The IAP playbook

12 strategies to help you
monetize your game

Unity IAP Promotion

You've built a game and spent countless hours creating your store for in-app purchases (IAPs). But how will players find your store? You can't expect players to make purchases without being prompted to do so. That's why we built IAP Promotion, a mechanism that surfaces your best IAP offers so you can earn more money.

Effective IAP Promotion requires a delicate balance of making sure you're surfacing the right message, at the right time, to the right person. At Unity, we see tens of thousands of games being developed on our platform every day. We've analyzed all of the major components to help you create a successful monetization strategy for your game.

In this playbook, we break down 12 IAP promotion strategies that we've seen work well for some of our most successful publishers.

1

Design your game to monetize with IAP

One of the most common mistakes game developers make is treating monetization as an afterthought. To succeed, in-app purchases need to be part of the game design so that they can be served at exactly the right moment. If you build the logic of your game with in-app purchases in mind, your users will be much more likely to buy them. Consider how players progress from one stage of the game to the next, and think about challenging, high-friction experiences as IAP opportunities. But be careful to not progress your players too quickly in your game, and make sure you're offering enough gameplay value to get them to return.

There are three main types of IAP. Games often offer a combination of the three, depending on the action you want the players to take throughout your game.

- Consumables: These are IAPs that can be used only once, such as an extra life. For multiple uses, they can be purchased again.
- Non-consumables: These are IAPs that can be purchased once and used again, such as an additional feature or a game upgrade.
- Subscription: These are IAPs that provide features on an ongoing and renewable basis, such as new game levels.

2

Know your players

Your IAP promotion should demonstrate clear value and be compelling to your players. To do this, you need to have a deep understanding of your users' behaviors. As you collect data on your players, you can often segment them into different kinds of users, such as player types (completists, competitive scorers, etc.). Examine what the biggest subsets of your players need or buy. Look for insights into where people are often dropping out of your game, getting stuck, seeing the most success, etc. For example, in a puzzle RPG game, one segment of players might like clearing the hardest challenges, while another wants to collect their favored characters. Serving the relevant IAP promotion to each segment greatly increases the likelihood that a player will engage and purchase.

3

Timing is critical

The key to making IAP promotions work is to make sure that you're surfacing the right message at the right time. Choose the right moment to show players an IAP promotion. For example, if you notice that certain users are continuously getting stuck on a particular level, that's a great opportunity to offer them a way to make their gameplay easier.

4

Experiment with multiple price points

To incentivize players to make purchases, the value of the promotion has to match the price. There needs to be enough value in the offer that it's difficult to say no, but it should also be priced to earn you some income. Don't display only $.99 offers as you will accustom players to that price point. Instead, you should maintain a healthy selection of different promotions at different price points so players want to keep coming back.

5

Drive urgency

Use psychology to get players to act, so you can maximize conversions on your promotions. Research and follow the best practices that e-commerce websites use. Trigger words can help drive urgency. Words like "instant," "now," and "discover," are proven to inspire consumer action.

In addition, you should experiment with time-limited offers. These are promotions that expire and often have a countdown clock to help drive urgency.

6

Localize your offers

It's important to localize promotions based on the country your players are in. If you have limited resources, prioritize your top-performing geographies. Speak the language, use the currency, and be culturally sensitive.

Increase your conversion rates by incorporating seasonality into the design and wording of your promotion. You can create promotional bundles that tie into key sales periods, such as Christmas or back to school. Keep in mind popular events in other regions such as Chinese New Year, which is one of the highest revenue-yielding times for most Asian countries.

7

Refresh your promotional material

Regularly update your promotions on a schedule that works for you. Change the colors, graphics, or text and offer different product promotions to keep your customers interested and increase conversions.

8

Clearly define the benefit

Users that are focused on gameplay might not fully engage with the particular IAP promo you're showing them. A good way to increase the likelihood of players buying IAPs is to explain what's in it for them. For example, when a player wins a battle, explain how it could've been easier with a certain product, or that it's worth investing in the product now as future battles will be harder.

If you're offering a discount, clearly state what additional value users are getting, such as a 25% or 100% bonus.

9

Create a promo for first-time users

Giving your users a taste of what's to come will help convert first-time payers. A great way to increase the likelihood of purchasing is to make your users understand the value of an in-app purchase early on. Once players see the value in it, they'll be much more likely to purchase when prompted later on in the game.

We recommend including an economical starter pack that is only available to new players, with a one- or two-day limit. This gets players comfortable with IAP promotions early in your game, when engagement is the most critical.

10

A/B test everything

The best way to know what to do is to test your options and let the data make your decisions for you. There's no exact science to determining the right promo, the right time to display it, whether to make it consumable, etc. These are all things that you need to test and iterate on, learning over time. The more data you have, the more insights you can draw, so you can work towards creating a sustainable, scalable app business.

The tests you can run are limitless. A/B test your design, text, price points, button color, placement, and more.

11

Take care of your whales

Every free-to-play game that relies on in-app purchases will have what are called "whales" – players who spend disproportionately larger amounts than your other users. Your most engaged users will be your biggest spenders. If you can segment them and isolate them, you'll be able to offer these whales a more customized experience. Taking care of your most valued customers will encourage them to stick around and keep purchasing. You can offer them exclusive content, discounts on future in-app purchases, unlocked levels, and more. Whales tend to focus on one game at a time, so paying them special attention should also improve long-term retention.

12

Use AI

Machine learning has advanced to the point that you can build a truly personalized gameplay experience based on each user's behavior.

The more you're able to personalize the game, the more likely players will be to purchase your in-app promotions. Unity's Personalized Placements is the decision engine that determines which to serve – ads or IAP promotion – based on what will drive the most revenue. We serve the right promotion, at the right time, to help developers make more money.