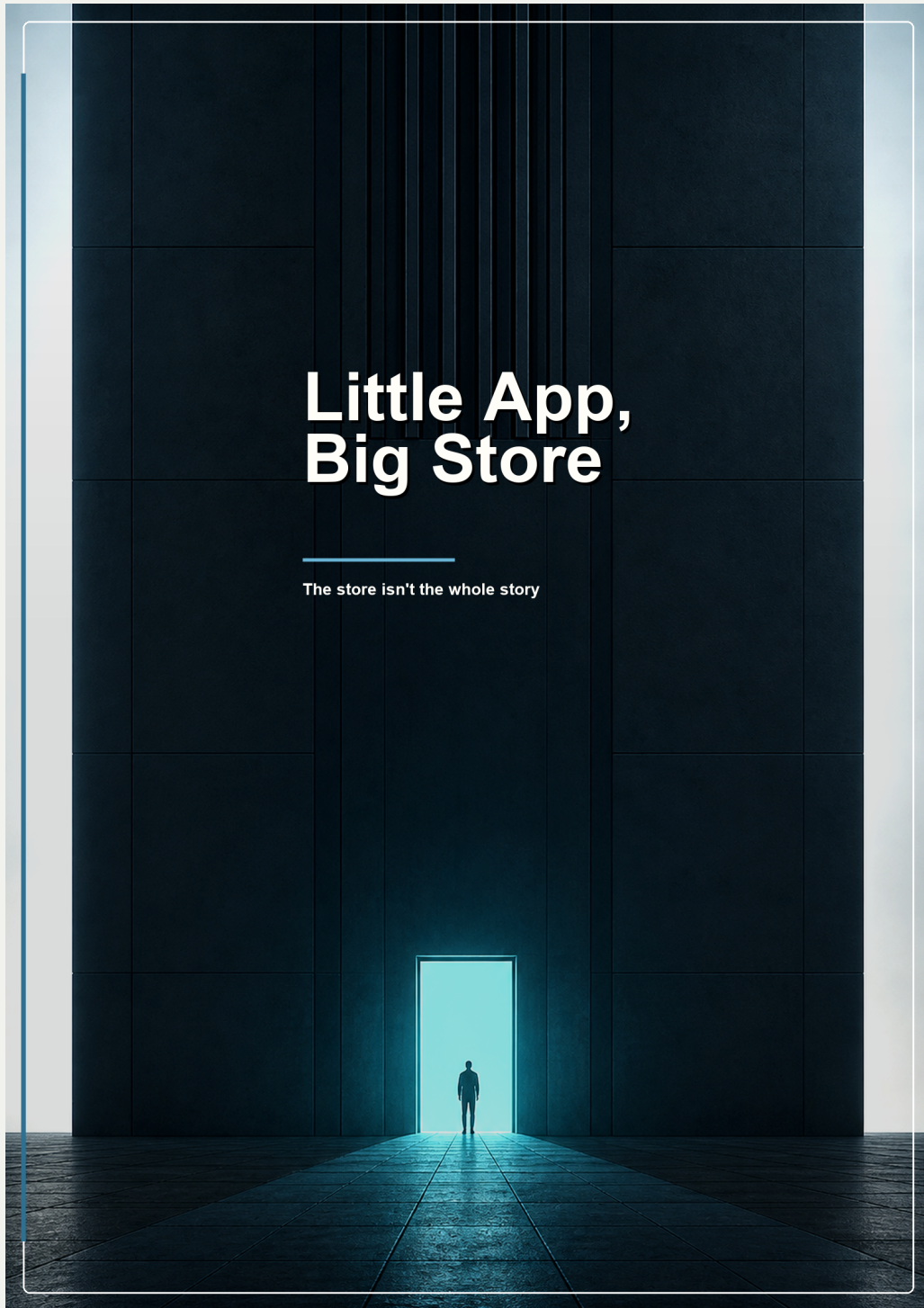


Little App, Big Store

The store isn't the whole story



A short book about what gets in the way of a useful product.

I wrote this after watching a useful app become a full-time project before it had a fair chance to help anybody. The original idea was simple: build something useful, make it available, let people use it, and let them decide whether it helped. That was supposed to be the whole thing.

THE QUESTION UNDERNEATH

The system isn't just the shelf. It's the gate, the checkout counter, the review desk, the rulebook, the map, the traffic light, and the sign above the door.

INSIDE THIS EDITION

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01

ROAD MAP

MORE AHEAD

NOW: THE APP STORE MACHINE

NEXT: THE STORE ISN'T JUST A STORE

The App Store Machine

But then the app had to go live in the store. First came the listing. The app needed a name, a subtitle, screenshots, preview videos, keywords, categories, reviews, ratings, privacy answers, in-app purchase rules, subscriptions, tracking disclosures, analytics, campaigns, and reporting. The little app thought it was finished. But the machine was just waking up.

The listing stopped being a simple sign on a shelf. It became a project with its own vocabulary, deadlines, specialists, and dashboards. The product still had to work, but now it also had to explain itself in the language of the store.

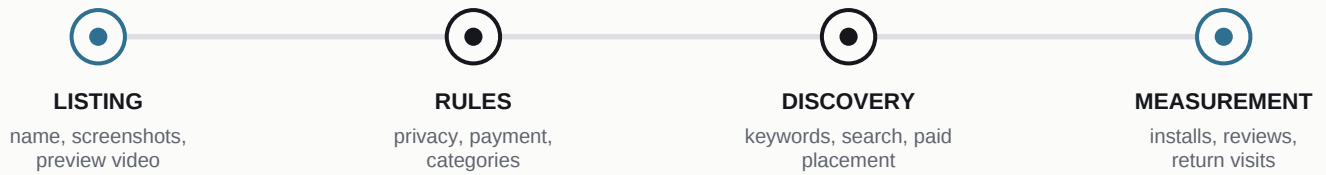
THE EXHAUSTED FOUNDER

I've optimized my ASO inside the App Store. I've rebuilt my web page, tuned my SEO and SEM, rewritten my CTAs, watched my CPC, calculated my CAC and LTV, checked my ROAS, refreshed my screenshots, and hired people for growth, content, analytics, paid acquisition, email, and retention. I've increased the app's price to pay for all of it. I'm fully optimized. I'm still not selling my app.

THE FIRST TURN

The little app thought it was finished. But the machine was just waking up.

THE LISTING ISN'T JUST A LISTING



Every step can be reasonable by itself. The problem is the accumulation. Before it has helped anyone, a small product is expected to have a polished listing, a media package, privacy answers, payment rules, a plan for ranking, and a dashboard full of reports.

THE GAP

A product can be ready to use and still be nowhere near a person.



The store isn't just a store

Being in the Store doesn't mean people will find you.

THE OBVIOUS QUESTION

Being in the Store and paying this fee seems like they should be marketing your product for you, doesn't it?

Then come the helpers: companies that improve app-store listings, track keywords, design screenshots and videos, run paid install campaigns, trace where users came from, manage reviews, help bring people back, and advise on subscriptions and analytics.

Everyone arrives with the same message: We can help your app succeed in The Store. And that sounds helpful. Until you stop and ask the obvious question. If The Store is already taking a piece of the sale, why does the app still need a whole second industry just to be seen inside The Store?

So the little app pays to be in The Store. Then it may pay to be noticed in The Store. Then it may pay someone else to explain why it still isn't being noticed enough. That's when The Store stops feeling like a store. It starts feeling like a casino with screenshots.

THE SECOND INDUSTRY

If The Store is already taking a piece of the sale, why does the app still need a whole second industry just to be seen inside The Store?



03

ROAD MAP

MORE AHEAD

NOW: THE PATH GETS CROWDED

NEXT: THE MALL HAS RULES

The path gets crowded

Every answer costs money. Every helper needs access. Every layer promises growth. And slowly, the simple app disappears behind the business of making apps look successful.

PRODUCT

the thing that helps

LISTING

the shelf and the gate

DISCOVERY

keywords and paid placement

MEASUREMENT

tracking and reports

VISIBILITY

ads, keywords, placement

WHAT GETS LOST

The simple app disappears behind the business of making apps look successful.

ALL HOPE IS LOST

The product is ready. The machine is full. Nobody is finding it. For a while, I couldn't see a way out of that.



04

ROAD MAP

MORE AHEAD



NOW: THE MALL HAS RULES

NEXT: THE PRIVACY LABEL PROBLEM

The mall has rules

The funny part is that the app is treated like a money machine before anyone has even used it. The moment you say, "I own an app," the world reacts like you found oil in your backyard. People start circling. Not because the app helped someone. Not because the product worked. Not because users came back. But because the app now lives inside a system where everyone knows there are fees, rankings, installs, ads, data, subscriptions, ways to keep people coming back, and reports to sell.

And the mall has a lot of rules. The rules may be necessary. The questions may be fair. But every answer creates another place where the little app can be measured, compared, promoted, or made to wait.

BETTER PLACEMENT

There is a system for that.

BETTER DISCOVERY

There is an agency for that.

BETTER KEYWORDS

There is a dashboard for that.

BETTER CONVERSION

There is a consultant for that.



05

ROAD MAP

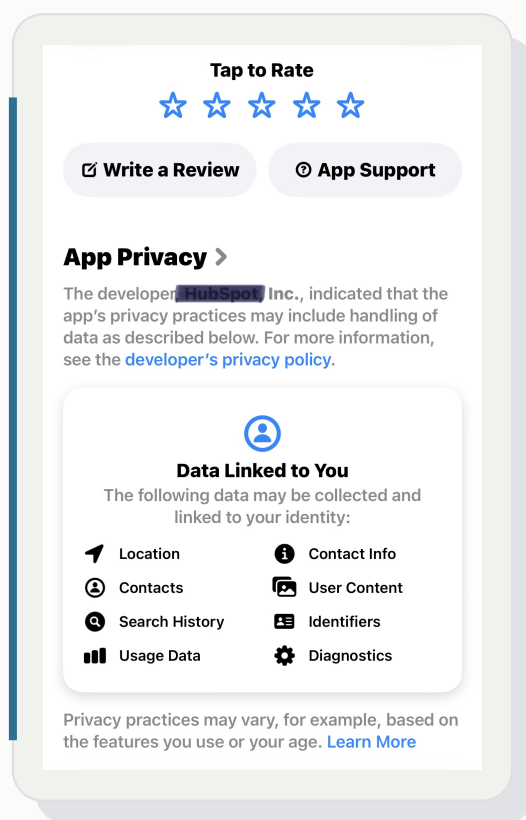
MORE AHEAD

NOW: THE PRIVACY LABEL PROBLEM

NEXT: WALK THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR

The privacy label problem

Then comes the privacy label. The Store asks: does the app collect data, track users, link data to people, or use third-party partners? Those are fair questions. Users should know what a product collects.



A fair question

But the label also reveals the strange position the little app is in. The Store asks the app to explain what it collects while sitting in the middle of the search, the tap, the ad, the install, the payment, the ranking, the review, and the report.

The Store isn't outside the system. The Store is the system.

The label is a small box inside a much larger machine.

THE LARGER QUESTION

The Store isn't outside the system. The Store is the system.



Walk through the front door

Build the app. Submit the app. Wait for reviews. Follow the rules. Answer the privacy questions. Set up the payments. Optimize the listing. Buy the ads. Track the installs. Study the dashboard. Hire the agency. Adjust the keywords. Refresh the screenshots. Chase the ranking. Repeat.

That may be normal now. But normal doesn't always mean clean. The founder owns the app. But The Store owns the path to the app. And whoever owns the path gets to charge rent along the way.

THE TWO PATHS TO THE TOOL

APP-STORE ROUTE

The product enters the store, waits for approval, and then has to spend more time or money trying to be seen there.

01 Submit the app to the store and wait for a review.

02 Answer the store's rules and privacy questions.

03 Keep changing the listing so the store can find and rank it.

04 Pay for ads or other help to get noticed.

DIRECT WEB ROUTE

The product page is the front door. A person can understand the tool, decide whether it fits, install it, and return to it.

01 Find the product page on the web.

02 Read what the tool does before installing it.

03 Decide whether it fits the problem you have.

04 Install it from the page and come back from the home screen.

Here's why we like the web-app path. A Progressive Web App is a web tool that can be installed from a website and opened from the home screen. It doesn't begin inside a crowded store shelf. It begins where the user already is: on the web. The person finds the product page, reads what it does, decides whether it fits, installs it from there, and comes back to it from the home screen.

No app-store maze. No buried listing. No second trip through someone else's marketplace. No pretending the website is just a waiting room before the real product begins.

The real point

A modern web tool can live on the device, carry its own icon, and open like an app when the browser supports it. That is the practical part. The larger part is the relationship: the tool should not need a parade of middlemen before a person can use it.

Circle the People isn't building software that gets swallowed by The Store machine. We build useful tools that are easy to understand, easy to reach, and easy to return to. That's why installing from the web makes sense.

CLEAR	The product should be easy to understand before it asks for anything.
DIRECT	The product page can be the front door, not a waiting room.
LIGHTER	Not perfect. Not magical. Just fewer layers between help and the person who needs it.
HUMAN	The relationship should be cleaner, with room for a person to decide.

THE CHOICE

Just the web. Just the product. Just the person who came looking for help.

AFTERWORD

ROAD MAP

MORE AHEAD

NOW: THE REAL POINT

NEXT: THE ROAD KEEPS CHANGING

The question underneath

The Store asks every app: do you track the user? Fair question. But maybe users should also ask: who tracks The Store? Who profits when the app needs to be discovered? Who sells the visibility? Who owns the path? Who gets paid before the product ever helps anyone?

The app store had its moment. It helped people discover software. It made installing apps feel familiar. It gave users a place they understood. But over time, The Store has become more than a store. It became a place where people fight to be seen. And once every place becomes something to optimize, bid on, track, and monetize, the product starts serving the system instead of the user.

We're choosing a different path. Not because we hate app stores. Because we like directness. Because we want a fairer deal. Because we like the old idea that if a product works, people should be able to find it, install it, use it, and come back without a giant machine standing between them and the tool.

REMEMBER THIS

No store maze. No ranking theater. No paid shelf drama. No little app trapped in the big mall.

Circle the People

Useful tools. Honest products. More agency.

A useful product doesn't need a perfect machine around it. It needs a clear path to a person.