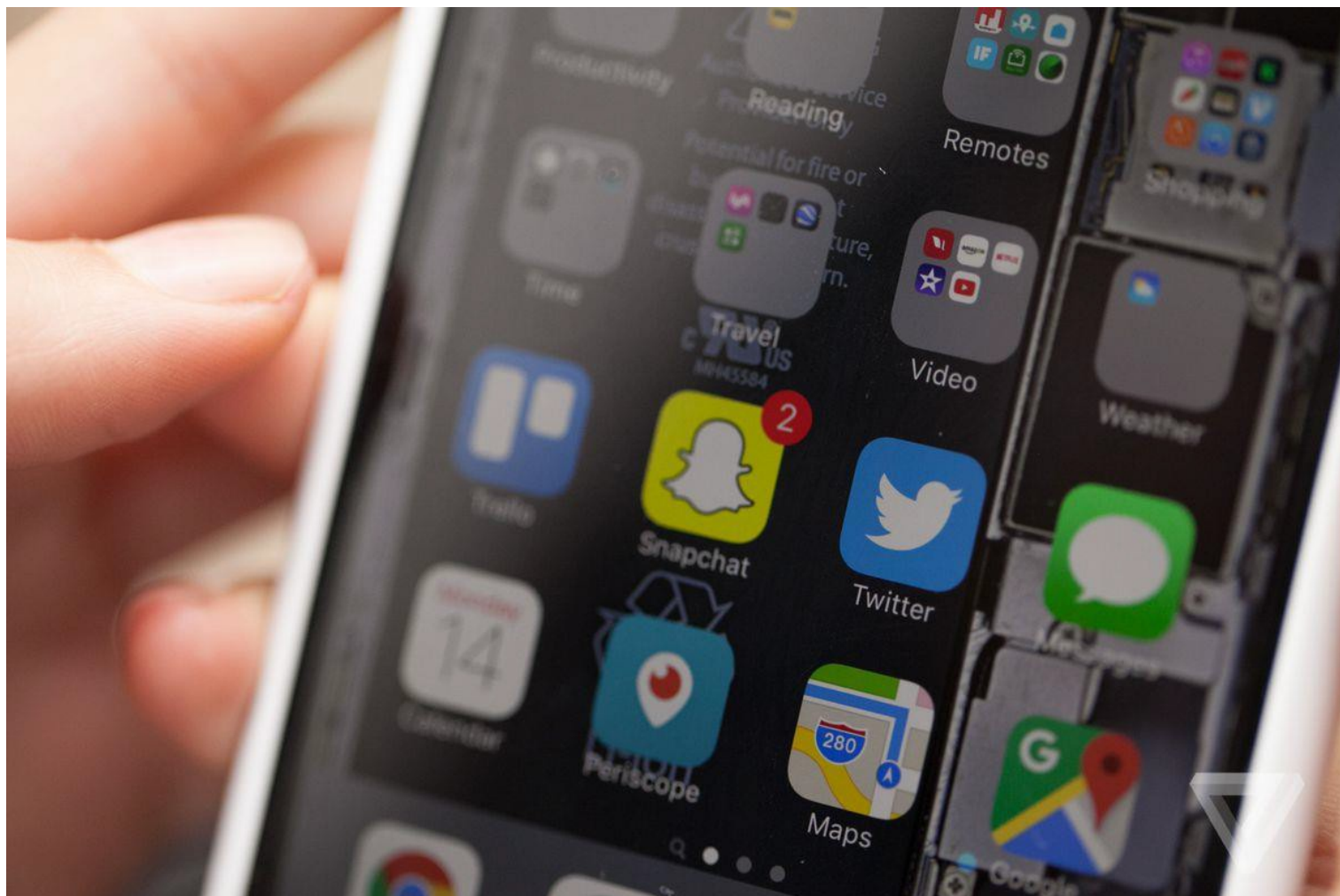


'App: The Human Story', an inspiring and sobering film documentary profiling App Developers

By Jeff Lu | Reflection/Response | Dec 4 2020



'App: The Human Story' is a film that tells stories about, Passion, Success and Failure.

One of the current dominant themes we are hearing more often these days "Fail early, fail often".

What does this mean?

Earlier on in previous generations it was common to hear affirmations espousing one to "Follow your Passion." All well and good but this leads to the question what is your passion and how shall we define it?

resilience:

“an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”

—Merriam-Webster Dictionary

I believe it was in Neil Pasricha's book "You are Awesome!" I first saw it. Where one of the major themes is about resiliency. Where an appropriate pursuit, which perhaps encompasses your drives, likes and passions would be one where you are able to bear numerous ups and downs; in particular repeated downs, failures and setbacks.

As the film lays out early on, we are in a unique time for software developers and in particular "App Developers". The introduction of Apple's iPhone signaled a seismic shift in computers. It became relevant for everybody to have a Smartphone.



Photo by Barry Lewis. Image courtesy of Getty Images.

Now the Smartphone was already in existence, but the iPhone was particularly useful in people's everyday lives. And this I think was the reason that Apple was the one to break this "barrier" to computers as it were. Since before this especially in regards to the more pervasive ownership of personal computers – PC's – this was something used for producing documents for work and institutions. It wasn't something that everyone might take with them in their jacket pocket or purse for voice communication. Instead here was a social and entertainment tool which served as a sort of portal truly integrated into how people connected with their everyday world.



Apple had positioned themselves as a purveyor of designer computer products, especially catered to those interested in good design and interface. However, this was still at the time more targeted to specific design professionals - as in Adobe products - and work professionals.

With the iPhone they applied their design sensibility of usability to everyone. By that token this also benefitted their existing customer and market base of design and work professionals. Further afield the more user centered approach has had a trickle-down effect to PC's and Windows product interfaces and usability.

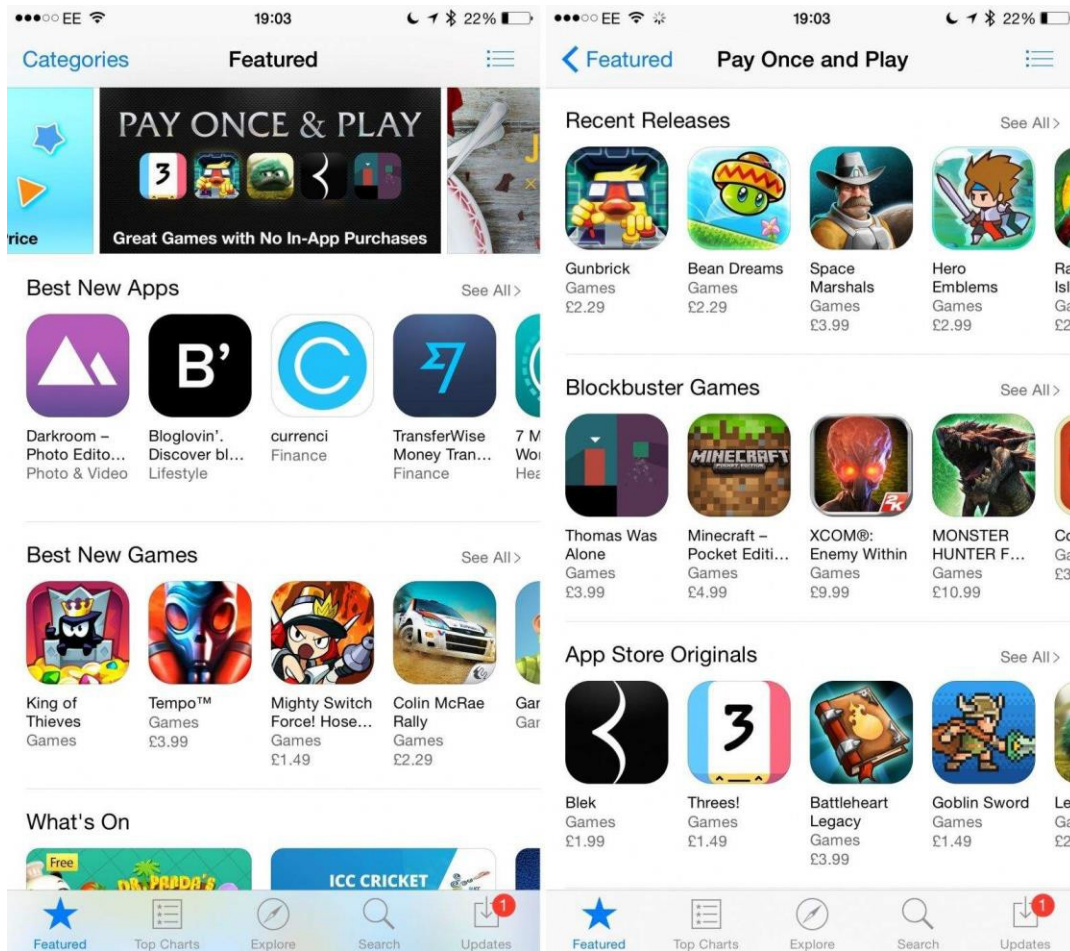
So, with iPhone now everybody was getting them or wanting one. However, as the film - 'App: The Human Story' - explains, in 2008 there was a dip in 3rd quarter sales. Apple's response to this was the "App Store". As Steve Jobs had noted with the increasing ubiquitous nature of the iPhone came increasing demand for applications to run on it. Enter the mobile application developer, commonly referred to as the "App Developer".



Image Credits: TechCrunch

Earlier iterations of the App Store saw a major influx of App Developers capitalizing on the lucrative profit stream the platform provided. Self-sustaining companies and entrepreneur-minded individuals saw their fortunes take off.

However, in later years Apple modified the presentation of apps on their App Store from the initial “Top 20 Featured Apps” to featuring them one at a time. App businesses thriving before the change now saw declining revenue and profitability.



In 2015 Phil Schiller was appointed head of the App Store. Six months in Apple quietly acknowledged the need to address App Developer sustainability. They loosened app subscription restrictions and reduced commission on subscriptions longer than a year.

So, I suppose this is sort of a lesson in “Drinking the Kool-Aid”. It was quite motivating and inspiring to witness the growing fortunes of those the film profiled. The subsequent decline and fall from grace as it were later on was especially poignant and sobering. It did underline my earlier nugget of wisdom proffered from Neil Pasricha on resilience. To follow your passion in an avenue where psychologically, emotionally and financially you are able to tolerate and endure inevitable and repeated failures and frustration.

In particular, along these lines those profiled did pivot in their “App Developer” field. Either scaling back and modifying focus and direction and/or supplementing their “App Developer” career with for instance teaching and instructing on the same area.

So, I will modify my initial comment that “App: The Human Story” is about Passion, Success and Failure ... and Resilience.

Reference

Pasricha, N. 2019. You Are Awesome. Simon & Schuster Canada