

Why GREAT CONCEPTS FAIL

5 Major App Development Mistakes
that Derail Your Success



Rocket Farm
STUDIOS LAUNCH YOUR NEXT ROCKET

TO LAUNCH A MOBILE APP THAT HAS STAYING POWER, YOU NEED MORE THAN JUST A GREAT CONCEPT.

A great idea can grab people's attention, maybe even convince them to download the application, but it won't necessarily keep them invested.

In fact, in 2019, 25% of mobile applications were downloaded and abandoned after just one use, [according to one study](#), and only 32% of people who downloaded an app use it more than 11 times.¹

The reasons? It varies. Right now, across the popular app stores, there are millions of apps, and organizations across all industries are developing enterprise applications for just about every operational function. So market saturation certainly plays a role. Poor user experience also drives people away. However, at Rocket Farm Studios, we believe poor retention rates most often come down to a lack of due diligence early on—before the design and development phases begin.

So what makes the difference between a successful app and one that never takes off? We've found that the failures are almost always a result of the following mistakes.

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¹ "25% of Users Abandon Apps After One Use," Upland. Accessed February 26. <https://uplandsoftware.com/localytics/resources/blog/25-of-users-abandon-apps-after-one-use/>

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Mistake

1

Not taking the time to understand market + product fit

Specifically, we've found that even the most market-savvy people don't spend enough time thinking about market fit.

Follow this process instead:



Assess market fit to confirm you have an audience for your application

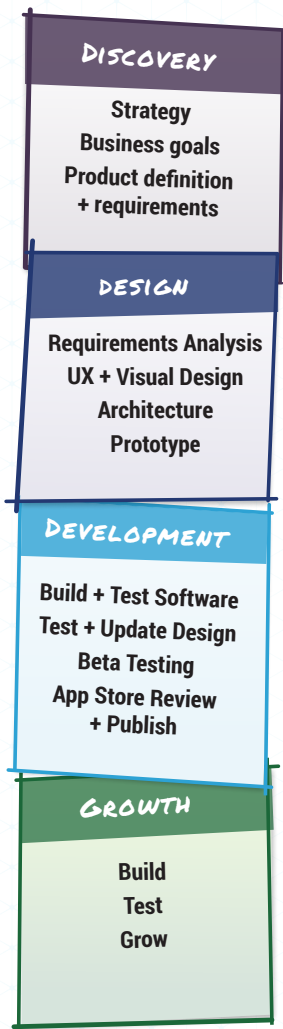
When you have an idea that you believe in, it's all too easy to think that consumers will love it too—but you must *validate* that belief.

Market fit involves strategic steps to uncover passionate users in a specific market who won't be able to live without your app once they start using it. It's not enough for people just to download your application. If you want the app to be worth the time and money you spend, they must use it often, and most people are quick to abandon an app if they don't immediately benefit from it.

At Rocket Farm Studios, we offer four core services to bring an application to market faster—Discovery, Design, Development and Growth—and finding and ensuring market fit is a key component of each of those steps.

While it is critical to think about your target audience, their behaviors and needs, and how they will use your application in initial discovery and planning, it's just as important to reaffirm those beliefs as you go through design and development and even after you launch. The bottom line: Market fit is continually changing—and you must be able to change to meet new expectations and demands.

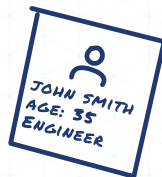
Fail to do that, and unfortunately, you may spend loads of time, effort, and money on an application that people just don't want.



How to confirm—and reaffirm—market fit

How do you ensure market fit? After many successful launches at Rocket Farm Studios, here is our best advice.

- ✓ **Know your user.** Before you do anything else, focus on understanding who is likely to use your product. Define your target audience and develop high-level user personas. Everything you do from this point forward—from developing application features to writing marketing copy—must be tailored specifically for your audience.
- ✓ **Create a brand map.** Put your brand's story, mission, vision, and values down on paper. Describe in writing how your product meets specific challenges of your audience. This process sets the framework for how you will position your application when you are ready to start marketing.
- ✓ **Don't wait until after development to conduct a competitive analysis.** So many well-meaning entrepreneurs develop the app and then research the competition to look for ways to differentiate their product with marketing strategy. It's the wrong approach because by then it may be too late to develop those features that actually set you apart.



Instead, take an extensive look at the applications that are most likely to rival yours. Evaluate them from a functionality standpoint, so you can pinpoint how your product is unique or better. Assess how they are marketing and selling their product. Look at the messaging they are using. Pinpoint their value proposition. Then figure out how you can differentiate your product and make that part of your design and development strategies.



- ✓ **Revisit your assumptions.** During the design stage, continue to re-evaluate your understanding of the consumer's problem and how well your product solves that problem.

Spend plenty of time communicating with members of your target audience through interviews, polls, and surveys. Test marketing copy and conduct keyword tests to evaluate how your messaging is resonating



with potential users. Doing it as you go, allows you to hone your branding and improve the product before you launch.

- ✓ **Build early fans.** When you are ready to go public with your product, early adopters can be your greatest asset. Obviously, if you are selling your app, those early buyers are great for the bottom line. However, whether or not you monetize the app, they are valuable throughout the process. Early adopters can offer critical feedback at every step and help to ensure the product better meets their needs.

During those early conversations, take their feedback to heart. Solicit their feedback as you are planning new features and rolling out your minimum viable product. That process provides you with the intelligence you can use to improve your product, but it also enables you to engage them and get them excited about using your application.

One of the smartest questions you can ask comes from a growth-hacking guru, Sean Ellis: “How would you feel if you could no longer use [ProductName]?”

- a) Very disappointed
- b) Somewhat disappointed
- c) Not disappointed
- d) N/A I no longer use [ProductName]

According to Ellis, if 40% of users would be “very disappointed” if they could no longer use it, you have a product you can grow. If you don’t hit that mark, find out why and make improvements.²



The goal is to find that point where 40% of customers tell you they can't live without you.

² “Using Product/Market Fit to Drive Sustainable Growth”, Sean Ellis.

<https://blog.growthhackers.com/using-product-market-fit-to-drive-sustainable-growth-58e9124ee8db>

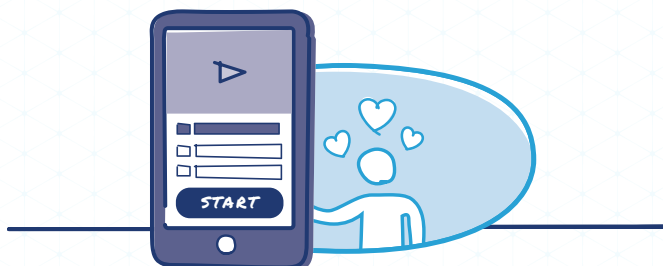
- ✓ **Don't set it and forget it.** Nothing works perfectly all the time, and neither will your application. So, even after you launch, keep gathering feedback from users and evaluating key sales and marketing metrics to discover ways to improve your overall product and maintain their loyalty.

Build loyal users with an early focus on product fit

Think about your favorite mobile app. The one you use daily. What about it keeps you coming back again and again? We're willing to bet it has a great deal to do with user experience. While market fit is all about finding the right users for your application, product fit is the steps you take to build their loyalty.

People may be quick to download an app, but then abandon it after a few uses because it either doesn't serve a purpose or, more likely, the user experience was flawed. If the application is a nightmare to use or slow to launch, for example, people aren't going to log in regularly to use it.

It goes beyond just the apps in the Apple App Store or Google Play. A regular complaint from corporate IT folks and the decision makers investing in enterprise applications is that employees don't use them enough or as intended. However, resistance to new tech usually occurs because it's hard to use or learn or the onboarding experience isn't smooth.



PRODUCT FIT IS ABOUT THE DESIGN + FEATURES OF THE PRODUCT. THOSE CRITICAL ASPECTS THAT WILL MAKE USERS HAPPY.

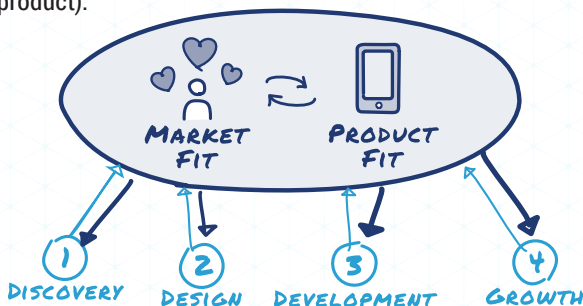
What do we mean when we say “product fit?” Whereas market fit is focused on your target audience (i.e., who will be passionate about using your product), product fit is about the design and features of the product. Those critical aspects that will make users happy and keep them using the product, even after you release new versions.

Market fit and product fit go hand in hand, and for your product to succeed, you need to find and ensure both.

How to confirm—and reaffirm—product fit

We’ve helped launch many successful projects at Rocket Farm Studios, and here are some critical lessons we’ve learned along the way:

- ✓ **Understand your brand and users incredibly well.** Develop a brand map that details what your business does, who you are, and how you relate to your users. Then define the types of users, if there are more than one, who will use your product. Conduct interviews, do market research, learn everything you can about your target audience, and create a user persona for each type of user. This step is critical to understanding their needs and preferences and how your brand specifically can meet those expectations.
- ✓ **Focus on a Minimum Viable Product (MVP).** Early on, create a thesis about the minimum feature set required to take your product to market and prove your assumptions (e.g., that your business model works or that users will keep using the product).

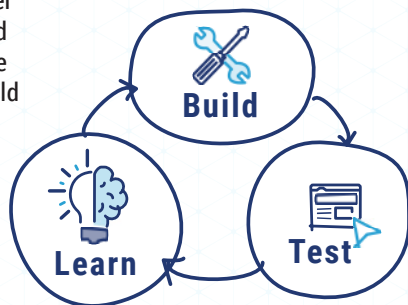


Map your MVP requirements, including functional requirements (i.e., features) and system-oriented requirements (i.e., reliability, scalability and security). Ultimately, before you move into design, you want a detailed plan and a high-level set of requirements, ideally captured in an issue tracking database that you can later reference against the design.

Remember, an MVP isn't a "perfect" product. It has the functionality required for users to begin using the application and is just enough to prove your core business thesis, but it's not polished or final. Releasing an MVP allows you to test the waters, discover glitches in the user experience, and gather customer feedback so you can fine-tune the product. If you are monetizing your application, it allows you to start making money sooner.

- ✓ **Measure data against a True North Metric.** Your True North Metric is how you will gauge the success of a product, and it will inform decisions regarding it. What is the one metric that captures the value you offer users and indicates that your product is succeeding? Is it the number of daily active users? Or time spent in the app? Decide what that metric will be early in the process. Then determine how you will capture and measure it against your internal and industry benchmarks.

- ✓ **Build, test and learn throughout the process.** We can't stress this enough: Don't trust your original assumptions. You won't always know what key feature or experience makes the product indispensable to users, so question your assumptions to ensure you are meeting the users' expectations—even after you launch. Iterate, test, learn, and fix what isn't working and enhance what is. Then start over. You should be testing everything, from keywords to features, with a small and growing set of users as early as possible and as a discipline.



- ✓ **Audit your existing resources.** Are you ready to release an MVP? What are the capabilities of your IT and marketing teams? What key intellectual property do you hold? What is the state of your current IT infrastructure? Do you have the ability to collect data and analytics so that you can glean the insights needed to brand and market your product or make improvements?

It's important to look at your existing assets and determine what you will need in order to develop, grow and scale your product. That could require upgrades to your tech stack or marketing process, for example. An audit can be eye-opening, making it obvious pretty quickly that you'll need support to take your product to market.

- ✓ **Design an easy-to-use interface so you don't lose early users.** User experience (UX) design is the process of creating a product that is both easy and enjoyable to use, so it drives up customer satisfaction. Early on, develop a high-level experience map that details what the ideal experience—from end-to-end—should look and feel like for customers as they navigate the application.



**USER EXPERIENCE (UX) DESIGN
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Mistake

2

Taking a hands-off approach



It's surprising to us that any person or business would want to be involved only initially and then have a design or development team come back months later with the final product. That hands-off approach is risky and that's why we have adopted a much more collaborative approach.



We want you to have a seat at the table. Even the best developers can't read minds, and ongoing collaboration with stakeholders is essential to ensuring that the product we develop meets your expectations. To us, a failure would be getting deep into a project and finding out that we're headed in the wrong direction. We don't like rework and we definitely don't like to start over.



When it comes to app development, for us, it's all about the sprint—and rapid innovation. In fact, in some cases, changes CAN literally happen overnight. What's more is that we're not thinking about crossing the finish line at the end of a long race, because for us there is no finish line.

After all, stellar products—the ones that have the best chance for long-term, sustained success—are continuously tested, evaluated and improved. You see it every day with the apps you love and use passionately. New features are rolled out and updates occur to eliminate bugs. It's just part of creating something great and keeping people happy with the product. And you should be involved every step of the way.

WE LIVE + BREATHE
AGILE APP
DEVELOPMENT



We live and breathe agile app development

HERE'S WHY:

- ✓ **We want to see rapid innovation.** Our approach is about making quick, incremental changes that improve the product over time. We meet daily to plan sprints, resolve issues, and update design to keep the project running smoothly. We deliver builds at least weekly, and progress happens fast.



- ✓ **We want to collaborate with clients often.** We provide all stakeholders with complete visibility into our process and progress. We're here to provide the expertise, but we want our



clients to step in and tell us if something doesn't feel or look right. We don't want to wait until the end of a project to learn that we missed the mark. We'd much rather root out—and fix—the issues along the way.

- ✓ **We want to test a lot.** We deliver mobile or web builds to testers—including clients—weekly to gain feedback on how the product works and what needs to be improved. However, we want to do more than just test; we want to be able to act immediately on what we learn and address issues that could impact user experience.

- ✓ **We want to stay nimble.** Requirements and conditions change, and we need to be able to change quickly too to ensure we deliver the right product.



Ultimately, with our approach, clients see the product take shape and play a role in developing the product they want. There aren't any surprises at the end.

3

[illegible]

What is a Minimum Viable Product?

The MVP is the most basic version of your product built in the quickest and simplest way possible. It includes the core functions and features required to solve a specific problem for the user and nothing more. That’s the minimum part.

If the MVP solves a problem, people will like using it and they will likely continue using it. That’s the viable part.

Full disclosure

It doesn’t make fiscal sense to spend a ton of time and money loading an application up with features and fine-tuning it before you get a sense of its viability once it hits the marketplace. That’s why at Rocket Farm Studios, we recommend releasing a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) first.

But why would you release an unfinished product?

The biggest objection to an MVP is that people are worried about a product being perceived as flawed or insufficient. Without all the features, they are concerned it won’t seem valuable enough to keep people interested until it’s “finished.”

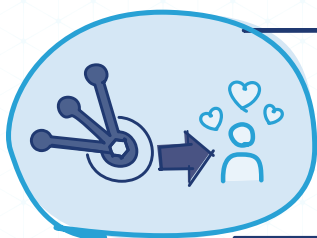
However, we see the MVP as integral to getting to a finished product, because it enables you to:

- ✓ **Validate your overall idea.** At Rocket Farm Studios, we spend a good bit of time early on determining market fit and product fit to find an audience for the products we develop. However, the MVP provides a true measuring stick, enabling you to test those assumptions with actual users and confirm that you are meeting market needs and expectations.



- ✓ **Avoid building unwanted features.** You could be very wrong about the features you think users want, and dump time and money into features that ultimately fall flat. After releasing an MVP, you can gain critical feedback from users about what features would bring more value to the product.

- ✓ **Get in the habit.** MVP thinking is Build-Test-Learn thinking. The sooner you can teach your organization to think and act like that the better.
- ✓ **Discover glitches in the user experience.** Early users can pinpoint issues and flaws with the functionality so that you can fine-tune the product. 
- ✓ **Save money.** Let's face it: Building a new application is not cheap. A quicker more streamlined product will cost you less initially, so it's low risk with high ROI potential. As important, however, is that the last thing you want to do is sink a bunch of cash into a product, find out it's missing the mark, and then sink even more cash into reworking it. Validating features with a simple MVP keeps reworking to a minimum.
- ✓ **Be nimble.** The economy can turn on a dime, the industry could undergo major change, or your organization could suddenly need to pivot. With an MVP, you make incremental changes, so you can more easily respond to the market or your own business needs. In other words, you are better poised to create opportunity from disruption.
- ✓ **Find early adopters.** If you are monetizing your application, an MVP allows you to start making money sooner. Even if you don't plan to monetize the product, you can still engage with users, and they can help to build buzz around the product. Additionally, their feedback can be instrumental in refining features and functionality. 
- ✓ **Test your business model.** With an MVP, you can test your marketing and sales approach, business functions and technology capabilities to ensure you can scale. It's important to know that if the product takes off, you can keep up.



**IF THE MVP SOLVES
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Rules for Developing an MVP

LET US MAKE THIS CLEAR: An MVP shouldn't be something you hastily throw together because you are desperate to get something into the market. It should still be a good product in and of itself, and a great deal of effort should go into planning and executing the MVP. It's critical that you:

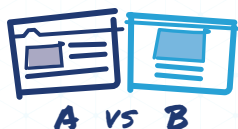
- ✓ **Solve a problem.** Any MVP must meet a specific need or solve a problem for users. The solution – not fancy features or design – is why people, and especially early adopters, are willing to invest in products. Make sure you have outlined the problem you are solving and how you solve it in detail.

- ✓ **Represent your brand.** No matter what you release, you should always be proud of it and it should be consistent with what you believe your brand is all about.



- ✓ **Prioritize ruthlessly.** You simply can't pack everything you want into the MVP, so you must pinpoint the critical features required to solve the problem. Answer the question: What do users need to accomplish this one thing? Then build those features.

- ✓ **Offer minimum features but maximum value.** An MVP is a stripped-down version; however, it should still provide an outstanding user experience. While it won't include every feature or function, it should provide the end-to-end functionality required to solve the core problem. If it doesn't do at least that one thing really well, users won't see the value in it.



- ✓ **Commit to continual improvement.** Like Uber, Facebook and all the other wildly successful applications that started off as MVPs, your MVP must also be a work in progress. Commit to gathering feedback from the market to learn what's missing and what needs work. Test, learn and make incremental progress toward a product that, ultimately, meets the target audience's needs.

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Underestimating the scope of your product



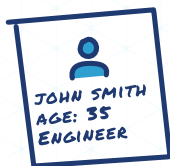
When it comes to developing an app, agility and flexibility are essential, but you still need a solid plan and documented development requirements to help ensure successful results. App development can be time-consuming and expensive, and detailed specifications keep everyone on track and provide a clear scope of work.

Why is that important? Because vetted, documented development requirements:

- ✓ Provide enough detail so that the developers on the team can create the product you intend, with all the features and functionality you expect
- ✓ Leave little room for doubt about what you want from the development process
- ✓ Reduce delays, technical debt and added costs
- ✓ Enable the development team to be able to better estimate the time required for the overall effort
- ✓ Beyond that, it forces you to map out all the business and technical requirements necessary to take your concept to market, and that can be pretty eye-opening, as you consider everything that needs to be built and done to bring an app to market, so it prepares you for what's to come.



Prepare for development with five critical actions



Before you begin development, you must have a solid understanding of the user. At Rocket Farm Studios, we nail that down during our Discovery process. That requires talking to users, conducting surveys, looking at competitors and more to create in-depth user personas.

In addition to that, we work with clients to help them build their brand story, including developing the mission and vision for the product and exploring the relationship between the brand and users, vendors, partners and competitors. We even start thinking

about design architecture, including logo, iconography, colors, images and fonts.



In order to move forward with design and, ultimately, development, you need to have that branding strategy in place and a clear understanding of your audience.

Then you can build out your development requirements following these guidelines:

1. **Be clear about your goals.** As with every project, it is critical to lay out your goals for the application. Doing so helps you to understand what your requirements will be. Is your primary goal to capture a specific market segment? Or streamline operations within your enterprise? Once you establish your business goals for the application, you can map out what are the must-have and nice-to-have features for the application.



Additionally, outline the stakeholders, or rather those people who will be integral in bringing the concept to market, the role they will play, and their individual goals for the project.

2. **Summarize the product concept, core features and benefits to the user:**

- ✓ Outline the objectives of the application. What problem does it solve? How does it bring value to customers?
- ✓ Describe your vision. What is your expectation for both development and the end result of the product?
- ✓ Lay out your monetization model, if any. Will you use advertising, pay-per-download, in-app purchases, freemium or subscriptions?
- ✓ Confirm your distribution model. What channels will you leverage to reach users? What kind of sales approach will you use for each channel?



3. Outline the requirements. At Rocket Farm Studios, when we draw up app development requirements, we focus on these core areas:



- ✓ Job and business requirements. What is necessary to finish the job and meet your business goals?
- ✓ Functional requirements. How will the app run and what features are needed?
- ✓ System requirements. Which platforms, devices and operating systems are supported? What is needed for testing?
- ✓ User interface (UI) requirements. What are all the actions the user will need to perform?

4. Define the system architecture. List the specifications of how the system will work:



- ✓ Define and describe the data architecture
- ✓ Show key components and data and messaging flow
- ✓ Select third-party vendors or libraries you will use
- ✓ Determine what is needed to ensure scalability, reliability and security
- ✓ Decide which maintenance and upgrade requirements are needed for the tech and marketing stacks

5. Describe the user experience. Outline the user journey, detailing every step of using the app, from registration to realizing the benefits:



- ✓ Focus on actions the app enables users to do
- ✓ Include base features (e.g., password protection)

- ✓ Include features from other apps you want to see replicated or avoided
- ✓ Prioritize features into must-haves (non-negotiable), should-haves (important and add value, but not vital), could-haves (nice, but can be left out), and will not-haves (features that aren't a priority at this time).
- ✓ List what the user can do from his/her own perspective (and why he/she would want to do it)

As you layout the user experience, also think about and incorporate visual elements into the document to help the team of developers fully understand how you want the app to function:

- ✓ Use base-level wireframes and pixel-perfect visual designs
- ✓ If sound and motion are part of the experience, include that too
- ✓ Share examples from other products, detailing specifically what you like about the design and why



Finally, throughout the process document potential limitations and all the challenges the team will need to keep in mind, including:

- ✓ Deadline
- ✓ Timeframe
- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Tech and marketing stack
- ✓ Budget



With that process documented, your development team will be ready to jump in with a firm understanding of the project and the tools necessary to move forward.

Mistake

5

Waiting to “grow” the product after launch



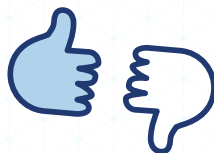
It's a big misconception that "growth" is all about what happens after a product is released. At Rocket Farm, we play a part in growing your app by making sure the product is what the market wants—very early in the process during Discovery, through Design and Development—and then after launch, through a highly-detailed and dedicated process.



Build-Test-Learn ... Build Better

You can't build a product and consider it done, so the ideal scenario is to release a product and then let the users tell you how to improve it. You must continuously tweak it if you want to build and retain loyal users. To do that, you must know what to fix and how to fix it first.

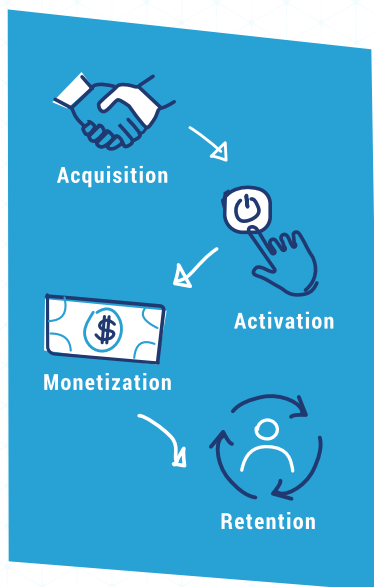
At Rocket Farm, after we launch the MVP, we begin collecting data and user feedback and then continuously roll out new or improved features to better meet market demands and improve performance across the entire user life cycle:



- ✓ **Acquisition:** Bringing in more users to learn about the product
- ✓ **Activation:** Getting more users to try the product
- ✓ **Monetization:** Converting users into paying customers
- ✓ **Retention:** Keeping paying customers happy

To do that, we:

- ✓ Track features against core metrics to see where we are winning and losing
- ✓ Prioritize relentlessly to dedicate resources and time
- ✓ Involve product management, engineering, design, data and marketing teams to prioritize improvements
- ✓ Follow a highly disciplined development process, because new features/changes/bugs are constantly being pushed and the team must maintain an extremely high level of quality



A deeper look at the Rocket Farm Studios growth process

For us, Growth is all about figuring out what your audience likes—and dislikes—about your product. Through testing, learning and building, the goal is to refine everything, from the product itself to the branding and marketing messages to give it the best chance of succeeding.

HERE IS HOW OUR SIX-STEP PROCESS WORKS:

- ✓ **Step 1:** Measure user data against the metrics. We identify and monitor critical metrics (e.g., on fire, leading vs. lagging, causal vs. correlated) and take an objective look at the product and customer funnel.
- ✓ **Step 2:** Theorize and ideate about what to change based on the data. We use hard and soft data from the metrics analysis to brainstorm improvements, new features, existing channel optimizations or new channel discovery.

OUR GROWTH PROCESS



- ✓ **Step 3:** Evaluate each idea. We take a hard look at each idea and gauge its merit against impact, ease of implementation and our overall confidence that it's the right thing to do.
- ✓ **Step 4:** Decide what to build next based on our findings. Through relentless prioritization, based on group consensus on which ideas will deliver the most impact, we determine which ideas to experiment with next.
- ✓ **Step 5:** Build and release. We develop new features and work with marketing to experiment with channels and messages.
- ✓ **Step 6:** We start all over again, as needed. If you are ready to test new features or ideas, we'll keep going for as long as you need us.

Why Rocket Farm Studios?

Rocket Farm Studios is an award-winning app development company committed to building great mobile applications. We help companies of all sizes across all verticals take their products to market, find traction and scale.

Here's how we do it



If you are ready to take your concept to market faster – and ensure it's viable once it gets there – Rocket Farm is ready to jump right in.

CALL YOUR SALES REP NOW!



Rocket Farm
STUDIOS LAUNCH YOUR NEXT ROCKET