Mobile strategy game Pixel Starships levels up from kick-starter to global success

About

Melbourne-based SavySoda is an innovative indie studio that develops games and apps in the post-PC era. After several successful products, SavySoda launched its first mobile strategy game, Pixel Starships, on Google Play in 2018, which reached global success.

The challenge

SavySoda got its start developing productivity apps, and eventually moved into the gaming space. As the gaming market shifted from PCs to mobile, the self-proclaimed "sci-fi geeks" at SavySoda felt there was something missing – a good multiplayer, retro sci-fi game. To fill this void, SavySoda launched Pixel Starships in 2018 after sparking interest with a kick-starter campaign, and the game immediately gained traction. To keep the momentum going, SavySoda turned to Google to bring to life its vision for expansion and profitability.

Savy Soda

Melbourne, Australia

savysoda.com

4.5 Google Play rating

10X revenue increase on Google Play

700K Google Ads installs

20% over target ROAS with Google Ads

4X more impressions served with the highest eCPM by AdMob

Google Ads

The approach

Launch & creative optimization

SavySoda used Google Play analytics and measurement features to inform a broader marketing strategy for Pixel Starships. The studio was able to test and optimize content in the app description to drive more installs on Google Play. And by viewing data on how users found and engaged with its app by country, SavySoda was able to identify potential markets for expansion.

The SavySoda team attended Google-led workshops and met regularly with account managers to discuss their user acquisition strategy and best practices for App campaigns. The company continued to spur growth by testing its creative assets and learning which ad formats and sizes performed best to boost campaign effectiveness.

Leveraging predictive events for continued growth

SavySoda used a TensorFlow model to predict users' likelihood to pay. This allowed the company to effectively reach high-value customers with its App campaigns, leading to higher return on ad spend (ROAS) and user volume at the same cost.

A diversified monetization strategy

Next, SavySoda concentrated heavily on monetization. The team found hybrid monetization a good strategy for meeting users' expectations, and tested rewarded ads. Based on a positive experience in previous apps, SavySoda decided to use Google AdMob in its stack – which provided integration with Firebase, a strong demand, and fine control over targeting settings. The team also tested a subscription-based model on Google Play to boost revenue further.

The results

SavySoda was able to reach 20% over its ROAS target with App campaigns, which have become its primary user acquisition (UA) channel. And by applying TensorFlow predictive events, SavySoda gained 30% more user volume at the same cost. In 2019, Pixel Starships was one of the highest revenue-generating games in the Google Play Start on Android program, and since launch revenue has increased tenfold.

After testing several ad networks, SavySoda found AdMob to be its most profitable ad provider, with the highest effective cost-per-thousand impressions (eCPM) and 4x more impressions served than the second best-performing network in its tests. Additionally, by serving rewarded ads in emerging markets together with lowered pricing for in-app purchases (IAP), SavySoda increased its IAP revenue 3x in these markets

What's next

In the coming year, look for SavySoda to launch a brand-new game. The company also plans on making some exciting updates to Pixel Starships, and to continue to optimize monetization through testing.

Product features

› Google Play

› App campaigns

› Google AdMob

› Google Analytics for Firebase

› TensorFlow predictive event

"Google provides best-of-class solutions in distribution, analytics, UA, and monetization. No other mobile technology provider has the same breadth of service available."

—Xin Zhao, Director, SavySoda