

# Functional But Unfriendly

A Study of Enterprise  
Mobile App User Experience



Original Research from



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## Methodology

This report is based on an online survey of n = 487 American full-time office employees who use at least one enterprise mobile app at least once per week. Of the 487 total respondents, 100 are users of only off-the-shelf enterprise mobile apps, 86 are users of only custom enterprise mobile apps, and 301 are users of both. The survey, designed by ArcTouch and March Communications and facilitated by Precision Sample, was in field from November 22 to 29, 2016. The margin of error is  $\pm 4.4\%$  at the 95% confidence level.

## Executive Summary

As smartphones have proliferated in the market, the corporate world has encountered two complementary forces. From the top down, companies are increasing productivity by engaging employees even when they aren't at their desks. From the bottom up, employees who are accustomed to the flexibility afforded by their own mobile devices are demanding the ability to do their jobs in whatever environment and on whichever platform works best for them.

Together, these forces have created a market of apps designed specifically for business: enterprise mobile apps. That demand is large, and growing rapidly; [according to Gartner](#), demand for development resources is anticipated to outstrip supply by five to one by 2017.

Recognizing this explosive growth, ArcTouch Mobile & Connected Experiences, a full-service digital design and development studio, designed and conducted a research study to explore the current state of enterprise mobile apps. It found that while demand is strong from both businesses and their employees, actual penetration remains stubbornly low; of the over 4,000 U.S. office workers screened for the study, only 12 percent are actually using enterprise mobile apps for their jobs.

And while respondents overwhelmingly agree that apps help their productivity and efficiency, they are generally underwhelmed by their experience with enterprise mobile apps — indicating that enterprises are not satisfying employee demands for their apps.

Key findings include:

Enterprise mobile apps help employees become more productive and efficient.

- 85% of enterprise mobile app users think that their most-used app saves them time.
- 83% think that their most-used app makes them more productive.
- 61% give their most-used enterprise mobile app an “A” for usefulness.

However, enterprise mobile apps underperform in the core aspects that make employees look forward to using the apps and ultimately improve employee satisfaction and work experience.

- 85% of users are pleased with their app overall, but that favorability is tempered: Users are more likely to be somewhat pleased (45%) than strongly pleased (40%).
- 70% of enterprise mobile app users wouldn't describe their most-used app as intuitive, and only 13% would describe it as elegant.
- 34% do not look forward to using their enterprise mobile apps.
- The aspects that most impact whether users look forward to using the app — design and UX/ease of use — are the worst performing aspects of current enterprise mobile apps.

Performance of off-the-shelf (OTS) apps (available to multiple companies) and custom apps (created specifically by or for one company) perform similarly in most user experience categories.

- OTS and custom apps are just as likely to be viewed as time savers and productivity boosters.
- Users are nearly equally pleased with both types.
- Unfortunately, that equal performance also means nearly equal shortcomings: 68% of both OTS and custom app users grade their enterprise mobile app as a “B” or lower on design and visual appeal.



Only one in eight office workers are currently using apps for their jobs

## CHAPTER 1

# Enterprise Mobile App Uses Today

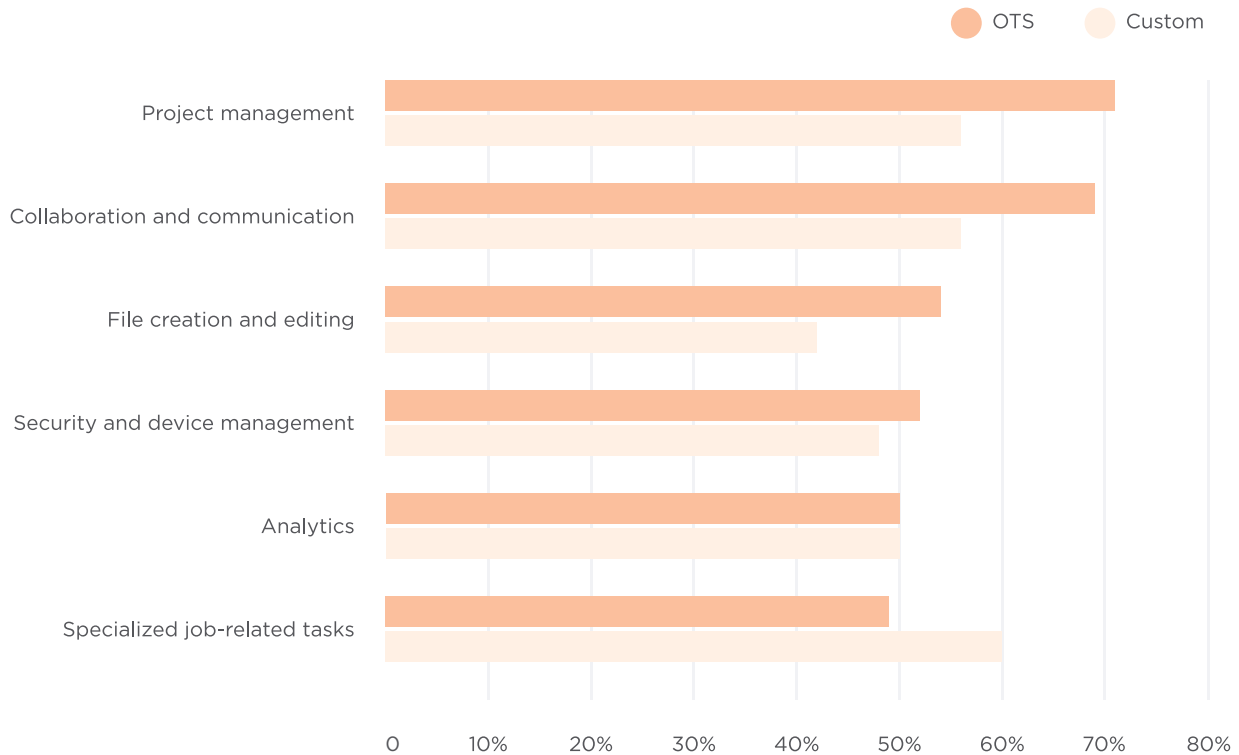
Though the expectations and potential of enterprise mobile apps are significant, their penetration in the market is still in its early stages. Only 12% of full-time office workers in the study use apps provided by their employers for their jobs at least once a week. Companies that have embraced enterprise mobile apps, however, have done so enthusiastically. Most enterprise mobile app users have more than one app on their smartphone and/or tablet, and more than half have three or more work-related apps installed.

Enterprise mobile apps can be broadly categorized as **off-the-shelf** and **custom**, defined as:

- **Off-the-shelf** apps are enterprise mobile apps available to users at more than one company and downloaded from public app stores. They may offer customization options, but are not specific to one business. Examples include Box, Salesforce, Expensify, Asana, and Slack.
- **Custom apps** are enterprise mobile apps that have been created exclusively for a single company, either by internal developers or by a third party specifically for that company. They are typically not available in public app stores.

Though there is overlap between the functions that OTS and custom apps provide, our research shows that there are specific uses that each type is more likely to fulfill:

### APP FUNCTIONS OFF-THE-SHELF VS. CUSTOM



The functions largely align with what would be expected; OTS apps are best suited for tasks that are consistent across businesses (for example, project management and collaboration), while custom apps are more likely to be deployed for specialized functions or job roles.

Respondents who use both OTS and custom apps were also asked which type they spend the most time using. Responses were nearly evenly split, with 54% indicating that they spend more time using OTS apps and 46% indicating that they spend more time using custom apps.

**13%**  
Just one out of eight users agree that the app they use for work is “elegant”



## CHAPTER 2

# User Experience: The Gap Between Importance and Performance

At the outset of the survey, respondents were asked why they use their mobile devices (smartphones and/or tablets) for work, as well as the most important aspects for enterprise mobile apps. Users told us they want apps that are useful *and* can save them time. Fortunately for enterprise mobile app users and their employers, the current slate of enterprise mobile apps are meeting these baseline requirements:

- 85% of enterprise mobile app users think their most-used app saves them time.
- 83% think their most-used app makes them more productive.
- 61% give their most-used enterprise mobile app an “A” for usefulness.
- 85% report they are satisfied overall with the enterprise mobile app they use the most.

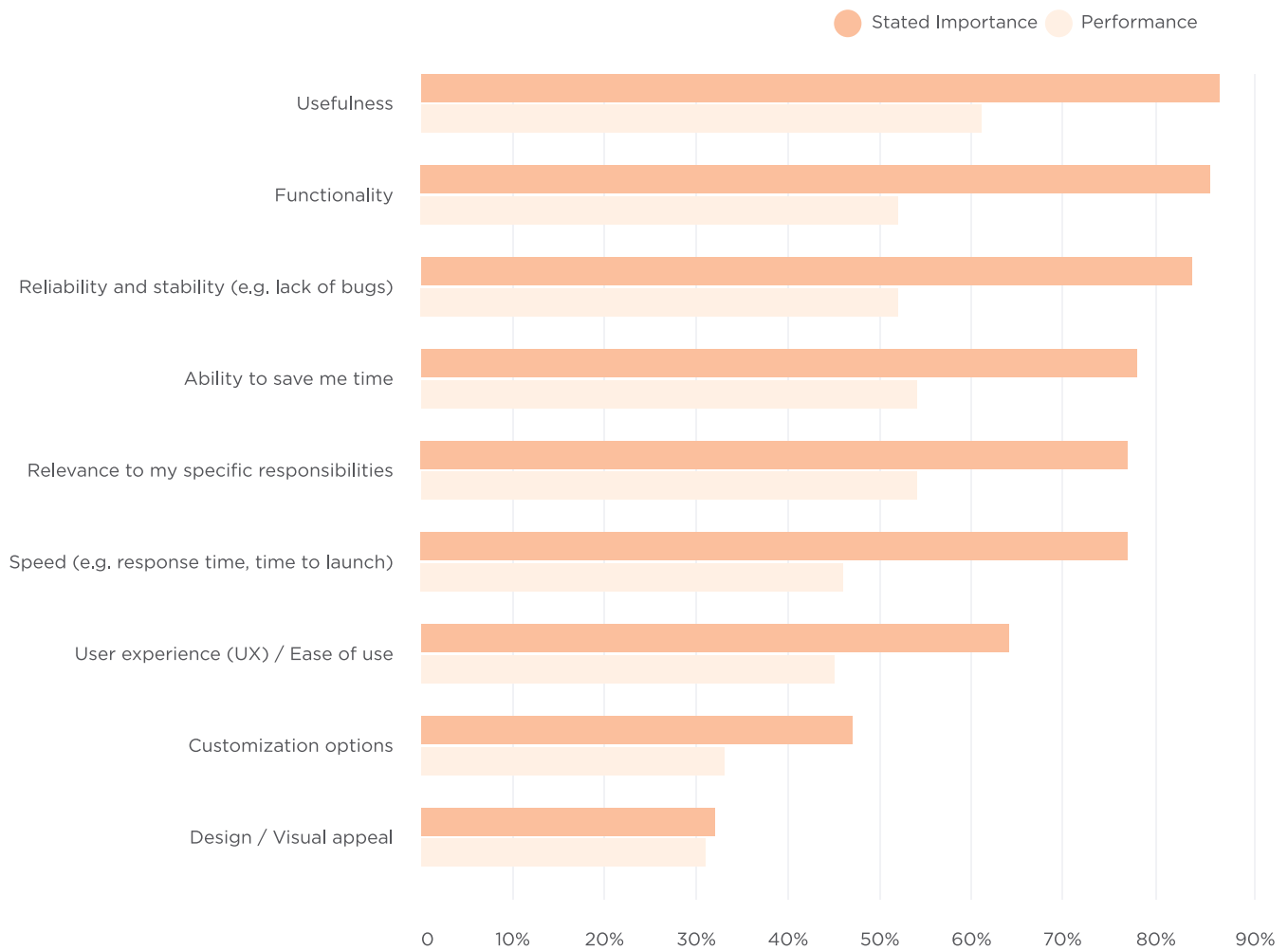
Unfortunately, the survey results indicate that while work-related apps may meet expectations, they do little to exceed them. While 85% of users say they are pleased with their most-used app overall, half of those — 45% — report that they are only *somewhat* pleased. This suggests that although enterprise apps today meet basic requirements,



there is a clear gap between expectations and performance.

Further, before we asked them to grade performance of enterprise mobile apps on specific aspects, we asked respondents how important each of those aspects were; comparing the two responses reveals a consistent gap where expectations don't match reality. Many enterprise mobile apps simply aren't providing "A" grade experiences in the most important areas.

### EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY



"Stated Importance" based on percent of respondents who indicated that the aspect is "very important" for enterprise mobile apps. Performance based on percent of respondents who gave their most-used enterprise mobile app a grade of "A" for that aspect.

Respondents were most likely to give "A" grades for usefulness, relevance, and ability to save time, supporting the overarching finding that enterprise mobile apps today fulfill functional requirements. That

said, those marks still fall far short of the importance respondents placed on those attributes. The most important aspect of enterprise mobile apps based on responses is usefulness, with 87% rating it as very important. But only 61% said they would give the app an “A” when it came to usefulness, a 26% gap. The largest gaps relate to functionality and reliability: There is a 34-point gap between how respondents rated the importance of functionality and the percentage of apps that received an “A” in functionality. Similarly, there was a performance gap of 32 points for reliability and stability.

As the chart on the previous page shows, relatively few office workers say they think design or UX are very important to enterprise mobile apps. These are also the areas where today’s enterprise mobile apps are most likely to score poorly, likely due to lower priority of those factors. Together, the lack of stated importance and low performance mean that enterprise mobile apps today meet expectations for design and visual appeal.

Other research into workplace habits supports this theory. The number one factor that drives someone to get a job is compensation. But according to [a 2016 study by Accenture Strategy](#), 70 percent of college graduates and 74 percent of recent grads would choose to work at an organization with an engaging, positive social atmosphere even if it meant accepting a lower salary.

**30%**  
Less than one-third of respondents described the app they use for work as “intuitive”



### CHAPTER 3

## Derived Performance and Getting Beyond Basic Function

The most successful products don't simply meet expectations — they strive to exceed them. They provide benefits that users don't necessarily know they're looking for. In the corporate world, the growth of the “modern” office offers a clear parallel. The top companies in the world today recognize that an office environment that is merely functional isn't enough to attract or retain top talent, particularly young talent. In an era in which top employers commonly offer up iPads or [FitBits as a means to attract or retain employees](#), delivering a somewhat useful and functional app experience probably won't suffice.

The goal for the modern workplace is to create an environment that people want to be in. For enterprise mobile apps, it is to create an app that employees *want* to use, rather than *being required* to use. Just as with consumer apps, an overall app experience that isn't delightful won't drive repeat usage. Ultimately, a minimum passing grade jeopardizes the app's chance of achieving the desired return on investment (ROI).

Some enterprise mobile apps provide a net positive experience: One-quarter of users strongly agree that they look forward to using their most-used enterprise mobile app. But one-third don't look forward at all to using their most-used enterprise mobile app. For these users,

enterprise mobile apps may help them be more productive or save them time, but they miss the wholly achievable opportunity to improve users' experience at work.

So what can developers do to create apps that employees want to use, rather than simply doing so because it's part of their job? Enterprise mobile app developers should take a page out of consumer mobile app developers' playbook and focus more on design, customization, and the overall user experience. For consumer and enterprise apps, providing a positive overall experience is essential to attracting and retaining users. The results of the survey confirm this.

The chart from the previous chapter shows “stated importance” — how much respondents think a certain factor will affect their opinions. Market researchers, however, rely on “derived importance” — the amount to which those factors actually affect those opinions. This means understanding how different data points move in relationship to each other. For this survey, it translates to measuring how performance (grades) correlate with likelihood to agree with the statement “I look forward to using the app.” High percentages mean that strong performance on those aspects correlates with the user looking forward to using the app; a low percentage means that the aspect is less important in actually driving that positive experience overall, regardless of what the user thinks.

Unfortunately, the aspects that enterprise apps perform best on aren't the ones that make employees actually want to use the apps. While all aspects were important (strong performances in any area didn't make users less likely to look forward to using the app), the aspects that enterprise apps perform worst at are the most important to driving satisfaction:

## DERIVED IMPORTANCE

- 1 Functionality
- 2 Design | Visual appeal
- 3 Customization options
- 4 User experience (UX)
- 5 Speed
- 6 Reliability and stability
- 7 Usefulness
- 8 Ability to save me time
- 9 Relevance

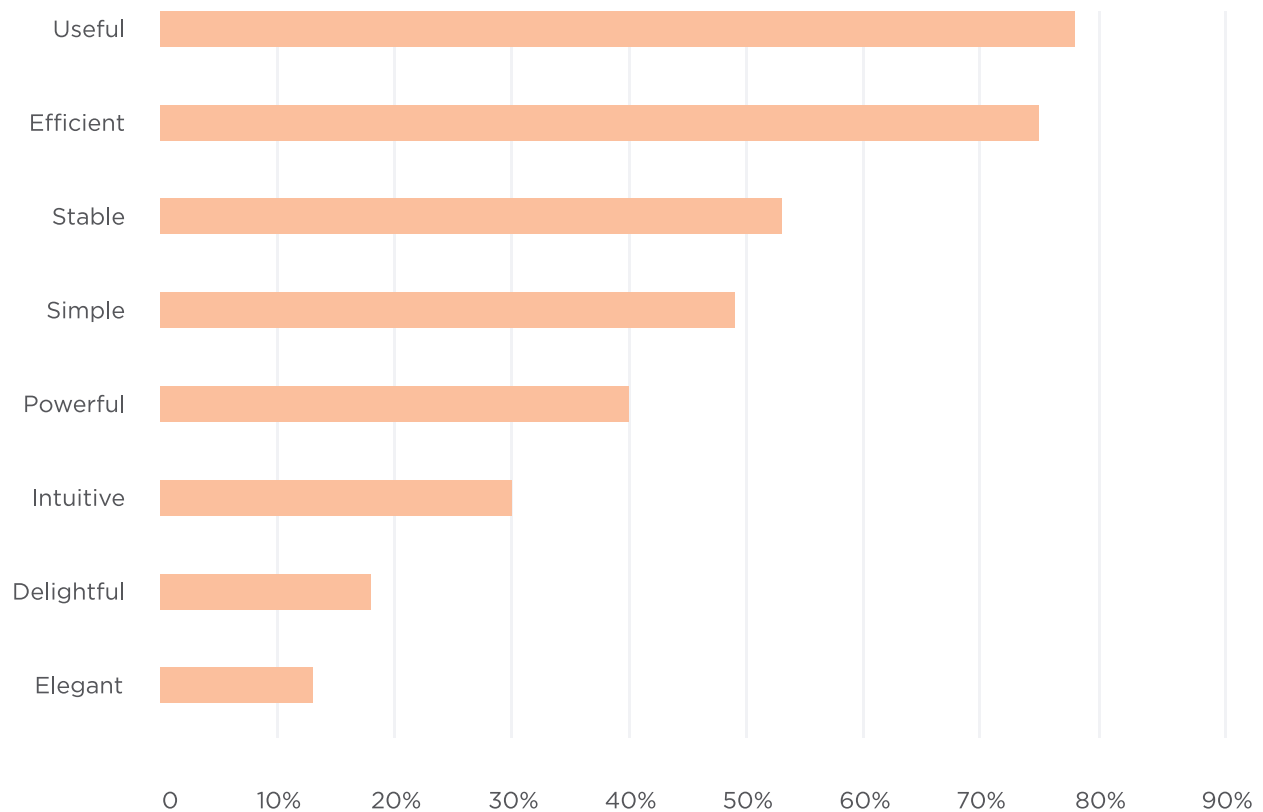
## DERIVED PERFORMANCE

- 1 Usefulness
- 2 Relevance
- 3 Ability to save me time
- 4 Functionality
- 5 Reliability and stability
- 6 Speed
- 7 User experience (UX)
- 8 Customization options
- 9 Design | Visual appeal

After functionality, the two aspects that most impact a user's likelihood to look forward to using an enterprise mobile app are design and customization — the two aspects that enterprise mobile apps today perform most poorly on. The inverse relationship continues from there — UX/ease of use and speed rank as next most important, but the current slate of apps performs only marginally better in those two aspects. Additionally, while enterprise mobile apps today perform relatively well on functionality, it's still the area where the gap between expectations and reality is most pronounced. Together, the underperformance of key UX aspects coupled with the gap between expectations and reality for functionality speaks to a likely misalignment between the teams that built the apps and the teams that use them.

The concepts of design and UX/ease of use are somewhat abstract, so respondents were also provided with a list of descriptors and asked which they felt apply to their apps. Consistent with the low scores in the areas of design and UX, relatively few respondents describe their most-used app using terms that indicate a positive experience:

## DESCRIPTIONS OF ENTERPRISE MOBILE APPS



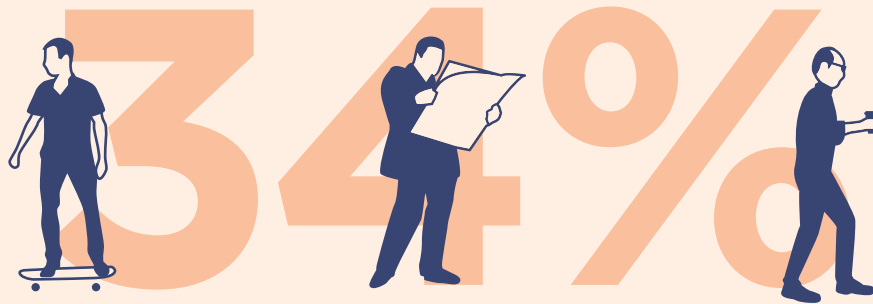
Percent of enterprise mobile app users who would use each term to describe their most-used enterprise mobile app.

The most troubling finding is that nearly half of users would not describe their most-used app as being stable — a foundational requirement for a useful app and an essential element to avoid user headaches. The second most troubling finding is that fewer than one-in-three enterprise mobile app users would describe their most-used enterprise mobile app as intuitive. Even accounting for the perception that design and UX are less important for enterprise apps than they are for consumer apps, the benefit of intuitiveness is clear: Intuitive apps are easier for new users to learn, cause less frustration, and increase users' productivity faster.

The office workers who use enterprise mobile apps say their apps save them time and help increase their productivity, and for some companies that may be sufficient. But just as companies wouldn't be satisfied with employees who are merely adequate at their jobs, they shouldn't be satisfied with mobile apps that people use out of obligation, rather than

out of choice. There is a reason why top companies today have chosen to invest in improved work environments despite their indirect return on investment; they know that most [employees care more about benefits than they do about their paychecks](#).

While companies have made clear progress towards creating work environments that foster employee engagement, apps designed to improve how office workers do their jobs are lagging. One-in-three users don't look forward to using their most-used enterprise mobile app at all, and two-in-three don't describe their most-used app as intuitive. And the aspects that most impact whether employees look forward to using the apps — design and user experience — are the ones that the apps perform most poorly on.



**One in three users don't look forward to using their work app.**

#### CHAPTER 4

## Off-the-Shelf vs. Custom: Which is Better?

When exploring enterprise mobile apps, one of the earliest and largest decisions that a company has to make is whether to select an existing, off-the-shelf app or to build one specifically for their business. The key question likely to be on any executive's mind is "which is better?"

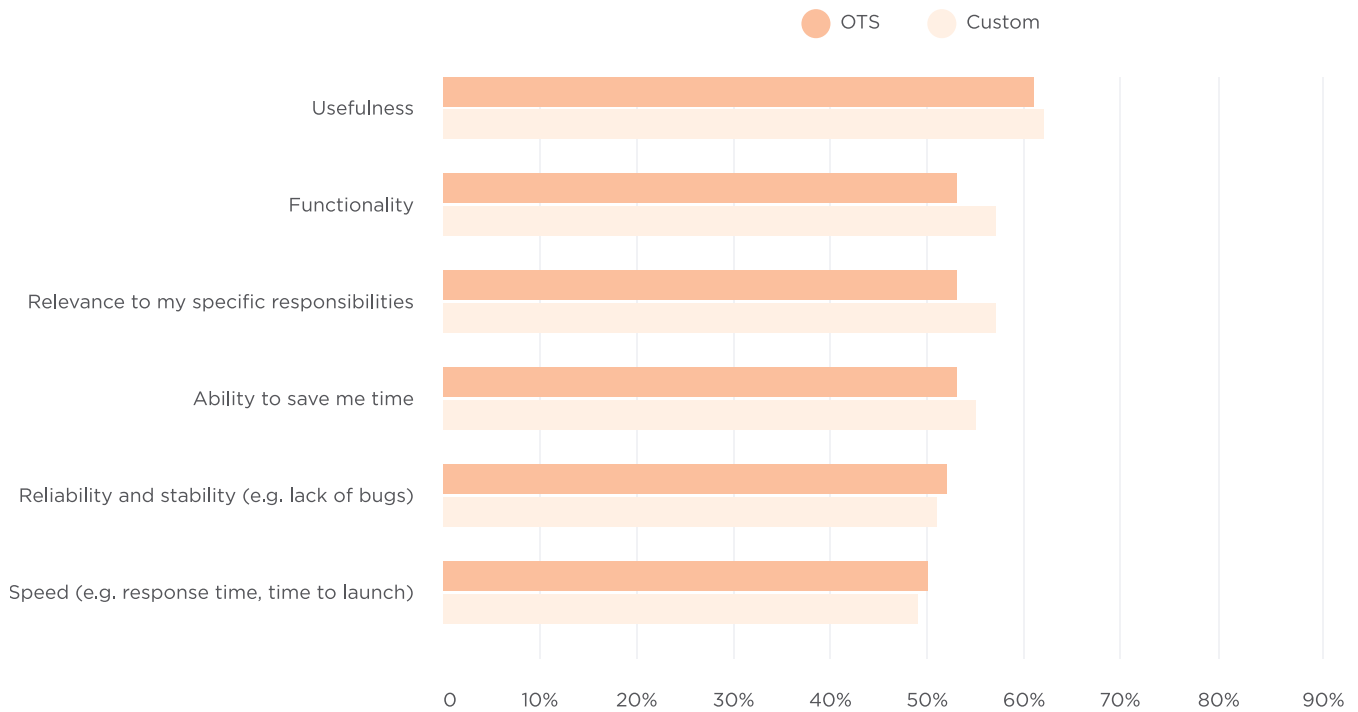
Though the answer, of course, depends on the problem the app is trying to solve and other factors — budget, security/need for control, specialization of the desired tasks, for example — there are a number of typical assumptions that can be addressed.

To the user, OTS apps are expected to be glossier and more intuitive (they need to entice a wide set of customers), but their cookie-cutter nature can cause headaches if there are specialized needs. Custom apps, on the other hand, have the benefit of being highly customized for the specific need but are more likely to have a less polished UX. To executives, OTS apps have a lower barrier to entry than custom apps do, but with OTS the company has to rely on a third party for app security and support.

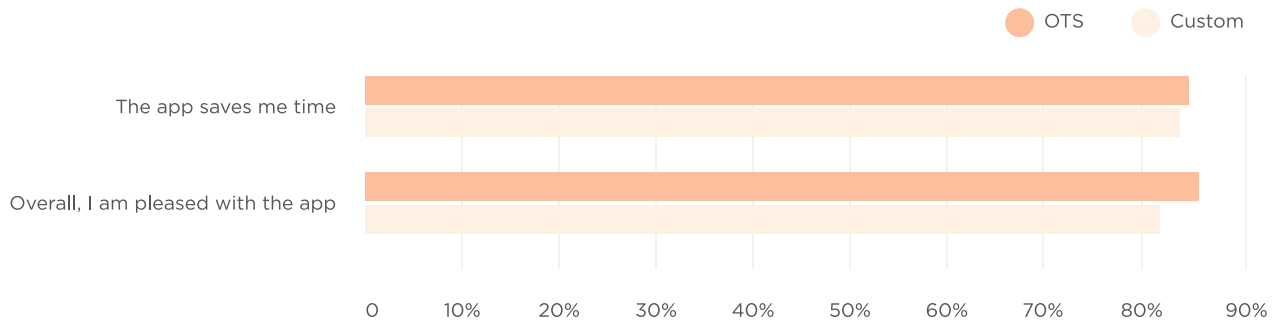
So how do the two types of enterprise mobile apps compare when it comes to user experience?



### "A" GRADES OFF-THE-SHELF VS. CUSTOM



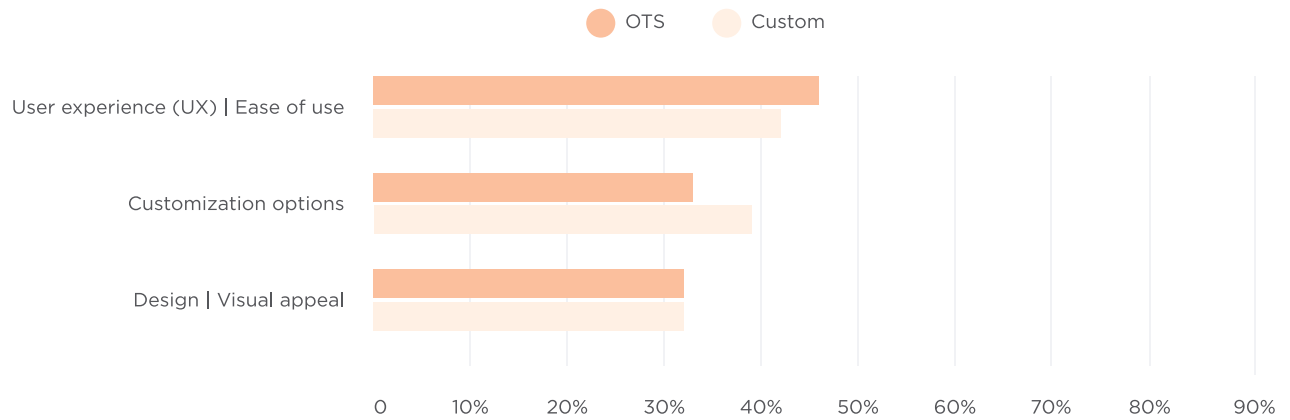
### STATEMENT AGREEMENT OFF-THE-SHELF VS. CUSTOM



As the above charts indicate, both OTS and custom apps help boost users' productivity. An equal percentage of respondents who use both types of apps (and as a result have the best ability to directly compare the two) think that both types save them time, and overall satisfaction with the two app types is also nearly equal. Focusing on specific aspects of the apps, the data suggests that custom apps are slightly more likely to be graded highly for functionality and relevance to specific job responsibilities, but the differences are within the margin of error. Suffice it to say, survey results indicates that OTS and custom enterprise mobile apps are equally competent at fulfilling their core requirements.

So what about overall user experience? This is an area where OTS apps have tended to outperform custom apps, largely because OTS developers can't rely on a captive audience of users. Surprisingly, the survey finds that custom apps perform similarly when it comes to design/UX. In fact, they are just as likely to get an A grade for design and UX/ ease of use, though the percentage of both custom and OTS apps that receives a high mark in these categories is disturbingly low.

### "A" GRADES OFF-THE-SHELF VS. CUSTOM



## Conclusion: Opportunity and Prioritizing User Experience

Judging by the results of our user experience study, enterprise mobile apps today are a net positive for office workers. The vast majority of users — 85% — are at least somewhat pleased with their enterprise mobile apps overall, and the apps have clear benefits. Nearly the same number of respondents say the apps save them time (85%) and increase their productivity (83%). The strength of these benefits speaks to the growing attention being paid to enterprise mobile apps. But software adoption of enterprise mobile apps dramatically lags behind hardware adoption of smartphones in the workplace. Despite the near-ubiquity of smartphones in a modern company, this study found that only 12% of full-time office workers in the United States use an enterprise mobile app.

Our survey results show that companies can benefit from creating custom apps for their employees and offer unparalleled value for very specific audiences and use cases. Off-the-shelf and custom enterprise mobile apps perform similarly in nearly all metrics. Both types of apps are equally likely to save users time and increase productivity, and drive nearly equal levels of satisfaction. Even among design-related metrics, custom apps are seen just as favorably as OTS apps are. But as companies look to new apps to grow productivity, efficiency, and engagement, they can be confident that custom apps offer more flexibility and personalization than off-the-shelf options.

As more employers provide apps specifically for their employees' use, UX will become even more important. Just as consumer mobile app developers can't settle for merely average performance, neither can enterprise mobile app developers. The rapid growth of interest and investment in more employee-friendly workplaces has come in response to increasing numbers of employees — particularly young talent — who demand an environment that is more than just functional. That same sentiment is likely at play with regard to apps.

Unfortunately, enterprise mobile apps still have significant ground to make up when it comes to user experience. A significant gap between expectations and reality persists for key aspects of app performance today. The factors that most commonly drive desire to use apps are the ones that rank the lowest when it comes to performance. Meanwhile,

only one-in-four enterprise app users strongly looks forward to using their most-used enterprise mobile app, and one-in-three don't look forward to using it at all. As millennial and younger employees continue to increase in the workforce, enterprise mobile apps will have to evolve to match the experience they expect.



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