# How to Choose the Best App Development Company for Your Needs.
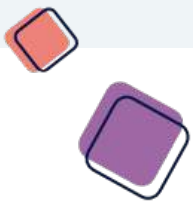
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# 01.

# Intro

We do not have official data for 2020, but we know **in 2016 there were 12 million mobile app developers** in the world. According to this research, in 2020 there should have been around 14 million app developers.

Too conservative? Too aggressive? I don't know about that. What I know is that **the number of apps in the stores has been constantly growing** over the last 11 years ([source](#)).

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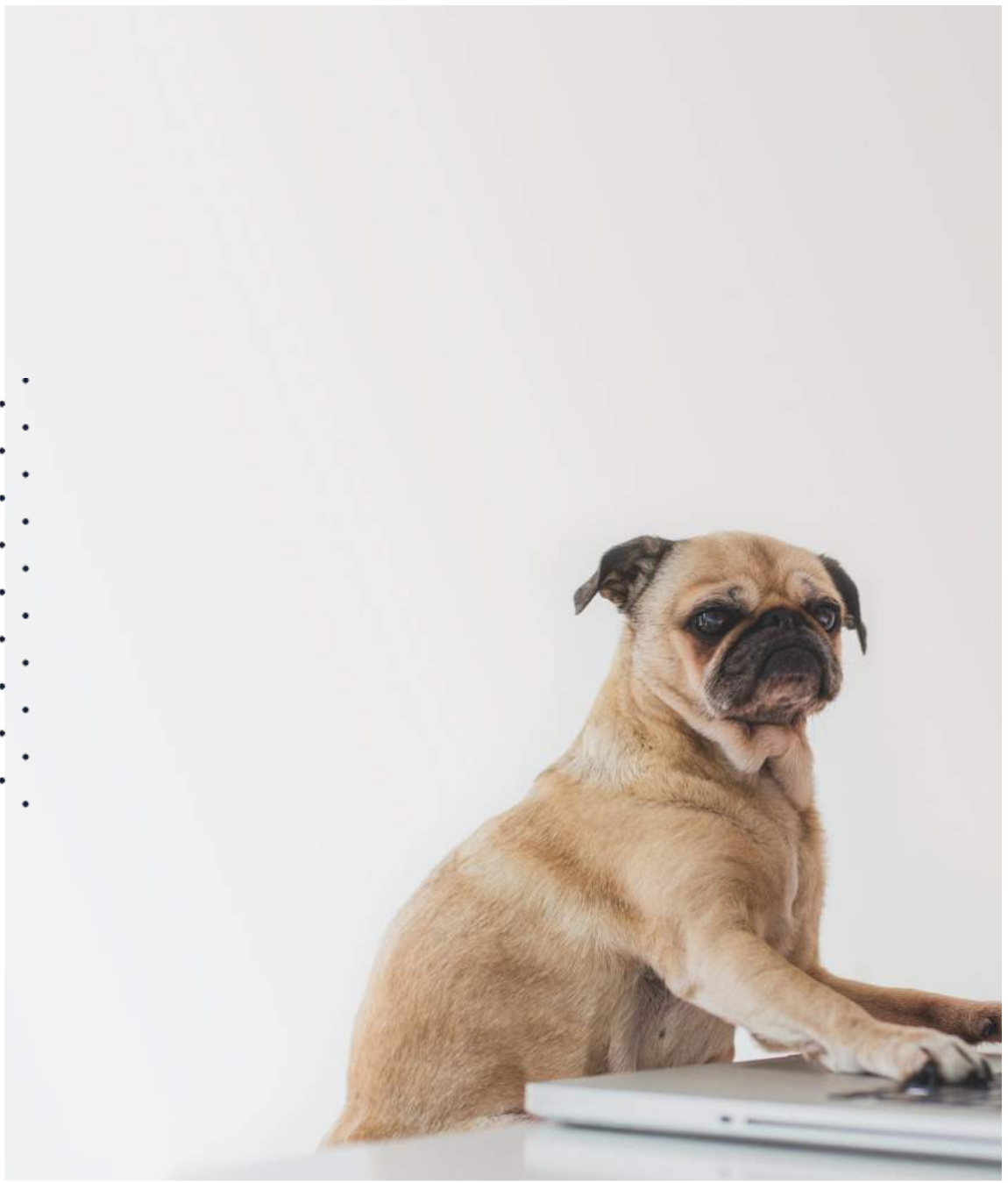
Developing apps has become more accessible than ever before and mobile developers flooded the market. Today, mobile apps can be developed using **native iOS** (Swift) **and Android** (Kotlin) **languages**, as well as using traditional languages like Objective C and Java for Apple and Google respectively.

Meanwhile, a whole new ecosystem has been growing right before our eyes. Many prominent web development frameworks (e.g. React, Angular, Vue) became tools to develop native applications; as you may imagine, **web developers saw a huge opportunity** to expand their reach and get themselves into mobile development.

To paint an even more complex picture, we have cross-platform technologies (such as Flutter, developed by Google, or Ionic) which allows developers to **create two applications from a single codebase**. Meaning they can write the code once while still creating two apps, the iOS version and the Android one. Bear in mind this is an oversimplification and almost every developer would tell you "mm, actually things are not exactly like this."

Yes, random developer - thank you for your honesty. Things in the mobile development ecosystem **have never been easier and** - at the same time - **more confusing**. While, to the untrained eye, they all might seem similar, **apps** developed with different languages, frameworks, and techniques **are extremely different** under the hood.

And no, this is not a guide to learn how to develop your own app. But hey - it's important to know that **not all apps are created equal**.

# What are you looking for?

If you get in touch with an app development company and they make it all about them, it's **probably not the right one**. Yes, there might be some minor differences in the offering of each app development company but bear in mind that **the boundaries of what an app can do are set by technology** (and the companies owning the stores, Apple and Google).

If you want to create an app that installs a spying tool on the user's phone, Apple and Google will prevent you from publishing it. That is why it does not make sense for an app development company to tell you everything about what they do: **they develop apps within the boundaries set by the two tech giants** I named above. They might do it with a specific language, with a modern framework, yes - but what your app can do it's pretty much set in stone.

The most important aspect is **how this company decides to tackle the development process of your product or idea**. That is why my first question is "what are you looking for?" You could answer this in a million different ways, couldn't you? I know and I do understand. I am going to go ahead and split the world into **two groups**. Yep, it's an oversimplification but it might help you get a clearer picture.

# 01.

**You want to create an app to offer a new service to your current audience or reach out to a completely new segment of potential customers in a different way.**

In this case, the app is key to your core mission. The success of your plan depends on how reliable, usable and well-crafted the app is - among many other business aspects, of course. You are ready to allocate a **consistent budget** to the development process because **this application will become a core asset** for your company.

Bear in mind that a consistent budget does not mean hundreds of thousands of dollars. Consistent means **aligned with the complexity of your idea**. It wouldn't be a great move if you asked an app development company to create the next Uber or Airbnb for a $30k budget, would it? That's what I was thinking of when I wrote "consistent".

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## 02.

**Your company feels the need to create an app to reach a new audience differently but you do not know how to make the app useful or attracts users to it.**

Yep, we all feel this kind of need. Lots of companies are developing their own app and you feel like you've been left out of it. Needless to say, for this specific scenario, **the planning part is very important**. If you do not have a clear idea around which you can build an app, you could end up with a new digital tool that is not very attractive to your potential audience because - well, **it's useless**.

Convincing someone to download a new app is not an easy feat. It's expensive and time-consuming. What if you put a lot of time, money and effort into it and then people delete it after the first visit cause they deem it "irrelevant"? Yep, you guessed it - not a great investment.

## 03.

**You have no idea what you are doing. You do not have a plan and are just looking for suggestions on how to move forward.**

Right, I told you I would have just split the world into two categories. And I still am, because **this is not a true category.** Lots of people fall under this description and there is no shame in that. Just make sure **you are aware of your current situation** and reach out to potential companies with a clear message.

App development companies receive a huge number of messages from people who have no idea what they are doing, let alone what they want to do. Again, it's perfectly okay to be clueless about how to tackle the app development process; just be honest and straightforward about it. In this way, you will accomplish two goals: you let them know **you need help in coming up with a plan** and a strategy and, most importantly, you'll know immediately if they are the right company for you. If they start telling you about their services and asking you for the specs of the project, you already know they are not listening to you and you would become just one of the hundreds of potential clients they talk to each and every day.
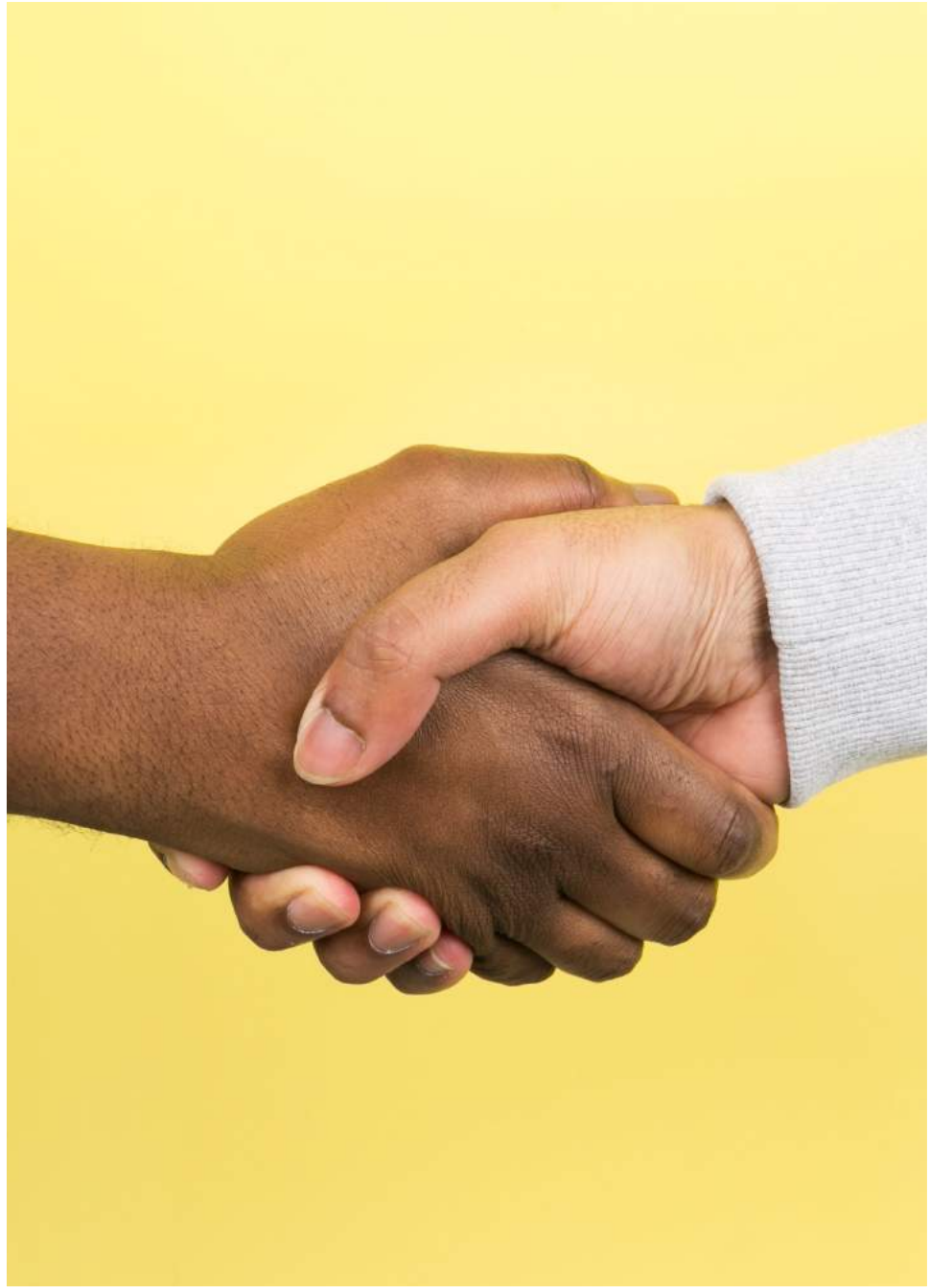
# The reaching out phase

Okay, now that you are clear on what is your current situation, it's time to move on and **start reaching out to potential suppliers**. Depending on your project and your time, you could reach out to **3-5 potential suppliers** and see what happens over the first few weeks.

My advice here is to handpick a **few companies pretty different from each other**. At least during this first round, ensuring diversity and variety in backgrounds could be a huge plus. For example, why don't you try to pick **different-sized companies**? Are you sure a huge 500+ employees company is going to be *better* for you than a boutique studio of 10 people? Is picking a company located in a different continent a plus or a reason for doubts and countless headaches down the road? The answer is "who knows?" - but you can start investigating potential hiccups right off the bat.

In my experience, it really depends on many factors and it's very hard to tell. Yet, at the same time, when you start talking to different companies, **you begin forming ideas and thoughts**. Be sure to **be transparent and straightforward** when asking potential suppliers to address your issues or doubts. Most likely, they've already had a chance to discuss the issue with a previous client and they will do their best to reassure you. Of course, they will try to minimize the risk and tell you it's all good but I am sure you will be able to distinguish between a hesitant *not-sure-how-to-say-this* answer and a truthful and honest one.

As an example, over the past decade, we've been asked many times if being in the EU (we're based in Italy - lucky us!) has ever been a problem for us. Our answer has always been super honest: not for us, no. We decided to set up an office in the US to give our clients a chance to communicate with our project managers during their office hours and, actually, the fact that we are working while people in the US are sleeping gives us an advantage. We're always one step ahead.

It's not the same thing for every company. We decided to build a team composed of engineers with at least a 5-year degree in Computer Science from top Italian universities. We take a scientific approach when tackling a problem; we support the client in drafting up thorough documentation that helps us developing top-notch solutions. Most of the time, **development teams lack high-level project management guidance** and do not include an experienced architect. These shortcomings are very difficult to discover at the beginning of your relationship with a supplier but can kill your project (and your spirit) later on.

## ⚠️ CAUTIONARY TALE - PART I

A couple of years ago, one of our biggest clients came to us and asked us to jump on a project as quickly as we could. They needed to **create and release an app on the Apple Store in a few days**. We worked day and night to deliver it and, as usual (yep - bragging time!), we made it happen.

I hopped on a call with the client after the project was online for a customer success call. **We usually set up monthly calls** to make sure things are great and there are no unmet needs. I wanted to understand why they had an Android app and they then decided to publish an iOS version with such a short runway for development. They decided to **open up and tell me** how things went.

Since their final client wanted a local development company in the Americas, we were not included in the first part of the project. A local company got the job and started developing the two apps. While the Android one went through with no hiccups, **the iOS one got blocked by Apple**. Since it was infringing a few rules of their agreement, Apple let the development company know they needed to **rebuild the app** following a different path.

## ⚠️ CAUTIONARY TALE - PART II

At that point, our client **discovered the supplier was not developing native applications** (even though they promised they were) and, since they had almost no expertise in developing iOS apps, they failed to comply with Apple terms. At 10 days from the go-live day, the supplier **asked our client to pay essentially double the price** they had agreed upon to allow them to rebuild the whole iOS app from scratch. And yes - you guessed it - they asked to push the deadline a few weeks in the future.

Luckily, we were able to come up with a clever solution that helped our client save some money, preserve the go-live date and - let me be very clear - publish a top-notch app to the Apple Store.

**TAKEAWAY**: Be sure you **pick the right company**. If you reach out to three different software development companies and one of them has a price that is 50% lower than the others, they better come up with a pretty thorough explanation for that. Otherwise, the strategy might be "let's reel them in with a smaller fee and then require more money when it's too late to back out of it". **Sounds like ransom**, doesn't it?

# 04.

# The exploratory call

Right after your first attempt to connect with a company, you might get an email with a few **questions aimed at better qualifying your solution**. Don't see them as a hu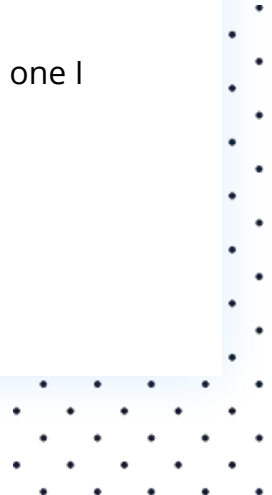rdle; instead, take them as a sign of competency and professionalism. For example, we at Mumble send a quick questionnaire to the people who contact us to **understand where they currently are on their journey** and to **set reasonable expectations**.

Some companies jump straight to the exploratory call in which they try to understand if you are a good fit and can work together. This is a very important step and, again, **it's as important to them as it should be for you**. Ask questions, get into the details, have them come up with a step-by-step description of their process.

**Here's a quick list of the 7 main questions you should ask to come away with a good sense of who they are:**

**01.** Do you have any experience in the { insert your industry } market?

*If they say yes, ask them to send you **links for other relevant apps** you can use to get a sense of their skills.*

**02.** Do you mainly work with **individuals**, **startups** or **big companies**?

**03.** Do you have a **minimum budget**?

**04.** Do you offer any pre-set or **template application** with pre-determined functionalities in case we want to start with a lighter version?

**05.** Which technologies do you use? Do you develop **native** applications or **hybrid** ones? Do you use **frameworks** or **native languages**?

**06.** On average, **how long would it take** to develop an app like the one I told you about?

**07.** Can you give me a ballpark idea of the **costs** for such an app?

Okay, the last two questions are actually a super great tool you can use to gauge the professionalism of software developers. The answer to both is usually "**there is no way to tell** unless we sit down and develop some clear documentation and a set of requirements". Even an apparently basic functionality can influence both cost and development time significantly.

That said, on a scale from "run the heck away!" to "hey, they're actually cool!", there's a bunch of nuances. One important suggestion is: **don't trust people that tell you it's very easy and can be done with a few bucks in a couple of weeks**. You will regret this in the blink of an eye and, as I've previously stated, it might be too late for you to jump off that wagon and find a better company for your needs. **You could end up investing twice the amount of money** you would have invested if you went straight to the most expensive (and skilled) company.

# 05.

# The 3 things to look out for
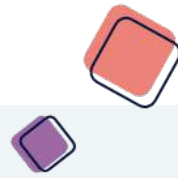
There are a bazillion things you could look for, but I'm trying to be reasonable here. Let's look into the **3 main points** you can use to evaluate an app development company.

**01.** Look for **referrals**: they might have an "Our clients say" section on their website, but that's not super credible, right? Yes, we all trust each other and stuff like that, but better safe than sorry. Pick some of the best customers from their previous works and **try to get in touch with them** on LinkedIn; it won't take long, believe me, and it will be a great way to get honest feedback.

**02.** Explore their developer profile on Apple/Play store: ask them the links to download some of the apps they created and then explore their whole profile. Look for other apps, **reviews**, average **ratings** from users, **comments**, etc. There might be one or two apps that have low ratings because maybe the client abandoned the project and did not update the app. Overall though you'll get a good sense of how they are doing as app developers.

**03.** **Team composition**: research the company on LinkedIn, see all its employees and understand if they are all located in the same area, if they outsource development to other countries, etc. **Do they have mobile developers** on board? How about designers? Back end developers? Even if it's just one developer per role, it is a clear indicator that **things get done internally**.

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Yes, I know, there are many more things you could look for, but these are (in my eyes) the most important ones. Does it matter that a company has been founded last year or in 1999? Not really, it all boils down to **the experience of the developers**. How about marketing expertise? Social media presence? An update blog? All vanity metrics. We tried many times to have a blog, but we're developers and we love to create awesome products. We could have hired someone to write blog posts but we felt it was not the right move for us.

For example, I am one of Mumble's partners and I'm not a writer. This is the first white paper I write and, in fact, I am pretty sure the result is not that great. BUT, what I can assure you is that this comes from the heart and from **my direct experience** with hundreds (maybe thousands?) of clients from many different backgrounds. And this leads us to the next (and final) chapter: we'll listen to you, but please listen to us.

# 06.

# Have a plan but be flexible

You might be a software developer or a tech-savvy professional who simply loves computers. You might be completely unaware of what app development entails. You might have a cousin who knows everything about it and instructed you to ask for specific things, even though you have no idea of what you are talking about.

I do the same things when it comes to cars. I am totally ignorant about any aspect related to vehicles, whatever number of wheels they have. Whenever I feel there's something wrong with my vehicle or, God forbid, I need to shop for a new one cause my old one irredeemably blew up, I ask all my friends and family; I read online forums, reviews, articles, whatever I can find. Then, I take a deep breath and I go to the car shop. I have my bullet point list, I go over it with the expert and, each and every time, **I end up questioning everything I took for granted**. But hey - it's actually a good thing and I have proof of that: I have always been super happy about my vehicles.

Enough about me though. Let's talk about your app. You might have a pretty clear idea of what it should do. Heck - you might even have a clear development roadmap, pricing, marketing strategy, and so on and so forth. Actually, I hope you do.

I will enjoy going over it with you, I promise you. You might come up with some great idea and I appreciate your input because it helps me get a clear sense of what you expect from the app and how you envisioned the whole process. I do have a request though: **when it's my turn, listen to what I have to say**.

If your plan includes some **super-advanced features** that would require a pile of cash and months to develop, listen to me when I **offer an alternative** or I try to **split up the development process** in multiple phases. If you tell me you're on a tight budget and ask me to create something similar to Uber, Whatsapp or Google Maps, I might feel the need to let you know we need to fine-tune our expectations. Remember that Facebook itself started out as a super simple web view with two pictures and the chance for the user to click on one or the other. That was it.

Next time you have a chat with a potential partner, **try to really listen to their suggestions**. Ask them why they are suggesting this. If they are saying this because of previous experience. Remember you are not selecting a supplier of commodities but **a tech partner which will be a key asset for your project**.

I am not saying this because I think I am a genius or that I deserve your attention. It's because **I care about you and your success**. I want to create something awesome for you, the people you want to serve and - well - for myself. I want to be able to run around with your app and **let everyone know we were the ones who developed it**.
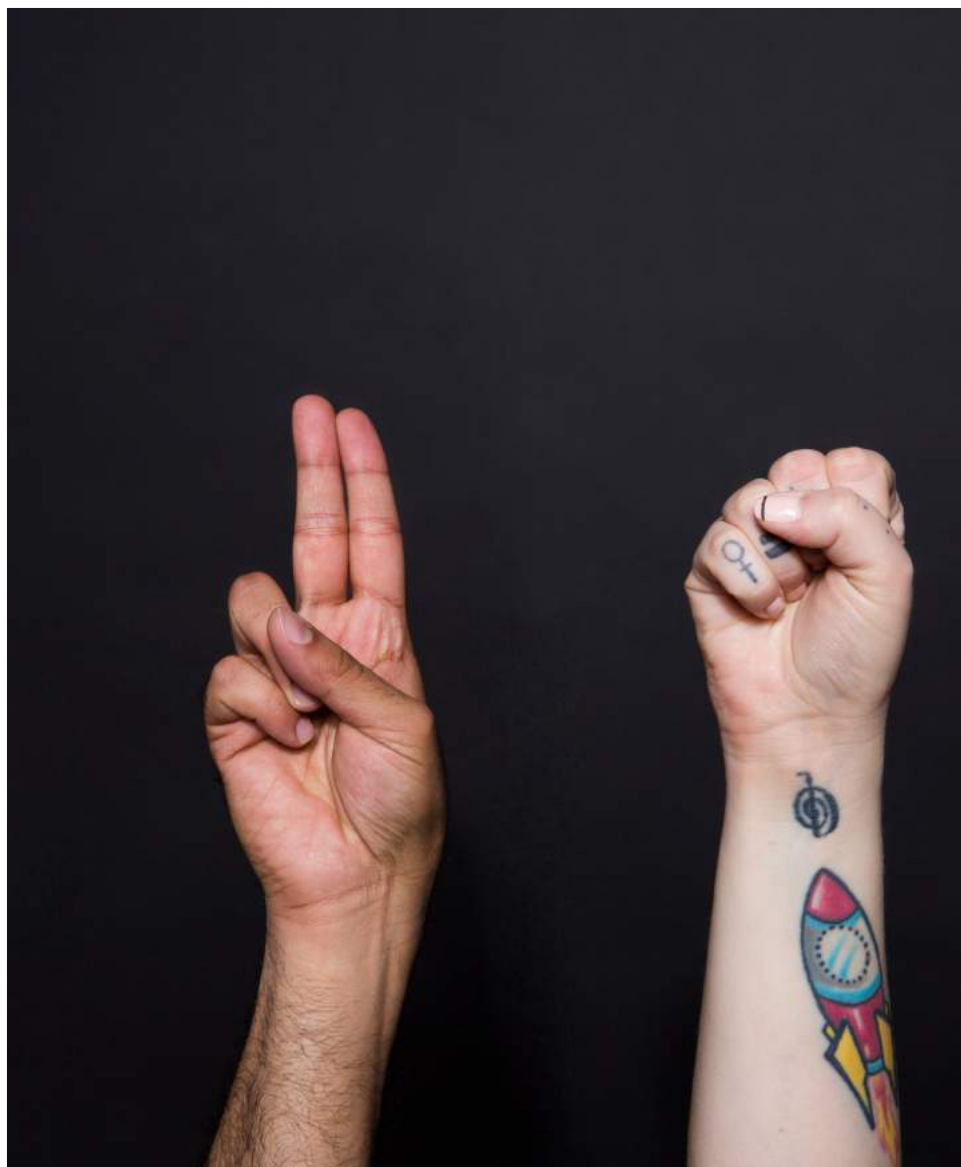
07.

# Get in touch!

I hope you got some value out of this white paper. I tried keeping it short and sweet because no one likes reading boring stuff on the internet.

Maybe a gif of a cute cat would have been the cherry on the top, but I decided not to push it.

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I wanted to write this for all the people and companies out there thinking about building a mobile app. **Mobile app development is a crazy industry** and we've been riding the waves for almost a decade now.

Mumble is a small team of tech engineers located in beautiful Modena, in the heart of Italy. We're a few miles away from iconic car manufacturers (Ferrari, Maserati, Lamborghini), we can go have lunch at Chef Bottura's restaurants in around 10 minutes. We can go pay our respect to the world-famous tenor Luciano Pavarotti.

In the midst of all of this beauty, we keep our eyes on our mission: **creating software solutions to improve people's lives**. We've been working for the **Government of the United States**, many huge European and International companies, as well as startups and individuals willing to transform their vision into reality. **We are damn proud of each and every app we created**.

If you want to get in touch, drop us a line to info@mumbleideas.it. We'll be more than happy to get to know you and discuss your project! If you want to have a look around, here is our website: LINK

Thank you for reading this. You can share this document or its content freely. If you could attribute it to us, **we'd be eternally grateful**. I've spent a couple of weekends on this so I sure wouldn't mind! 😉

## ABOUT MUMBLE

We have developed digital projects for lots of different sectors to help businesses thrive and improve people's lives. Our mission is create smart digital tools to help people do more while working less.
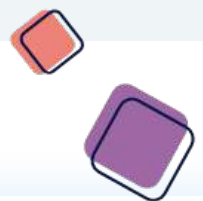
**Wanna know more?**

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Drop us a line at **info@mumbleideas.it** or visit our website www.mumbleideas.it