adapty
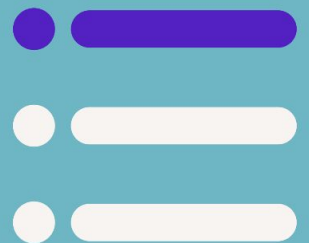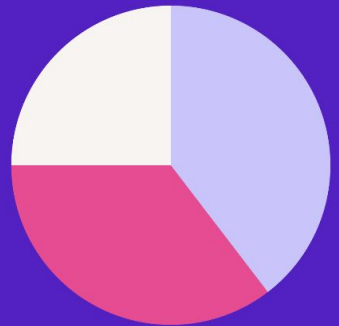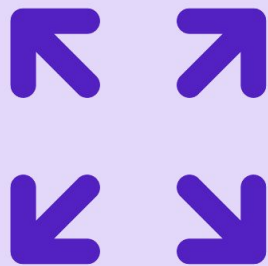
From zero to $1K MRR: A guide to launching a subscription app

You don't need much to hit $1K. Just a working app, a few users, and a plan that doesn't suck.

What's inside

Introduction

Shipping an app is easier than ever. You can build a working MVP in a weekend. You can design a paywall, set up analytics, and publish to the App Store in a few days.

But that's not the hard part.

The hard part is:

- Getting your first 100 users

- Figuring out what to charge

- How to find your first 100 paying users without a budget

- Understanding why people churn or don't convert at all

- Making decisions when the data is unclear and time is limited

This guide is for that stage – the messy, early, "is this even working?" part. Where real progress comes from doing the unglamorous things well.

Section 1: Build first, then validate.

You don't need to come up with something completely new.
Plenty of apps make money by solving everyday problems. They just do it better, faster, or in a more focused way than others.

Thanks to AI, you can build a basic version in a day or two. Instead of spending weeks validating an idea, it's often quicker to build something small and see how people react.

If users are already downloading similar apps, that's not a bad thing, it means there's demand. Your job is to see what's missing and figure out if you can improve the experience.

> 💡 *If you're on a limited budget, you can consider starting with Android. Google Play gives you more flexibility, and it's often easier to get organic traction there compared to the App Store.*

1.1 Use the app stores to explore demand

Looking through the App Store or Google Play is one of the easiest ways to spot real demand.

Here's how to do it:

- Use ASO tools to find keywords with high downloads and strong monetization

- Spot apps that are popular but feel outdated or clunky

- Read 2★ and 3★ reviews to understand what's missing or frustrating users

- Identify opportunities where you could offer something cleaner, cheaper, or more focused

> 💡 *Use ReadReviews.dev to make review analysis faster and easier. It runs analysis on App Store and Google Play reviews, so you can spot patterns faster across your own app or your competitors.*

1.2 A crowded market is a good sign

If there are already lots of apps in a space, that usually means people are willing to pay. Instead of avoiding competition, try to find a niche:

- Targeting a specific group (e.g. "budget planner for couples" or "workout tracker for new moms")

- Localizing for one country or language (many apps don't bother)
- Improving speed, pricing, or UI/UX

> 📌 *Example: Cal AI didn't invent calorie tracking. They just built something that felt faster and easier to use than older popular apps.*

1.3 Real validation = real usage

You don't need a long validation process. You need to see how people respond when they actually use the product, even a very rough version of it.

Fast ways to validate:

- Build a basic MVP and share it via TestFlight or Google Play beta

- Post in Reddit or Discord groups and ask for honest feedback

- Run a small TikTok or Instagram ad (even $20 can give you useful data)

- Track clicks, signups, or pre-orders

> 💡 *You can put your app on pre-order in the App Store and drive interest with short-form video. This helps you measure demand and builds momentum for launch day.*

1.4 Keep the feedback loop open

Start collecting feedback as soon as people use your app.

Make it easy for users to talk to you:

- A WhatsApp link in the app

- A quick feedback form after key actions

- Use session replay tools to watch how people interact (just make sure they're privacy-compliant)

And keep going after launch. The best insights often come when people start using the app in ways you didn't expect.

Section 2: Build small. Keep it simple. Learn fast

Your MVP isn't your final product. It's just a starting point – a way to learn what users actually want. You don't need to include everything.

You just need something people can try, so you can see what works and what doesn't.

2.1 Focus on the core

Pick a clear use case and build around it. That might look like:

- A single flow that solves one real problem

- Basic onboarding that shows how it works

- Metrics to track if people "get it"

> 💡 *If users don't reach the main feature, it's worth checking your onboarding first. The idea might still be solid.*

2.2 Add analytics early

It's much easier to improve when you know what's happening. Track the basics from the start:

Track the basics

Installs	First-time actions	Retention	Crashes
	e.g. "opened app," "used feature"	*D1, D3, D7*	
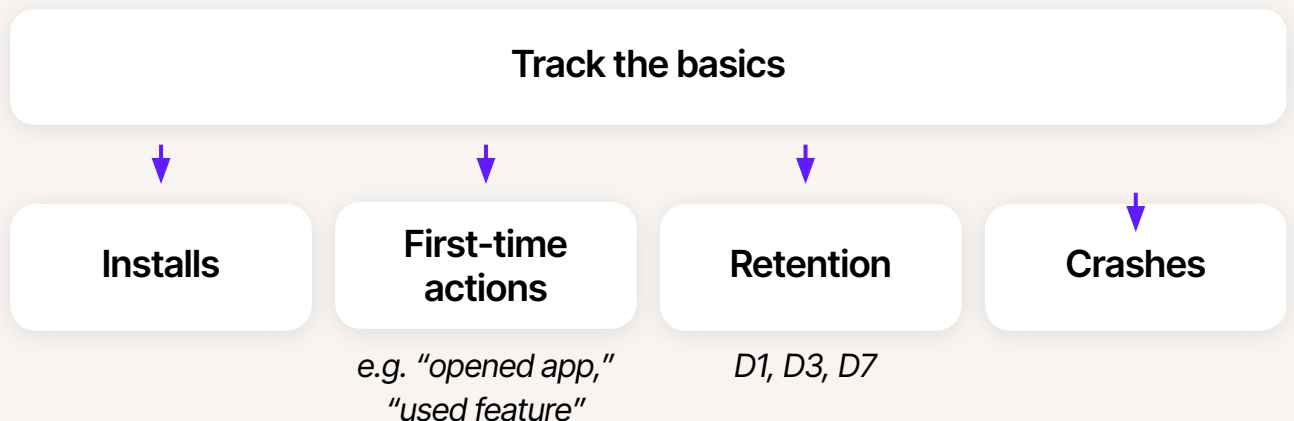
Use whatever's easiest – Firebase, Mixpanel, or Posthog.

> 💡 *Session replay is also useful. You'll see where people get stuck without needing to guess.*

2.3 Ship it (even if it's ugly)

It's okay if your app isn't polished. You'll learn a lot more by putting it in front of users than by tweaking every detail.

Use TestFlight, Google Play beta, or even a private download link. Your goal is to get real feedback fast.

Section 3: Get your first users

Your MVP is live or nearly ready. Now it's time to get your first users.

2.4 ASO

ASO isn't just about keywords. It helps people find your app and decide to download it. That's why your icon, screenshots, and title matter just as much as the text.

App Store and Google Play each work a bit differently, but the basics are the same:

- Make your app easy to discover
- Make it clear why it's worth trying

Step 1. Start with your app's core use case

Begin by describing your app in plain terms. What problem does it solve? How would someone search for it?

Example:

- Meditation app → "sleep sounds," "daily mindfulness," "stress relief".
- Language app → "learn Spanish," "English grammar," "vocabulary trainer".

Write down 10-15 phrases that describe your core use case. They'll help guide the rest of your ASO.

Step 2. Use autocomplete and keyword tools to expand your list

Type your main terms into the App Store and Google Play search bars. You'll see real user searches appear as suggestions.

This is a quick way to see how people actually phrase things. Google Play often shows even more suggestions as you scroll and take notes.

You can also use tools like AppMagic or SensorTower for deeper suggestions. Even SEO tools or Google Trends can help here.

Step 3. Look at similar apps to learn what's working

Check the titles, subtitles, and screenshots of 5-10 apps in your category.

See how they describe the app, which words they highlight, and what shows up first.

Chances are, they've already tested a few different approaches and you can learn from what they're doing.

Step 4. How to choose what to prioritize

If you're using ASO tools	If you're not, use your judgement
• Check keyword volume: how often it's searched • Check difficulty: how hard it is to rank	• High competition = many apps use the same word • Look for long-tail phrases where fewer strong apps appear

> 💡 *Review your keyword list weekly after launch. Track ranking changes and swap in new keywords based on performance.*

Metadata: Make it readable, relevant, and easy to scan

Title (App Store+Play Store)

This is one of the most important spots. Use your strongest keyword here, but keep it readable. Avoid repeating it in the subtitle on iOS, that doesn't help.

Example:
Bad → Habit Tracker: The Best Habit Tracker App
Better → Build better routines: Habit Tracker

> 💡 *Some devs place the keyword first, then the brand name to help with early discoverability.*

Subtitle (App Store only)

Use this to add helpful context or highlight a secondary use case. Stick to benefits, not buzzwords.

Subtitle (App Store only)

Use this to add helpful context or highlight a secondary use case. Stick to benefits, not buzzwords.

Keyword field (App Store only)

Fill all 100 characters. Use commas. No repeats from title or subtitle as they're already indexed. Skip filler words ("the," "for," "app"). It's not visible to users, but Apple indexes everything.

Promotional text (App Store only)

Short line above the description. Good for announcing a new feature or offer.

💡 *You can update this anytime, no need to release a new version. Great for sharing a small win like "Now with iPad support."*

Description

Google Play indexes your full description. iOS doesn't, but users still read it.

- What the app does

- Who it's for

- What problem it helps solve

Then use short paragraphs or bullets to explain key features. You don't need a founder story – just help people decide whether to try it.

Visuals: People scroll fast, so make it count

Icon

Think simple and clean. Avoid text, and make sure it still looks good at very small sizes.

💡 *Compare with your top competitors and test variations. Icons can have a big impact on downloads.*

Screenshots

Most users don't scroll through all of them. Focus on making the first 3 screenshots explain:

- What the app does

- Why it's useful

- What they'll get from it

Use short captions focused on value, not technical terms. Sometimes a clean screenshot without text can perform better. It's worth testing both.

Preview video (optional)

Short is best – 15-30 seconds. No intro logos, no background music buildup. Just show what the app does and how it works. In some categories, videos don't improve conversion. But if your app has a slick UI or interactive feature, it's worth testing.

Localization (optional but powerful)

If you're targeting more than one country, start small: pick one additional language and fully translate your metadata and screenshots.

Localized keywords can improve rankings. Localized screenshots can boost conversions.

No need to support 10 languages at once – go one market at a time.

TL;DR – ASO setup checklist

Elements	What to do
☐ Title	Add your main keyword. Don't repeat it in the subtitle.
☐ Subtitle (iOS only)	Add supporting info. Keep it short.
☐ Keyword field (iOS only)	Use all space. Comma-separated. No repeats.
☐ Promo text (iOS only)	Announce new features or offers.
☐ Description	Start with value. Focus on benefits. Indexed on Google Play.
☐ Developer name (Google Play)	It shows in search. Use a clean name, avoid noise.
☐ Icon	Simple, recognizable, no text. A/B test often.
☐ Screenshots	First 3 = most important. Focus on clarity and value.
☐ Video	Optional. Show real usage. Keep it short.
☐ In-app purchases	Add keywords to plan names. Improves search visibility.
☐ In-app events	Use to highlight features or promos. Boosts store presence.
☐ Ratings & reviews	Boosts credibility and ranking. Respond to both good and bad reviews.
☐ App size	Smaller = faster installs. Matters on mobile data.
☐ What's New	Keep it meaningful. Frequent updates = better ranking

3.2 Short-form platforms (TikTok, Reels, Shorts)

Short-form video is one of the best ways to get attention for a new app, even without a big budget or big audience.

Some developers have seen thousands of installs from a single 15-second clip. It's not guaranteed, but it's one of the few channels where small apps can still get discovered quickly.

Most of the examples in this section come from TikTok, but you can apply the same ideas to Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts. These platforms work in similar ways and it's worth testing a few to see where your content fits best.

Step 1. Set your target audience from day one

TikTok's algorithm doesn't just rely on your content. It looks at your phone settings, SIM card, IP address, and even your App Store region to decide which audience sees your videos.

If you're targeting users in the U.S., but you create an account from another country, your content will be pushed to the wrong audience from the start.

Here's how to do it right:

1	**Use a phone without a SIM card**	Avoid linking your account to a local phone number
2	**Set up a VPN**	Connect to the region you want to target before opening TikTok.
3	**Change your region settings**	Update your phone's location, App Store/Google Play region, and even your language preferences.
4	**Always log in with a VPN**	If you switch back to your local IP, TikTok might start pushing your content to the wrong region.

Step 2. Nail your niche from day one

Before posting anything, engage with content in your niche. Like, comment, save, and share videos that your ideal users would enjoy.

For example, if you have a pet app, interact with #PetTok content until your For You Page is filled with animal videos. This signals to TikTok that your content should be shown to pet lovers.

Step 3. Post like it's your job (because it kind of is)

Early on, posting 3-5 videos per day may sound like a lot, but it gives you room to experiment. Don't stress about perfection. Focus on testing different content styles and topics.

> 📌 *The team behind QUITTR (a quit porn app) posted multiple raw, relatable videos with no fancy editing. One clip went viral, and they hit $100K MRR within months.*

Step 4. Hook 'em in 3 seconds

People scroll fast. If you don't catch their attention right away, they'll move on.

1	Did you know there's actually an easier way to…[insert desired result]
2	So you… [insert negative result or problem]? Here's what you can do about it.
3	The best kept secret to.. [insert desire] is finally being revealed
4	Crazy things are happening in the… [insert business, niche or industry] world. Here's what you need to know
5	It breaks my heart when I see people… [insert negative result or problem]. Here's how to avoid it
6	Stop doing [insert activity] to [insert desired result]. It doesn't work. Here's what to do instead.
7	So you… [insert negative result or problem]? Here a 3 things you can do to fix it
8	One of the best pieces of advice I ever heard/got was to [insert advice]. Here's how it change my life
9	How the best [insert person type] are successfully/consistently [insert desired result or activity]
10	Did you know most people don't know the best way to…[insert desired result]

Step 5. Double down on what performs

If a video gets good views or engagement, don't be afraid to repost it. The algorithm doesn't penalize you for repeating yourself, especially if your audience is still growing.

> 📌 *Coconote.ai, a tool for content creators, reused the same 10-second video multiple times with different captions. Each version still got thousands of views.*

Step 6. You can scale content later. For now, just learn

Once you've figured out what resonates, you can consider hiring small creators to make videos for you. They usually charge less than influencers and know the platform well.

But early on, it's enough to experiment on your own. One good video can bring more users than a paid campaign and you'll learn a lot faster by doing it yourself.

3.3 Reddit

Reddit can be a surprisingly effective place to get your first users, especially if your app solves a specific problem or speaks to a niche audience.

But it works differently from short-form platforms. You're not relying on the algorithm as you're joining conversations. And that means the way you write matters more than anything.

Step 1. Start by reading, not posting

Before you share anything, spend some time getting to know the subreddits that match your topic.

This could be:

- r/productivity

- r/selfimprovement

- r/LanguageLearning

- r/iOSProgramming

- or even r/SideProject

Look at the tone. See what gets upvoted. Read the comments. You'll start to see what kind of content feels authentic and what gets ignored or downvoted.

Step 2. How to share without getting flagged as self-promo

Reddit has strict rules around promotion, and most subreddits will remove posts that feel like advertising. The safest approach is to tell a story. Focus on the "why" behind your app, not just the features. Posts that tend to do well:

- "I made a simple habit tracker that helped me wake up earlier. Here's what I learned"

- "Launched my side project on Flutter. Happy to share what worked and what didn't"

You can mention your app but do it in context. Share your process, what you've learned, or what surprised you.

Some indie devs post to r/SideProject or r/Entrepreneur with updates like "Built this with no code" or "Here's how I got my first 50 users." These often lead to comments, traffic, and early signups as long as the post feels honest and personal.
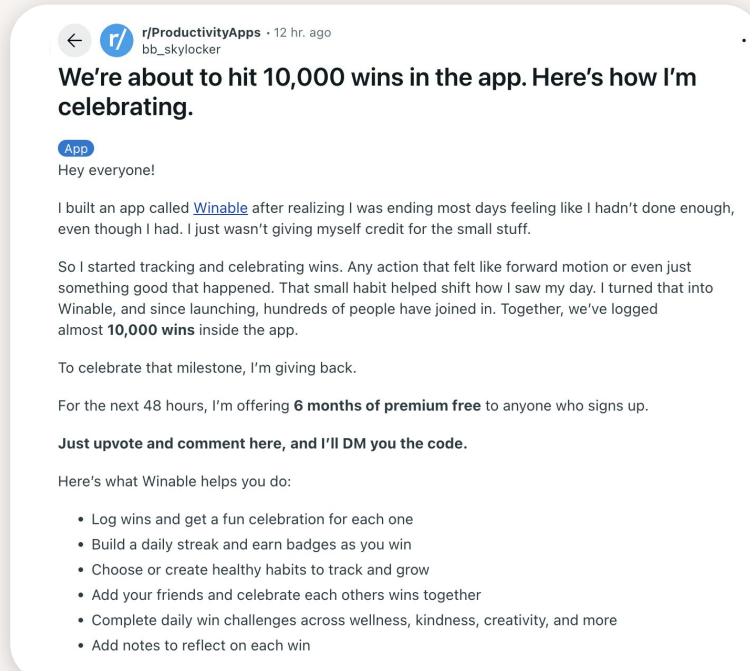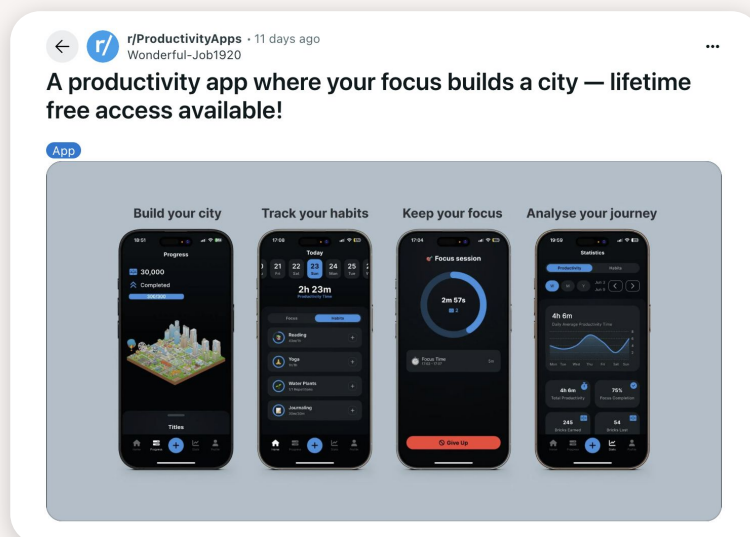
💡 *A tool like GummySearch can help you find relevant threads, spot what questions people are asking, and even analyze patterns in user comments. It's especially helpful if you're still shaping your product or looking for messaging ideas.*
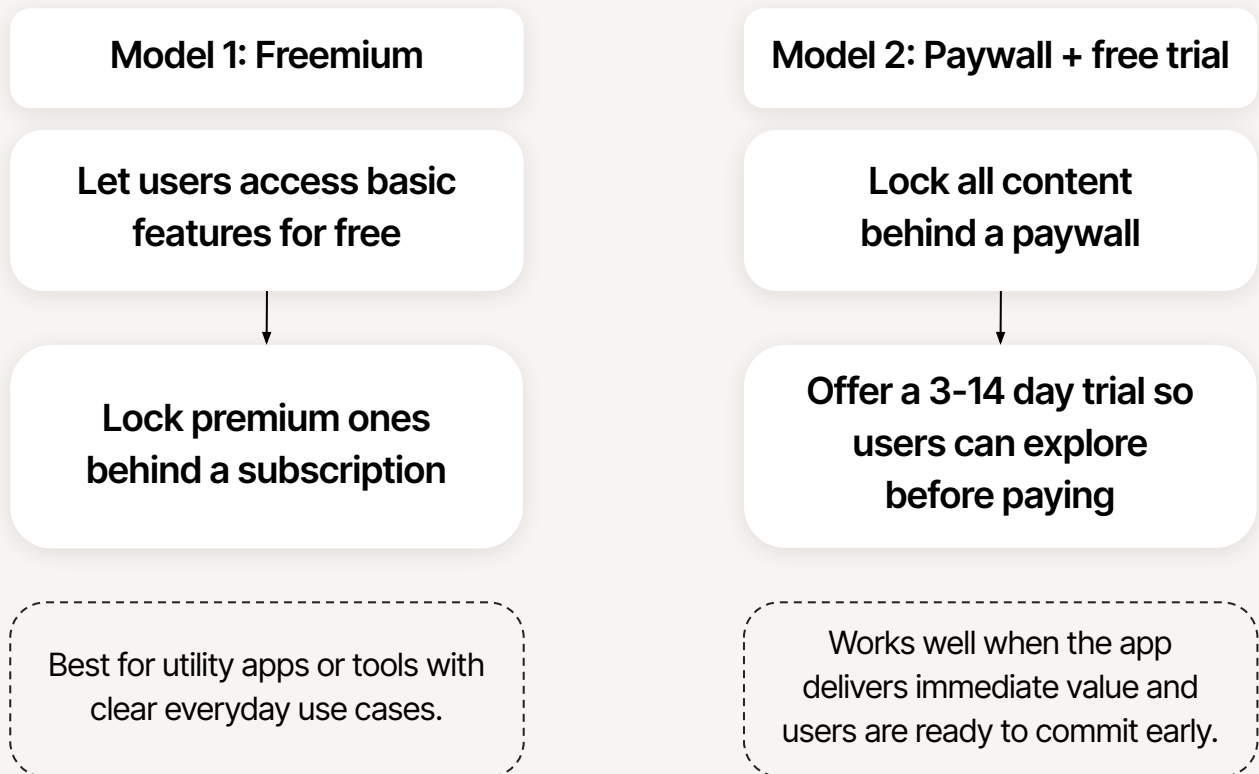
Section 4: Monetize and get subscribers

If your MVP works and people keep using it, it's time to think about monetization. Many developers wait too long to add a paywall. They give away too much for free hoping to "build trust" first. But the sooner you start testing monetization, the sooner you'll understand what people are willing to pay for.

That doesn't mean turning everything into a paywall overnight. It means being intentional and starting small.

4.1 Choose a simple model to start

You don't need multiple price tiers or complicated upgrade flows. Pick one model and test it The two most common approaches:

Model 1: Freemium	**Model 2: Paywall + free trial**
Let users access basic features for free	**Lock all content behind a paywall**
↓	↓
Lock premium ones behind a subscription	**Offer a 3-14 day trial so users can explore before paying**

Best for utility apps or tools with clear everyday use cases.

Works well when the app delivers immediate value and users are ready to commit early.

💡 *Some developers also use rewarded video ads to unlock content. This gives free access while still monetizing and can be a helpful bridge if you're not ready to offer a trial.*

4.2 Don't undercharge

Your first instinct might be to go cheap. Don't. Your app saves time? Reduces stress? Helps someone achieve something? It's worth paying for. Even early on.

Start with one plan (e.g., $4.99/month or $29.99/year). Test a second option if needed, but keep it simple.

You can always adjust later. And you don't need to offer pricing for every region right away.

> 💡 *Once you start seeing real traffic from a specific country (e.g., India, Mexico), it might be worth adjusting the price using localized pricing. Many developers see significantly more purchases when they lower prices in lower-income regions without hurting global revenue.*

4.3 Where to show the paywall

The best time to show your paywall is right after onboarding. That's when users are most engaged and where most purchases happen.

If fewer than 80% of users see your paywall, that's a sign something in your onboarding is off.

Other moments you can test later:

- After completing a core action

- After hitting a usage limit

- When trying to access a premium feature

But for your first version, don't overthink it. Show the paywall early, and see how users respond.

4.4 What to include on your first paywall

Your paywall should be simple, focused, and value-driven. At this stage, clarity matters more than creativity.

Include the following elements:

1	**Headline**	Clearly communicate the main benefit (e.g., "Unlock unlimited workouts").
2	**Trial length**	If offering a free trial, state the duration (e.g., "Start your 7-day free trial")
3	**Pricing plans**	Present both monthly and annual options, and highlight savings (e.g., "Save 50% with annual")
4	**Primary CTA**	Use action-oriented text such as "Start Free Trial" or "Upgrade Now"
5	**Optional urgency**	Add a time-limited incentive when appropriate (e.g., "Offer valid until Friday" or "Limited-time 40% discount")

> 💡 *You can look at apps in your category for paywall inspiration but always test with your own users.*

4.5 How to think about churn

Some users will cancel. That's normal. Don't panic.

Early on, focus on understanding why users leave:

- Did they expect something else?

- Was onboarding confusing?

- Did the value become unclear?

Tools like cancellation surveys or quick in-app feedback buttons can help.

Also: don't assume high churn is always bad. Some utility apps naturally have short life cycles (QR scanners, TV remotes, etc.), but still make great money through volume and ads.

On the flip side, apps with strong long-term use cases (like period trackers or journals) may convert slowly but retain users for years. That's fine too.

The key is to understand your app's natural rhythm, and design your monetization around that.

Final tip: Keep things simple

Early-stage monetization is about learning what works:

- You probably don't need a sign-up button on day one.

- You don't need full backend logic for subscriptions. Keep it simple and stable.

- You don't need to "scale" pricing. Just test one model, one message, and improve based on real behavior.

Summary

You don't need a team or a budget to launch your first subscription app.

You need:

- A clear idea that solves a real problem

- A simple MVP that works

- An app store page that converts

- One paywall that helps you learn

- A few channels (like TikTok, Reddit, or ASO) that bring traffic

Start with one pain point. One feature. One message.

Don't get stuck chasing polish – ship early, listen carefully, and iterate fast.

Your first 100 users will teach you more than any blog post. And if you keep showing up, testing, and improving, $1K MRR is just the beginning.
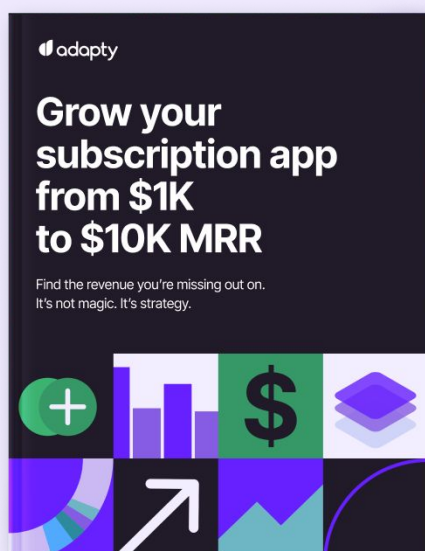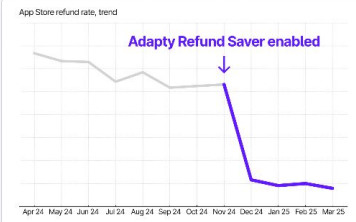

Your roadmap to $10K MRR in 2025 starts here

- A step-by-step path to $10K MRR

- Marketing made simple

- Revenue-focused strategies

- Built for non-marketers

[Download for free](#)

One line of code
Integrate in-app purchases instantly

Refund Saver
Let Adapty pay for itself

App Store refund rate, trend

Adapty Refund Saver enabled

Apr 24 May 24 Jun 24 Jul 24 Aug 24 Sep 24 Oct 24 Nov 24 Dec 24 Jan 25 Feb 25 Mar 25

No-code native paywall builder
100% native, fully customizable

Show on device Off
Layout settings
+ Add element
Hero Image
Headline
List
Item 0
Item 1
Item 2
Products
Monthly Premium
Yearly Premium
Footer
Purchase Button
Links

Background color
Color
linear-gradient
Default font
System (SF Pro, Roboto) Regular
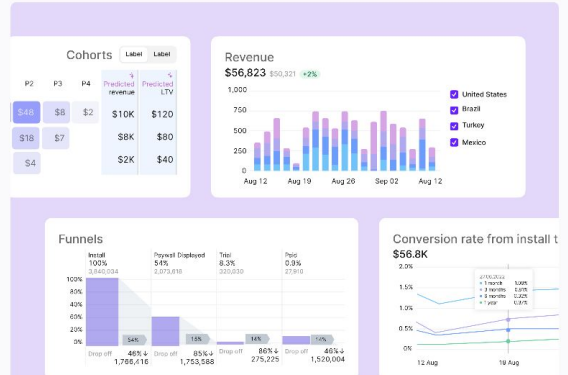Content layout
Default child margin
20 20 0 20
Spacing
8
Top button On
Action
Close
ID Required
Close
Style
Icon
Align
Left

Trusted by millions

Yearly plan
paid annually
$5/month
trial 30 days

Monthly plan
paid monthly
$6.99/month
trial 7 days

Try free for 30 days

Key financial insights
Track 20+ metrics: revenue, MRR, LTV, and more

Cohorts Label Label
P2 P3 P4 Predicted revenue Predicted LTV
$48 $8 $2 $10K $120
$18 $7 $8K $80
$4 $2K $40

Revenue
$56,823 $50,321 +2%
1,000
750
500
250
Aug 12 Aug 19 Aug 26 Sep 02 Aug 12
United States
Brazil
Turkey
Mexico

Funnels
Install 100% Paywall Displayed 54% Trial 8.3% Paid 0.9%

Conversion rate from install t
$56.8K

Targeting
Personalize your offers

ASA workout
Audience

All users
Audience

Tier 1
Audience

Paywall
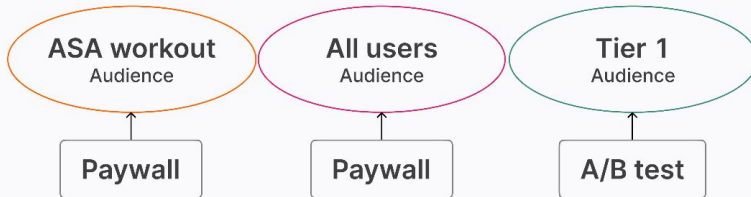
Paywall

A/B test

A/B tests
Find the best paywalls to grow your LTV

Predicted winner
A 96.3%
B 3.7%

Get more out of your music with Premium

Get Premium Access

Revenue per 1K users
$49.68
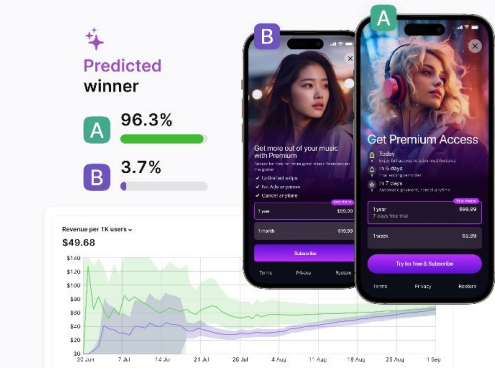
Paywall templates
High-converting designs, ready to use

Discover Hidden Trails and Scenic Wonders!

FIRSTPOSE PRO
Breathe, Bend, Begin

Your roadmap to $1K starts here!

Book a quick walkthrough

$1K playbook
Learn how to grow from zero to $1K MRR