App Anticipation is New to Me

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I started at 178,735. Yuck. That's the huge registration number I pull, my spot in line for Mailbox, a new Gmail app that's getting all the attention. My initial reaction was, "Barf. I'm not going to sit here and wait for something that performs a function that my native email app, plenty of more readily available OTTs or even my mobile browser can already do well enough."

But something happened as I kept launching the Mailbox app and watching as the number of people in front of me rapidly decreased, while the number of people behind me in line increased even faster. I started to look forward to using Mailbox. I'm now at 108,583 and the anticipation is reaching a fever pitch. I'm practically foaming at the mouth to get to the front of this line and get my hands on this app. I just know it's going to rule!

It's the same mentality that makes a beer taste better or a roller coaster tens time more awesome after waiting for it. The more patience required of me, the more supposed hardships I must endure, the more precious the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow will seem. Except this is an app, one of millions, most of them completely useless. I've never looked forward to an app before until now.

Anticipation is part of my brain's everyday agenda, processing my feelings about upcoming music, movies, video games, books and TV episodes. I even save a little cautious optimism for the new Die Hard movie. Those mediums all employ tricks to bait my interest, like various promotions, previews, trailers and "leaks." But apps are so cheap and ubiquitous while requiring so little commitment. Couple that with how little impact promotion leading up to their release seems to have, and it's no wonder I haven't been circling their release dates on the calendar.

That's not to say there haven't been tons of mobile applications worth getting excited over or that worthwhile apps haven't been covered in advance as to give the app-downloading public reason to watch for their live dates. But for whatever reason, I haven't felt anticipation for an app until now.

It's entirely possible that Mailbox's waiting period scenario is just a clever marketing trick and not a necessity to avoid overload [1]. Regardless, the way the wait list notifications have been designed—first with the text message alerting you to your entrance code and then the app, which serves as a mesmerizing countdown until you reach the door—is fantastic marketing. And it's working on me at least, since I

must have checked my place in line at least 25 times since last Friday. Judging by the ever-expanding length of the line behind me—closing in on 700,000 last time I checked—it's hooking others in as well.

A sharp sense of how to generate hype around a consumer app before it becomes available could go a long way toward increasing visibility for the thousands of developers out there. In 2012, a Canalys report [2] noted that only 25 developers raked in more than half of the app revenue for Apple's App Store and Google Play.

Maybe Mailbox won't be all it's cracked up to be; the reviews have been mixed so far. But the build-up has me feeling like a kid on Christmas (82,914!) and looking forward to the next app that finds a smart way to recreate this anticipation.

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