

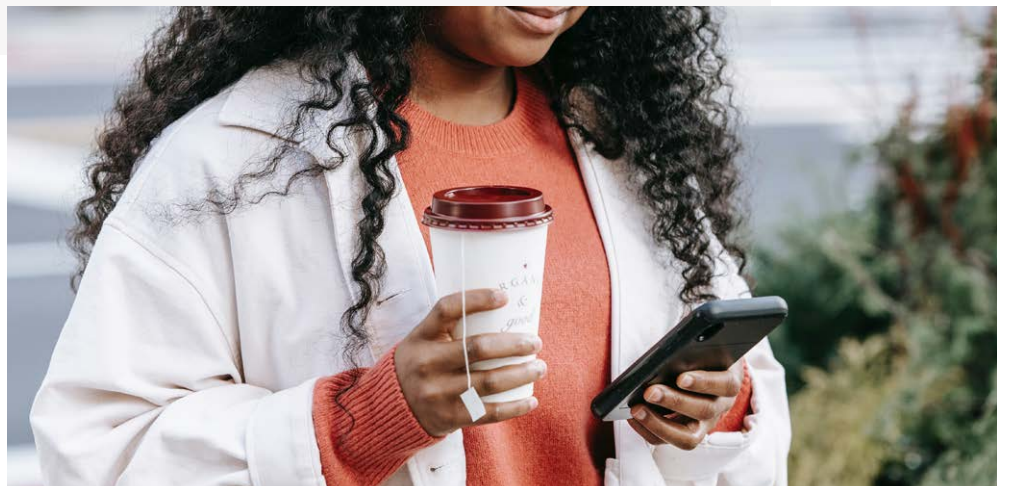
CASE STUDY

Pret's highway to scaling mobile app development

How a 'Fast Follow' development approach underpinned by cloud-native, API-first platform principles provided the foundation for Pret to innovate and scale rapidly from mobile web to mobile app.

Between 2020 and 2021 Pret A Manger went from high street icon to online innovator, launching new digital propositions like the Pret Coffee Subscription, Pret Pick Up (a click and collect service) and the Pret loyalty programme called 'Pret Perks'. Next, Pret used Equal Experts **mobile app developer expertise** to scale these mobile web propositions for the Pret mobile apps.

Developed on a custom digital platform and underpinned by cloud-native, API-first principles, these digital propositions had originally been developed for the mobile web to deliver the broadest digital reach with minimal development effort, allowing Pret to learn quickly with short feedback cycles. The team then used a Fast Follow approach to achieve the best cross-platform mobile app development speed to scale to both iOS and Android apps for Pret.





About Pret A Manger

Pret A Manger is an international sandwich shop franchise chain based in the United Kingdom, popularly referred to as Pret. Founded in 1983, Pret currently has over 460 shops in the UK, with 317 locations in London alone.

INDUSTRY



Retail food & beverage

ORGANISATION SIZE



8000

LOCATIONS



UK, USA,
France, Dubai,
Hong Kong,
Canada,
Singapore

SERVICES



Mobile app
development

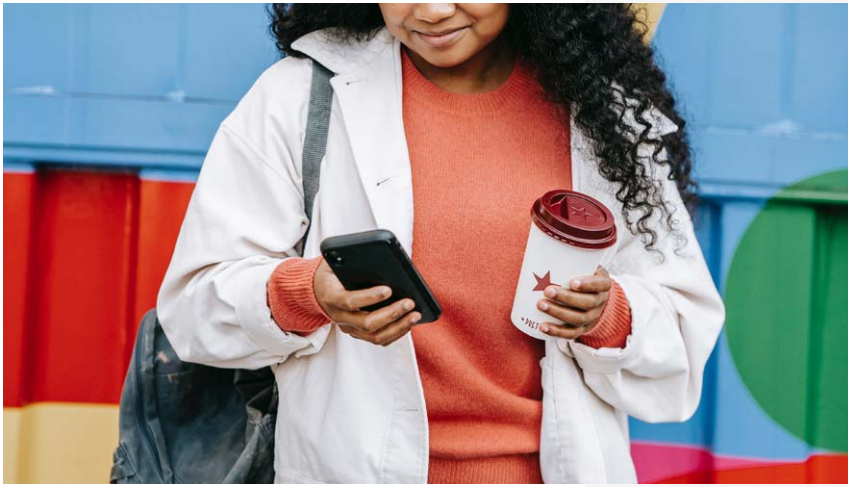
Demonstrating the business value of a pivot towards mobile-first technology

A web-first approach met the initial goal of reaching new customers via the website and launching new propositions rapidly into multiple international markets, but it came with some well understood trade-offs. It is typically not the preferred experience for frequent, on-the-go use; however, with speed-to-market, risk and cost reduction the priority, it was the pragmatic place to begin, always ensuring the capability was ready to support additional digital channels later with an API-first approach.

After launching the web version, real-world data insights clearly demonstrated the business case for further investment to extend the proposition to mobile apps, with the goals of improving the end-user experience and increasing reach, adoption and customer engagement. The end product would more tightly integrate customer propositions, as well as supporting Pret's strategic goal of reaching more of its customers via digital through a presence in app stores.

Beginning with 'Pret Pick Up' the team set about pivoting the proposition to mobile-first.

App development for iOS and Android platforms, with their sophisticated capabilities, brings a level of additional complexity, with non-standard development languages, frameworks and specific design and platform requirements. However, the benefits when taking advantage of these capabilities transcend these factors. Studies show that retail customers have a strong preference for apps over web when on mobile devices; in 2021 mobile as a share of total e-commerce spend was 72.9% (Source: [Statista](#)) with users spending 7x more time in native apps and purchasing more frequently when using them. (Source: [App Annie](#)).



Having already built out the business proposition and the underlying APIs, the mobile app development team, together with Pret's product team, could focus on the most important aspect of the transition from mobile web to mobile app. Providing a fully app-like experience to meet customers expectations, resulting in both a positive customer experience and favourable reviews and comments in app stores. (The app is rated 4.9 stars: Source [Apple App Store](#), Oct 2022)

Whilst simultaneously working on a well-timed brand redesign, the design team set to work creating both iOS and Android apps, applying the specific idioms and design of each mobile OS. We balanced these needs to combine the various propositions that would lead to the creation of a fully integrated, consistent, standalone app-like experience that maintained the simplicity of the Pret brand.

The decision to pivot towards mobile-first was well timed. Adoption was phenomenal, with 85% of all Pret Pick Up orders being made through the app within a matter of weeks.

In fact, across the industry mobile ordering of fast food and food delivery was surging with 110% year on year growth in 2020, demonstrating that this was a vital development for Pret (Source: [App Annie](#))

How Fast Follow native app development reduces cost and speeds up production

Although it is possible to build simultaneously for multiple mobile platforms in the early stages of creating a proposition, it does create additional overhead. Multiple teams, working on multiple platforms simultaneously – where the requirements are yet to be defined – carries an inherent cost. To mitigate this overhead, we recommend the ‘fast follower’ pattern.

Fast Follow development means leading with customer’s primary mobile OS to begin with, then following quickly with the second after the early ‘discovery’ stages of development have completed. This discovery period is when the risk of rework is at its highest and where a smaller team can move faster. The impact of inevitable rework (as new learnings are uncovered) is therefore minimised.

In Pret’s case there was an obvious preferred mobile OS and it was viable to lead on this before introducing a second (an insight gained from usage of the web version). Given a strong launch and positive market response, bringing the experience to all customers was a clear opportunity. However, as it would serve a smaller percentage of customers any efficiencies would improve the business case.

This hypothesis held up, and by taking this approach the app development for Android (the second mobile OS) turned out to be 50% less onerous in both time and materials. The second team was able to take advantage of the requirements and designs established by the first team, using this as a slipstream to effectively speed up delivery. This new team was able to catch-up rapidly because, as in everything (and software is no exception), it’s easier the second time round to get it right first time.



With a well-defined, pre-existing backlog of requirements and the QA and BAs able to support the second team, Pret were also able to utilise Equal Experts' international teams to deliver the work, with the second team able to be supported from Pune, India. The original delivery team members were able to effectively communicate detailed requirements and designs for this remote team to work from.

Fast Follow development has been a cost-effective way for many of our clients to build out to a second mobile app platform, and has proven a viable alternative to the less predictable efficiencies of mobile cross-platform technologies.

As proven by Pret, using this approach can be more efficient – and less of a risk than traditional methods – for cross-platform mobile app development; it also provides all the benefits which arise from using well understood native development technologies.

(Depending on delivery requirements, cross-platform technologies such as [Flutter](#) do provide another viable alternative approach. For help understanding the trade-offs, contact our experts who can provide additional examples guidance specific to your project).



Value Delivered: How an app improved customer engagement and increased revenue

From a standing start with limited digital presence, Pret have significantly grown and are now taking their customer experience global and digital, first with web and mobile.

With a consistent spot in the top of the Food & Drink category (helped by a healthy 4.9 star rating (Source: [Apple, App Store](#), Oct 22) Pret says “its Coffee Subscription service, is used over one million times a week.” (Source: [The Caterer / Pret](#)).

Through Pret Pick Up, Pret Perks and Pret Coffee Subscription, an ongoing relationship has been built with Pret's most loyal and valuable customers across both UK and international markets.

All this has been delivered at incredible pace and scale using the principles of Fast Follow, continuous delivery powered by shorter feedback cycles to reduce risks when things don't work and just as importantly capitalise on them when they DO.



Summary

The choice of whether to begin with a digital proposition on the web or a mobile app isn't necessarily an obvious one. The web is the fastest and most well understood route to the broadest number of platforms, but isn't always the way to achieve the broadest customer adoption and engagement.

A Fast Follower strategy, together with a cloud-native, API-first approach gave Pret the flexibility to go to market fast with their strategic plans with short feedback loops on new propositions. It also afforded them the agility they needed to extend propositions to multiple platforms and technologies as desired, to support their business strategy.

Mobile has given on-the-go customers improved convenience when engaging with retailers. A **best-in-class mobile app can grow engagement and sales** that far exceed the cost of adding and supporting these tools, when done well and underpinned by a platform agnostic, API-first digital platform.

If you need an app development company, or if you're looking for help with your digital platform strategy, multi-platform digital deliveries and achieving sustainable innovation at scale speak to our world-class experts who would be happy to sit down with you and share more insights, case-studies and advice.

Want to know more?

Are you interested in this project?

Or do you have one just like it?

Get in touch. We'd love to tell you more about it.