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Users want Magic

create amazing products
TIPS, TRICKS & IDEAS

for mobile Apps Developers

Scientists have calculated that the chances of something so patently absurd actually   existing are millions to one.

But magicians have calculated that million-to-one chances crop up nine times out of ten.

-Terry Prachett
Mort

INTRODUCTION

Creating mobile apps is the best job in the world

Creating mobile apps is unquestionably the best job in the world. It is creative and profitable. All you need is a computer with Internet access. You don't need an office, you can assemble your team on elance.com or toptal.com. You can also order a finished product in an interactive studio, such as, for example, cartoontree.co. As Carter Thomas from http://www.bluecloudsolutions.com/ said, the life of a mobile app developer has all the perks of being a rock star without its inconveniences - paparazzi, psychofans, lack of privacy.

Something that attractive cannot, however, be achieved easily. The competition in app business is very intense, because hundreds of people dream about the same and only some will be successful. We get better in terms of merit. We design better marketing tools. We create more and better products. But it is getting increasingly difficult to convince users to use new apps.

REALITY

Creativity and innovation became insufficient

Civilisation based on product was transformed into civilisation based on information, but when the internet gave us access to all information, their market value decreased. When information providers, such as Google, enabled immediate access to all knowledge gathered by humanity, the need has arisen to select information and adjust it to the needs of individual users. Facebook is such a gatekeeper - our friends select content for us to see, at the same time evaluating it by "liking" and commenting.

To understand, process, analyse and use all this information we need more tools, more apps, more intuitive interfaces. Creative development of new products and services as well as supporting products and services became the primary activity of millions. Billions' worth of companies established by 20- or 30- year olds further fired their imaginations. The low barrier to innovative market entry and easiness of rising capital stimulated a rapid increase in the number of concepts of innovation, especially for mobile apps.

These mobile platforms and dedicated applications most deeply penetrated almost every area of contemporary life. Mobile apps industry developed in the context of information society made a whole generation startuppers. Engineers felt the desire to become rock stars. Artists became UX designers. Writers wanted to become SEO specialists.

We live in an era of Creativity Compulsion. Creative approach and technological innovation is not something special any more - it is obligatory.

Dreams of developing apps versus reality

Hundreds of new mobile apps are designed every day, stimulated by their creators' desires to solve problems, finding recognition and gain fortune. Inspired by belief in future riches, fascinated by startup lifestyle and pleasures of coworking creators, programmers, designers sacrifice everything for their dream of creating another Angry Birds, Instagram, Uber or Tinder. The harsh truth is that 80% of app developers cannot support themselves by creating apps. 78% of app earns from 1 to 5 thousand dollars of total income. Most of them cannot reach the limit of 1000 downloads.

Is it surprising? Most of these products are just clones of great hits - tools for managing tools created in a post-modern mental trap. Low quality, insipid products, counterfeits easily substituted or simply unnecessary. The myth that it is all about the money spent on marketing is in fact only a pretext for monetising companies to induce startuppers to invest more funds into using their tools. The popularity of Great Applications, such as Instangram, Snapchat or Tinder, came from their creators' excellent understanding of social context. These apps just had to be created, because they relate directly to steps on Maslow's pyramid of modern people. For example, Instagram more than Facebook implements Andy Warhol's idea that *"In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes."*

EXPECTATIONS

What more to expect from mobile apps ?

If you read this ebook, it means that you are not satisfied by copying ideas of great visionaries, you don't enjoy creating organisers, calculators and alarms and you don't want another game you create earn 11 dollars. Look around and think: which needs are currently not addressed by applications?

Turn off your smartphone, go for a walk in the woods, feel relief, go against the mainstream.

Is there anything you lack? You can order pizza or taxi through an app. You can rent and furnish your apartment through an app. You will find entertainment in mobile apps and games. Your need for knowledge and recognition can be fulfilled through apps. You can find work through apps. Apps can help you find your soul mate or just a sex partner. Are these all your needs?

The purpose of applications is Defining and Fulfilling needs

The aim of applications is facilitating. Facilitating access to resources, facilitating the process. Speeding up making contact, establishing a relationship or achieving any effect in the private, social of business sphere of your life. In other words, an app fulfils users' needs more immediately, unrestricted by time, place and situation than any other means, in instant mode.

What can become the next Great App? Which users' needs still remain unfulfilled, perhaps even not yet defined or determined? Answer - those hard to define.

Inexplicable, or at least hard to explain.

Unfulfilled needs

Needs which cannot be easily explained. I don't have a better word for what cannot be easily explained, so I will call it Magic.

Irrational, emotional needs, deeper needs, so called spiritual needs. Until now they have been fulfilled by literature, poetry, art, philosophy. Until now they have not been fulfilled by apps.

MAGIC

Deus ex Machina

"Magic Applications" are obviously not about sorcery. They are about experience, feeling and "aura" felt while using them. They are about marvellous experiences which cannot be easily explained.

In the modern era of monetizing, commercialisation, usefulness and analytics, the need for deeper experience is growing. We don't want to be perceived as records in databases. We feel the need to take a break form the race for popularity achieved through picks with flat bellies and expensive bags.

We want to convey our thoughts in a less banal way than just some emoticon. Express opinion more meaningful than a like. We want sincerity, depth - we want magic. But this has to be Instant Magic, not requiring secret knowledge or even reading Joyce's Ulysses. We want user-friendly magic easy as drinking a magic potion.

We are tired of usefulness (it is far too little) - now we want something extraordinary. MVP has to be substituted with MAP - minimal awesome product. Good design intuitive UX/UI, social media features are not sufficient. We want to be surprised! We need intense emotional experiences and we want our smartphone - our closest device, our magic wand - to enable experiences.

Emotion-based design

Programming is no longer a secret knowledge. Countless tutorials, frameworks, ready-made solutions lowered creative technology market entry barriers, especially app development. We have thus witnessed the inflation of concept, clones, such as Flappy Birds, Clash of Clans and countless other applications only serve to increase the number of followers on Instagram. App development has become a cyni cal undertaking set to generate profit, and a lousy one. We analyse keywords, application traffic management, create crosspromotion campaigns. We check the click-through rate of interface elements, we localise. We often directly lie to our users by presenting them graphics of screenshots and icons of a far better quality than the graphics of the game or app itself. We have forgotten about all the emotions, about respect for the user - not as a consumer, but as a human being.

If an app is to be successful, people have to love it. It must generate strong emotions, even sensations such as "butter-flies in the stomach", as in falling in love. Only then our app shall have a real impact on the physical world and lives of our users and will grant us the guru status. Some musical pieces, films or video games can generate such emotions. Can they be elicited by an app?

Today Leonardo da Vinci would create apps.

More importance should be given to programmers and app creators, so that they would see themselves and be seen by others as enlightened. The modern magicians should re-alise their magic powers. Forger your work on another tool to organise and optimise working time. Fly over waterfalls!

Magic is not about effects. It is about changes in estab-lished conventions of thinking. Magical applications will in-troduce changes to social processes, changes we find diffi-cult to understand. Just like some people still don't under-stand the basic principle behind Snapchat.

If app developers want to create great products, works of post-instagram, post-snapchat, post-tinder, post-uber era, they have to take into account the fact that some aspects of human reality cannot be measured.

It was possible to tame the supernatural energy (or at least its impression) with such primitive tools as paper and pen. Even agnostics admit that looking at Goya's sketches gives them the inexplicable sensation of its expressive power. Just looking at them sends shivers down our spines. Can an application - a lot more influential, interactive, social medium-make a similar or even more powerful impression ?

Let's not downgrade the capability of mobile apps. Let's not reduce their potential to platitudes.

Extraordinary things do happen.

Leonardo da Vinci was accused of witchcraft by Savonarola - rightfully, I believe. The magic of his talent and genius still works. I am certain that if he was born today, he would become an app developer - a creator of Magical Apps, just as his art and inventions were magical.

Extraordinary element in everyday life

I think that contemporary technology already has a lot in common with magic, but in the time of sharing knowledge, conferences, expert blogs, slideshare.com, meetups, we have totally rationalised our experience of the world and interpersonal relationships.

Perhaps the slightest experience of a mystery, magic would already be interesting for users, even in the form of a simple magic trick ? Is it possible for us to look at users as persons, with souls (whatever that means) rather than as targets ?

All this eco movement - eco-products, farmer's markets, hives at the tops of office buildings, street-art, slow-food, slow-life, non-chain unique café, independent galleries, unplugged concerts - all these are very popular phenomena and businesses introducing a bit of magic to our lives. Because people need it. People want at least some moments of their lives to be magical. Can we, as app developers, help them achieve it ? Can our productions for iOS / Android/ Windows Phone platforms emanate palpable magical energy ?

Essena through the looking-glass

Essena O'Neill who had nearly a million followers on Instagram, deleted her account and mercilessly criticised contemporary social media apps. She explained her decision: "I was deceiving all of you because the media let me. I didn't have to pay for the clothes you saw in my posts. It was all a lie and a naïve cult of the body

All I had to do was to take thousands of pictures every day in order to choose those few which would attract attention. I was pretending to be this sexy girl that I am really not. You saw what you wanted to see. You though I was living the dream because I got all these things for free? I was just miserable," she confessed.

Artificiality, glitter, fighting for popularity - these were the sources of constant stress, lapsing into clichés, focusing energy on futile activities and, consequently, leading to lowering self-esteem and depression. Self-destruction through success.

Essena's symbolic gesture allows us to notice a more general trend. Turning to naturalness and authenticity. The need for deeper experience and potential for more nuanced forms of sharing emotions. Since we still want to convey them through iMessage, we need solutions enabling us to send and receive richer content, but in a familiar and accepted form.

Interface of Emotions

Dreams, Fantasies, Feelings and Emotions are the spheres of human life not yet colonised by apps. Twitter or Pinterest would definitely be interested in the technology or even an interface enabling some insight into these spheres.

There are some alternatives in other media. Pop music has its counterpart in alternative music (often equally popular). Sometimes we feel like a comedy, other times like a drama touching upon important issues. Sometimes we want to watch a silly cartoon, other times - a beautiful fairy tale. The popularity of Tinder, where (with all due respect to its creators) we pick and choose people like pizza toppings, is not balanced by any Alter-Tinder. Tinder can be defended by the fact that many people look for and expect such a tool and it works best for them. Essena's example shows, however, that there is a growing number of users who expect solutions which would go deeper in terms of emotions, but in a equally simple and accessible form.

Magic Factor

Magic always assumes some mystery. The magician is not willing to reveal his secrets. Magical applications cannot entirely explain how they work/ They have to include an element of secret knowledge. Every startupper is to some extent such a magician trying to foresee the future and make it happen. Create something from nothing.

The worst thing you can do to an app is to make it insipid. The worst thing you can do to a magic trick is to explain how it works. The number of apps will increase rapidly . A technologically perfected and well-designed tools will need something more to become successful. Perfected technology, attractive design and adequate marketing are today a must have - everyone does it, tens of thousands of creative, intelligent, professional creators compete for the same thing. Today oly few applications achieve success similar to Great Apps several years ago (two years in this business is a long time). Just like pulling a rabbit out of a hat is not that impressive any more. Today something more, something else is necessary.

Viral marketing, shearability, word of mouth marketing in social media are now the most powerful force generating demand. It is hard to make it work using only financial resources, even considerable ones. In order to make the use word of mouth marketing possible, a product has to have a certain feature or features - a magical component which makes the information about it flow into the air, over the continents and oceans by means of social media and blogs. Magic Factor is the basic feature of a Magic App and it influences its acceptance of rejection by users. It is more essential than technology or design, more than its functions and it terms of the number of downloads it is more important than all marketing strategies. Thanks to the magic factor people will keep talking about our application.

Creating an adequate magic factor for a mobile app requires following several principles of the art of magic :

1.
Remember that people focus on themselves - their needs, their emotions, their desires, memories and dreams. They not that interested in technology as such, but rather how it can impact their lives. The app will be Magical if will strengthen user identity, not in terms of identifying with the app, but rather how the app helps its users to identify with themselves and with other people. The app will be Magical if using it will improve some feature, such as self-confidence.

2.

Enchant your users in as many ways as possible. Apps are like promises. Anyone can make a promise, just like anyone can design an app. But promises are meaningless if not kept. We lose trust, just as we would lose our users - very fast, if the app or game does not fulfil their expectations. Mobile users have are regarded as disloyal and hard to keep. That is because apps are like speed dates: we try many of them, encouraged by top charts, icons, screens, descriptions, advertisements. They usually generate some number of downloads but do not guarantee retention. Magical apps have to be enchanting at every level and in every detail. The quality difference between marketing materials and actual app is unacceptable. Delighted users will pass the information about the app on to their friends, because then they will become delightful. The demand for enchantment will never die down because we all want it and look for it.

3.

Magic needs purpose - magic potion allows Alice to shrink so that she would fit through keyhole. An app has to work the same as magic potion - always easy, concentrated and quickly digestible. An app needs a clear purpose. However, distinguishing between easy and shallow is extremely important. An application referring to Emotions, Dreams, Feelings, Fantasies, Memories cannot be shallow, but cannot aim at doing too many things at a time either. Fulfil too many needs at once. Elicit too many different emotions. Magic is not about creating intellectual labyrinths.

4.

Magic and magicians can be as serious as Saruman, but then only orcs will follow them. If you want your app to attract many users try some sense of humour, like Gandalf. Magic, voo-doo, occultism may evoke dark associations and that may result in depression. We want magic, we want to go beyond rationality, but it does not mean that we want "cut" ourselves. Reference to magic should not open the door for darkness, sadness, loneliness and incomprehension. On the contrary, we want to trigger positive associations, elicit smiles or even emotional response, but never depression or alienation. If our users would be self-contained, emotional introverts or sensitive outsiders we should rather make an attempt at opening them to the world and let some more light into their rooms - in an ac cessible way, of course.

5.

Analysing trends and targets, cloning hits led us (app developers) to a dead end. The pursuit of profit led us to producing worthless applications. Magic apps are based on correspondence with user's emotional states or eliciting these states. App creators should have the sense of understanding these emotional states. App developers cannot hide behind logos of their companies in this maze don't mean anything to anyone. We should let them know that these apps were created by people for people.

It is important to feel that when millions of people will download our application, they should still be able to trust us because what we have created directly results from the kind of people we are. Just like poets who write poems they would like to read, we should create apps we would like to use.

6.

Can we say that something is Magic in itself? Or perhaps Magic appears as contrast to non-magical phenomena? If someone with a cell phone suddenly appeared ages ago, it would be regarded as magic. Today handwritten letters have a magical element and magical aura. If our app is to be Magical, it should be designed in contrast with non-magical phenomena. I don't have in mind anything negative, but rather, for example, widely recognised functions or activities which became mundane, obvious. Popularity of digital photography resulted in the return of polaroid or lomo types of camera regarded by their users as having a "soul". Many people use special apps like Retrica, because photos taken with the filter of this app also have more "soul". Magic can be found in past trends, other cultures, inspirations from art or philosophy. Magic can pervade even most mundane activities if we manage to make them less mundane.

7.

Magic happens in direct interpersonal relationships - encourage them. Despite the available mobile and video multiplayer games board games have returned because they require face to face meeting of several people in a real world and nowadays we all lack such opportunities. Hence the success of Dice+ - a company which produced an digital dice for iPad games. We can play interactive games from the App Store animated and integrated with Facebook, but if we want to have the full experience of the game we have to meet with friends in a room and roll the dice, just like the old times. It is easy to focus application development on social media, because anything can be transmitted through links and references. Moreover, this movement can be traced and analysed. But the relations beyond our perception can be even more valuable for increase in downloads of our app. Make sure that users are clearly encouraged to use your app in the company of other people.

Magic Management

Magic is not about witchcraft. It is about emanating a certain energy rather than flying on a broomstick. Every incidental luck, small pleasures, comfort in sadness - all this we can call magical. Can we develop apps which would fulfil these functions? Can applications learn their users so that they would be able to recognise their sadness, joy, yearning or self-doubt and react to it? Can applications help with magical organisation of life principles of their users? One of the most popular applications are organizers, but the life of a Person should not be reduced to increased productivity and more efficient execution of items from to-do list.

Using Magical apps should confront users with questions they would otherwise have to ask themselves. Just like Sorcerers must choose the path to follow: Wisdom or Glory? Love or Power?. app users should have the same opportunities to make a choice. An app should differentiate its users, it should make them ask themselves who they really are and what they are like, even if in the form and purpose of entertainment. I we ask people "what they want to be like" we will get the same results we can observe on Instagram - millions of similar selfies of flat bellies in a mirror, which even after they win the desired popularity leave them with the sense of unhappiness and artificiality

Magic App is a Sorting Hat from Rowling's novel - it knows better than the freshmen students of magic which House of Hoghwarts they belong to.

Be careful with Magic

Magic obviously has side effects. Used incompetently or with impure intentions, its use may bring about some unexpected consequences, opposite to intended results, or even turn against the user. In this context, our users will notice any insincere attempts to touch a raw nerve of magic - the sensitive elements of human nature. Such app will be rejected immediately, it will be regarded as pretentious, profiled, or it will just passed unnoticed and will sink forever in the ocean of App Store. Therefore, even if we have a team of brilliant programmers and designers, before we start producing our app, we should learn something about human nature. Philosophy, psychology, poetry, art, literature - they should become an inspiration for creating apps (and by "literature" I don't mean expert blogs, SEO e-books or Steve Jobs's biography).

Disappearing bitmaps

Disappearing is a temporary state between reality and ghost world. Snapchat creators understood that very well. Disappearing of photos and videos, their ephemeral nature, the fact that they remain only in memory makes them magical. The inevitability of disappearance. The necessity to seize the moment, to enjoy the present.

Change, transformation and distortion. It is technically possible to produce a thousand of photographs from one weekend. Selecting the ones on which we look our best is easier when we have many options. But we pay much more value, attention and focus to both posing and taking pictures when we know that we have ten films in our Polaroid. Disappearance, transience, transformation or limits in reality require reflection and reflection is a magical state. They compel us to keep memory and to think. Magic is the opposite of mindlessness and automatism.

Magic will not change the world and has no such ambitions. The world will still be focus on productivity, ergonomics and economy. We will still be working in office buildings, paying our credits, spending our Sundays in supermarkets. The world and everyday life will remain as they are - real. Magic apps will not substitute Tinder, Instagram, Twitter or other great, liked and used apps. Magic apps should be like an unplugged concert in the candle light - acoustic and emotional. A moment of forgetfulness and a break from reality. Opposed to everyday reality, it allows for charging our batteries before we get back to it.

Ritual UX

It is not just about relaxation, break and separation from everyday reality. Sometimes we need a strong stimulus, perhaps sometimes even traumatic and fierce - if controlled, they can purify the mind in a way extreme sports purify the body. Apps enabling reflective crisis management training for our minds. As hard to digest as films by Lars von Trier. Using apps as a Ritual. Ritual apps - traumatic but strengthening experiences. An app which would challenge its user. An app you would have to live up to. Nobody expects learning Magic to be easy.

You have to slow down to keep up

We lose a lot as a result of the need for quick reactions, quick reading and writing, quick determination of priorities. Externalisation - swapping, exchanging, letting others do things. We want to forward the message as soon as possible, so that someone else would take the responsibility. We live in a forwarding culture. If every morning our mailbox contains 70 unread messages and almost each of them requires some action, if only writing back, we want to free ourselves from this burden and forward messages. In addition, there are instant messages and missed calls. Direct debits, some regular spam with advertisements. Bombed by these attacks of communication, we instinctively shut down, we become immune, we improve our skills, but not skills of answering but forwarding - letting someone else take action. Mental outsourcing. Emotional outsourcing. An app that would slow down communication - are you certain about our priorities for a given day? Are you sure? Are you sure? Facebook reminds us about birthdays of people close to us, but we don't really notice. We add some icons of heart, flower and birthday cake to their profiles. Done. But is it? Pedometer++ compels us to take a certain amount of steps per day - for our health. Now it is time for apps taking care of our mental health.

It is always too late, we are always behind our expectations. So we buy "likes" for our pictures. We know it is a deception, we know we bought these strangers' approval. But our friends don't, or at least cannot know for sure. Because it is their opinion that we really care about - look, I have 200 likes of my selfie and I am friends with you, you should appreciate it! Applications helping us appreciate what we have, without the need for pretending, buying likes, without glitter or insincerity. Apps deepening the relationships we already have, instead of constant search for new, shallow ones in this race towards the edge of the abyss. Towards the hell of scrolling down the fake profiles.

Shitty Apps

I have made all these mistakes. Until now I generated the highest profit from Shitty Apps. Worthless clones. I spent the money on expensive pleasures. While working almost 24/7 I lost touch with how I wanted to live and who I wanted to be. I have been wasting my talent and sacrificing my dreams. All I wanted was to increase sales. No matter what the consequences. Increased spending on clothes was accompanied by increased uncertainty about my purpose in life. Apppreneur - this is how I wanted to introduce myself.

But what did my apps offer to their users except for advertisements? - not much. Not that they were low quality - quite the opposite. They were very were designed and technologically perfected. They attracted users, they felt tempted enough to download these apps. They were free and functional. They were simply very effective billboards for displaying ads. Today I understand that I used only a small percentage of my potential and only a fracture of the potential a medium like mobile apps has. App have an actual capability to have an impact on reality. Leaving their mark on the history of culture. Thinking of apps in terms of gas station locator, advertising column, torch or fork is easy and profitable, but I realised I don't want to take the easy way, I want to go to the top.

People want Magic

One of the key elements for creating Magic Apps will be the Customer Development. It is traditionally used in production processes, but here it would be directed at positive values beyond "the most intuitive button layout". I ask, talk to people and draw conclusions based on observation. I formulate hypothesis concerning solutions of objective, real problems. The spirit of magic looms over us. In fashion, design, film, social life - people want "something more". App developers should give it to them.

What moments, events or situations in our lives could be perceived as magical? Do people use magic? Can a mobile app or any other product be magical? The sense of magic is subjective, it exists only in the user's mind. Magic has to be noticed. Magic needs adequate setting, perfect moment and run time. Magic as an antidote for problems. Magic is a counterpoint to one of the dominant attitudes today: „work hard - play hard". Magic is about focus, cultivating presence and subjectivity. Magic is not about changing the world, but yourself and your vision of the world.

Magic has to be believed in. Magical apps should show their users alternative models of behaviour, enable them to escape from the current model of how reality operates.

Magic is about keeping secrets. In the times of sharing everything, openness, space which sometimes causes agoraphobia, let us create spaces in the net which are not easily accessible, where we could hide and keep our secrets. Where you can't just press Print Screen and reveal to the whole world what was supposed to remain hidden.

Magic should not be overdone. We cannot escape reality. If we attempt to escape into the world of magic, imagination, dreams or memories, we will lose touch with reality and it can end tragically. Dreams can be substituted by fulfilled dreams.

If we give in to feeling and emotions too strongly, it can distort our relationships. Looking for deeper values can end in ridiculousness - as it did for Erlich Bachman in HBO series Silicon Valley, who was searching for the name of his company under the influence of LSD.

When we hang the picture of a tropical island o the wall we perform an act of magic, but only if it helps us save money to afford the holiday trip. In such case this banal trick would influence reality. A simple ritual and belief in its effectiveness creates energy which changes reality. App performance can also have an impact on reality if it will result in users' behaviour.

Belief in something encourages people to certain actions. Belief of one person can change her life, but belief of many people can change the world. If many people believe in something, this belief is made real by their actions undertaken as a result of their beliefs. The development of mobile apps will only speed up: AR, VR, 360-degrees video. The minds of brilliant engineers will keep generating more inspiring forms, but their content depends on users' needs - conscious and unconscious. The need for Magic have always accompanied mankind. Today it is definitely gaining momentum.

EPILOGUE

Perhaps impossible or perhaps possible ?

Enriching, ennobling, making more extraordinary, more interesting or valuable - these are Magic's intentions towards things, phenomena, emotional states or people. Magic is art of creating and transforming. Appearing from nowhere and disappearing into the void. Magic leaves behind questions without answers. We stand astonished, full with admiration and wonder - how is it possible? Where did it come from? Where did it go ?

How did we get here?

Things around us appear and disappear. At first we are unable to understand it, but at some point we learn to see the pattern. We notice order in Chaos.

Even Magic becomes the force we can harness.

I encourage anyone who feels "the magical power" to change themselves and reality through applications to contact me.

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