use native ads, we've created 2 products on AdMob – native ads express and native ads advanced.

Native Ads Express

AdMob native ads express is an easy and quick way to set up and monetize native ads.

With native ads express, you'll be able to:

1

Implement native ads fast.
The interface is intuitive and it's easy to create and style your ad in the browser in less than 5 minutes.

2

Get your creatives approved quickly.
If everything is within policy guidelines, we can approve your ad creatives instantly.

3

Test your ads without having to update your app.
There's no need for users to update the current version of your app to allow you to test different ad creatives.

4

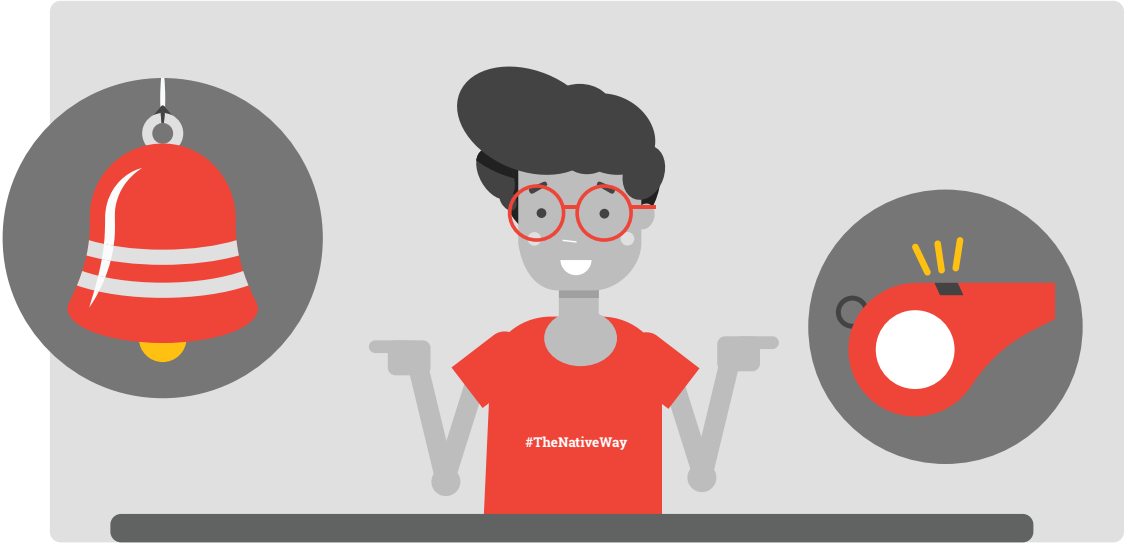
Preview your ad creatives.
You can preview your ads right in your web browser without having to push code.

Start by choosing from different ad templates, then customize them to fit closely within your app's UI using CSS. Once you're done designing, just drop a few lines of code in your app to request your new native ads, and you're ready to go.

You'll be shown a variety of ad types, not just app install ads.

And, if you want to change the look and feel of your ads down the line, you can easily do so from the AdMob interface without needing to re-publish your app.

Native Ads Advanced



For developers that need more bells and whistles, AdMob native ads advanced allows you to create and implement highly customized ads that fit your app. We send you the ad components directly, and you render them in your app code as you choose (within policy guidelines). This feature is currently available as a limited beta for participating publishers.

Conclusion

Apps are an important part of the mobile ecosystem and Google's committed to helping developers succeed with tools and best practices -- like the insights from this guide. We hope you found it valuable.

Now it's time to get to work. We recommend beginning to test native ads with native ads express.

Be sure to fill us in with your progress on Twitter and G+.

For more information on user engagement and general app development, check out our YouTube channel and blog.

Best of luck!