

What Are The Processes Involved In App Development?

September 21, 2019 in [Building Effective Apps](#)



If you're planning to launch an app to improve your customer experience or streamline how your teams get work done, one of the first questions you'll ask is "how long will it take?"

The quick answer is three to four months

My stock answer to this is “If we started next week, you could get something great out there in 3-4 months”.

How can I say this when every app is different and so many factors that come into play?

Well, if you have a clear goal, a good team, tight collaboration and communication, and you are willing to accept different solutions to how to achieve your goal, then you should be able to create something useful in 3-4 months.

So why 3-4 months? Why not 1-2 months?

The first release takes longer

The first “drop” might take 3-4 months because starting software projects can be a bit “messy” as people rally around and things ramp up. Here are the necessary starting activities that take up time.

- Aligning everyone on goals, risks and ideal outcomes
- Researching the needs of customers and staff
- Creating ideas, sketching and shaping the solution

- Gathering feedback and input from stakeholders and customers/staff
- Researching technical risks, integrations and the business domain
- Clarifying the elements that need designing and building and resolving issues that might impede development

This can take hours, days or weeks depending on the size of your project. With that nailed, we're all in a good position to start building an app.

After this, you can move to shorter cycles. So, after the first 3-4 months, you might release the 2nd version of your app 4-8 weeks later.

Thinking in time-boxes can help

Another reason to assign 3-4 months is that it's a time-box to work towards. It's changing the question from "how long will an app take?" to "how can we move toward our goal in 3-4 months?".

This is a healthier question to ask because you're limiting the risk by setting shorter milestones. Yes, you might not get everything done, but

you should get something useful done that will start generating revenue or saving money, depending on your goal.

How to stop a 3-4 month app becoming a 6-12 month app

There are things that will make your app take longer, and in turn cost more. The more you can minimise these factors, the less time your app will take.

- The people managing the app in your business have too many other things to do. This means that things that should take a few days drag out for a week or so as people wait for information or answers to questions.
- There are other systems to integrate with. There are many risks around integration that make projects take longer. We recently did an integration with Sage that should have taken weeks but it ended up introducing a three month delay just waiting for the work to be done in preparation for the app.

- The team doing the work are pulled off onto something else.
This sounds obvious but it's important your app developers can commit consistent effort to move your app forward.

What does the data say?

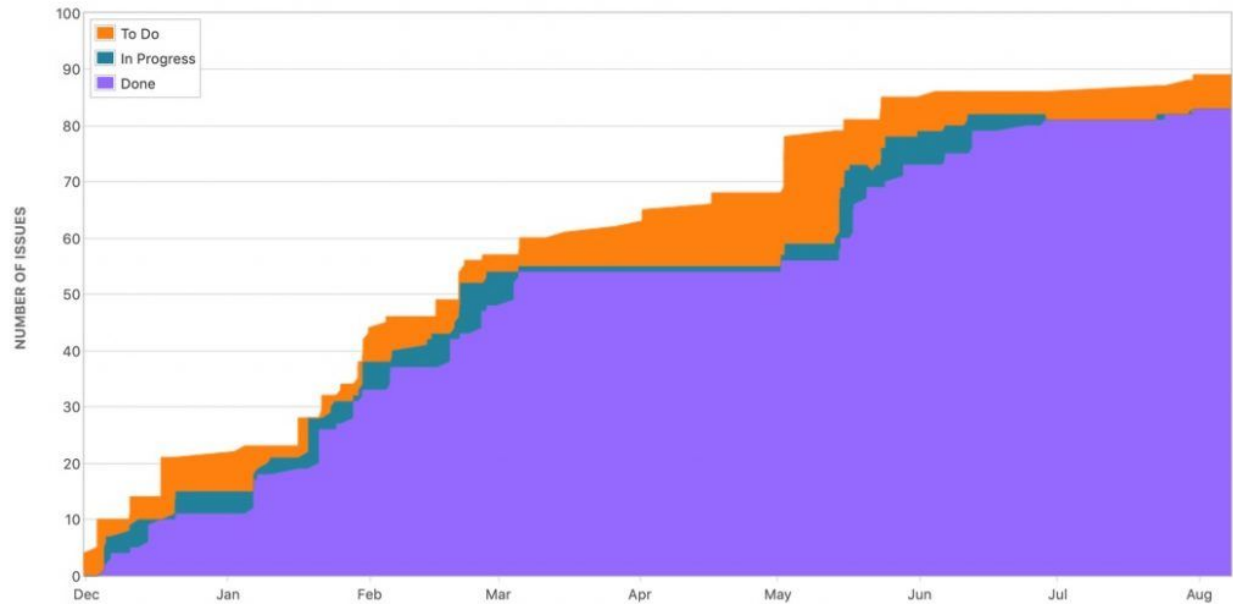
I'll also talk about something a bit more useful – our own history. We build apps for a living and capture data along the way around how fast they progress.

I reached into our systems and pulled out some stats about how long it's taken us to build some of our apps and what influenced the timelines.

The charts below show the amount of software delivered over time for a given project.

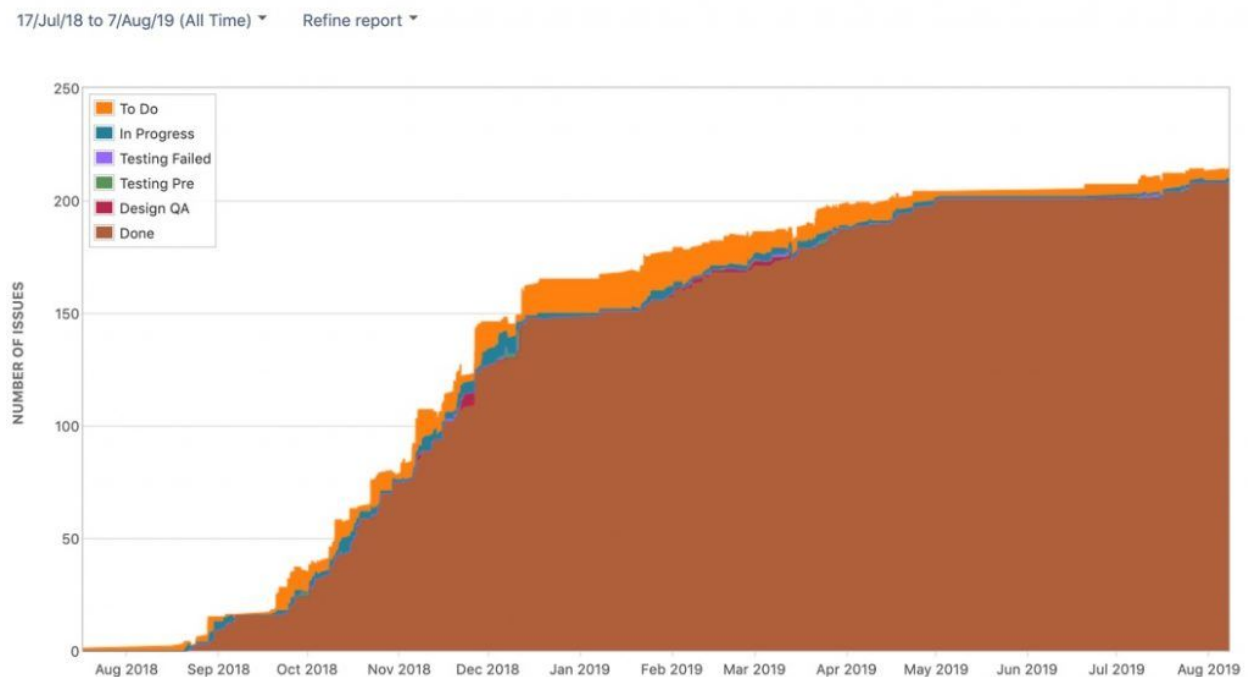
APP #1 – SEVEN MONTHS

30/Nov/18 to 7/Aug/19 (All Time) ▾ Refine report ▾



Here we have a 3-4 month app designed to help customers have an easier time at an “experience day”. In the end, it took seven months. You can see that progress stops when the busy management team are pulled away on other pressing priorities. Then, when they come back, things ramp up again. This highlights the importance of having a consistent focus on both sides if possible. Without it, progress can halt, adding months to the delivery timeline.

APP #2 – TWELVE MONTHS



This app helps 100 drivers work more efficiently in the construction industry. It had a six month delivery timeline but ended up taking 12 months. We had a strong start and made good progress from September to December. Christmas slowed things down, naturally. After Christmas, the business leaders were pulled away on other challenges. Then a lot of time was spent waiting for the Sage integration to get up and running between May and July. This highlights how integrations with other IT systems can slow things down, and also the need to allocate someone in the business to keep the app moving along.

Healthy conversations to have about the app development timeline

Nobody has a crystal ball at the start of the project. It's difficult to foresee all the risks that can make an app take longer. The most useful thing to do is to first speak openly about things that can go wrong, and also run a discovery phase aimed to establish the risks. Conversations about these kinds of things are healthy ones to have early on:

- How available are people on the development team and the business side of things?
- Which single person is assigned to “own” the project from the business side?
- What is the smallest thing we could build that gives value?
- What pain points are customers *really* having? What if we just address those?
- What IT systems are there and where does information need to flow?
- How much capacity does the development team have?
- What is their lead time?
- What upcoming events and holidays could derail progress?

In summary, different app projects take different amounts of time. The best thing to do is to set key milestones, be honest and open about anything that might delay the project, and readjust the timelines accordingly. This means everyone is on the same page and timescales can be re-estimated, expectations managed and products delivered.