Expert review of Stack by Salt Inc.

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Introduction:

We chose the Stack app because it's a popular app and we never used this app. This app is new for everybody in the group. This way we can make a proper review. Stack is an app developed by Ketchapp. Ketchapp is a very well-known game studio. They produced over 20 games for android and iOS. Ketchapp is a cheeky wordplay of these clever memers. They named themselves after the famous tomato sauce called ketchup. This gives a lot of fame because ketchup is very tasty. They changed the last part of the word in app because they make apps. The app Stack is one of their most popular games.
This is the description of the product in the Play Store:
"Stack up the blocks as high as you can, play the best new tower game free now <3"
Reading this description makes us want to play this game, we can't wait to play and review this app!

Personas:

Occasional Android gamer
This user is between the age of 12-24.
The gender of this user is most likely male but females are not excluded.
The highest level of education this user has received could range from middle school until a master's degree
This user will come to this app to play a good game and spend several hours in one go. After that he might visit this app a few days later to once again have a good time. This game will be played on his android device. This player is all too familiar with his device and has no problems navigating through his phone. This provides the app to use its full functionality in the form of more advanced buttons and such. This user received all this knowledge from playing other games and using his phone on a regular basis. If this user is not capable of figuring the controls out himself, he has no trouble looking for answers on the internet. In the end the users want to have a great time and I satisfied feeling when finishing this game. The user is looking forward to the next level even before he is finished with the current level. His ultimate goal is to finish the game even if he needs to purchase some in-app purchases to accomplish this.

Occasional iOS gamer
Same, except this user utilizes iOS instead of android. This user has a lot of knowledge about his OS and knows almost all the buttons. He can use Safari to look for answers.

Beginning Android gamer
This user is between the age of 6-80.
The gender of this user will vary. The highest level of education this user has received could range from a master's degree to none at all.
This user will install this app to pass some time in the bus or waiting for one. This will most likely be once a week and this user doesn't have a lot of experience in gaming. This user will play this game on an android device. The user has slight troubles navigating through his phone and only uses his phone to call or send texts. This forces the app to use easy-to-see, on-screen buttons. When the user doesn't know what to do he will most likely uninstall this game rather than looking for the answers on the internet. In the end the user doesn't play this to finish the game but rather to pass some time. However the user does want to spend his time in an enjoyable manner.

Beginning iOS gamer
Same, except this user utilizes iOS instead of android. This user doesn't have a lot of knowledge about his OS. He bought this phone for the looks and doesn't really care about the price.

Heuristic Evaluation:

The evaluators have to perform specific tasks and report on their findings.
These tasks are the following:
- Start a game
- Share your score
- Rate this game
- Mute sound

We are the evaluators ourselves. Nathan and Awend have an iOS device and Wouter and Aaron have an android device. To simulate the beginning gamers we let Awend and Aaron swap their phones. Nathan and Wouter remain on their own phone simulating the occasional gamers.
Our findings are grouped per user and persona.

Wouter the occasional android gamer:
After starting the game an annoying pop-up from google play appears. After clicking the cancel button another pop-up appears, this time it's from the game itself. In the pop-up information about another game from the same developer is shown. I find this strange and inappropriate. The first task was easy. Just press the play button. Sometimes the button and the background are the same color this might make it harder to spot the button. After playing the game sharing my score was easy. Just press the share button. Since I'm an occasional android user I know what this button looks like. When I tried to find the button to rate this game. This button was in the main menu and not in the after-game screen. Returning to the main menu was strange. It told me to tap again to restart but it went straight to the main menu. In my opinion restarting means playing the game again. Once I entered the main menu it was easy to spot the button. The star. Muting the sound was as easy as pressing the speaker icon. After this I pressed the icon with 3 bars. In other games they use this for high scores but in this app it did nothing. Perhaps they forgot to implement this feature.

Usability heuristics:
- *User control and freedom*, once starting the game you have to finish or fail it in order to return to main menu. I classify this problem with severity level 2. The user will be repeatedly bothered with this problem. It can't be overcome once the user knows this problem exists because the development team has to fix this. This problem occurs everytime you play a game.

- *Flexibility and efficiency of use ,* the button for restarting a game has to restart the game and not go back to the main menu. For an occasional gamer such as myself, you would like to restart the game fast. I classify this problem with severity level 2. This problem occurs after you finished a game and want to restart it fast. This user can overcome this by tapping twice really fast but the user will repeatedly be bothered by this.

Both problems are tiny mistakes but might result in the user quitting sooner because they are annoyed. Another problem that I found was that one button wasn't working. I am not sure where to classify this under but I do think it has a severity level of 3. The app simply has a button that is not working. These kinds of mistakes shouldn't happen at such a big gaming studio.

Nathan the occasional iOS gamer:
The app is rather simple and the looks are great. There are a few things that bother that bother me, however. When you open the app you get into a menu where you can press a stack of blocks to go to some sort of shop where you can buy new looks for your blocks. I really can't derive that it's a shop judging from that icon. That icon could really mean anything. Instead I'd rather use something like a shopping bag or something. Secondly there is a star in the menu. When you click it it takes you to the App Store to rate the app. Personally I wouldn't put that on the start up menu. You would rather ask something like that after the user finished a good game, like when he gets his high score or when he plays a lot. Furthermore there are the mute sound and the leaderboard options. Those are fine. And you can tap the big play button to start which is also fine.
So then you play a game. The game works fine except for a bug where the block you drop gets stuck in the block below and it starts vibrating like crazy. I encountered it only once though. Then after you finish a game. There is a like option which takes you to the Facebook page of Ketchapp. It opens the Facebook app if you have it. Nice feature, it's a shame the Facebook app is so slow… Then there is a no ads option. Personally I would put that in the main menu, since it is more like a setting and really doesn't have anything to do with a particular round. Then there is a share your score options which is fine. And there is another leaderboard options which kind of feels like some lack of originality, but since it's not a bad place to have it there, I'd say it's okay. Then, in the post round menu, there is the thing that bothers me the most. It says "Tap to restart" and then when you tap, it takes you back to the starting menu. So you don't restart, you go back to the main menu and then you can start a new game.
By playing you can earn some kind of gems, which you can spend in the shop. But because they never appear anywhere in the rounds, it's kind of unclear how to get them. It took me a few rounds to understand you get one every time you get score that's a multiplier of 10. So for example a score of 36 gives you 3 gems. This is probably confusing for starting users. Overall it's a fine app. Most things are clear and the design is nice.

Aaron the beginning iOS gamer:

After I start the app the first thing that pops up is an advertisement as big as the screen. After a bit of waiting I realize there is a tiny button to click away the ad. After removing the ad from the screen we get a menu. Only a bar on the bottom of the screen is still filled with ads. There's a very clear play button in the middle of the screen along with four smaller buttons under it. Our task is to start a game so we click the play button. The game starts immediately without any information on how to play the game. After a few tries we figure out the goal of the game. After a game it's quite easy to share your score, as one of the four buttons mentioned earlier is a share button. Also the big button in the middle is replace by a clickable text saying restart. It seems that we cannot rate the game from the menu we get after playing a game, but we can from the menu when we first start the app. The same is true for muting the sound. You can only mute the sound in the menu you get when you start the app.

Aesthetic and minimalist design:

The app looks very clean. There's almost no text at all and the icons used on the buttons indicate clearly what function the button has. The only thing that doesn't really fit into this clean look and feel is the bar displaying ads on the bottom of the screen.

Help and documentation:

There is no tutorial and it takes a few tries to figure out what you have to do. It would have been easy to make a little button that takes new players to a tutorial. In this tutorial the game is then briefly explained, this saves time and the user is less annoyed.

Advertisement when starting the game: 2

The ad is way too big and it makes it so the user is annoyed before even playing the game.

Advertisement on bottom of the screen: 1

The ad on the bottom of the screen isn't pretty but not interfering with the usability of the app.

Lack of rate buttons: 0

I don't think it's that much of a problem not finding the rate button because it doesn't interfere with the usability of the app.

Lack of mute buttons: 1

You can always use the volume buttons on the device you're using but a small button to mute the sound would be nice.

No tutorial: 3

This makes it very hard for new players to understand the game. They will most likely uninstall the app because it takes too much time to understand the game.

Awend the beginning android gamer:
After finding this game in the popular section of the play store while looking for something to just distract me during a break I gave it a try. The first time opening the app I got some google play pop-up for a play account (probably used to keep track of your games like game center for iOS). After entering the menu for the first time I got a pop-up add for one of their other games. This is very annoying because it happens every time you open the app and accidently clicking the add because you want to skip the intro will bring you to the store page. After starting the game for the first time there is no tutorial or anything that explains the game but it is easy to figure out after a bit. After my failed attempt I get +0 of some kind of currency. After playing the game multiple times I still end up getting +0 and it's unclear what score I need to be able to finally get some points. In the end game screen there is a high score button which doesn't do anything and tapping to restart doesn't actually restart the game but puts you back in the menu.

Usability heuristics:
-   Aesthetic and minimalist design, The game has a very minimalistic design and looks simple. There's barely any information given so it would be hard for them to give too much information. The only information included in the game is relevant (it even lacks some

information). This shows that the design is too minimalistic. I would give this a severity level of 1 because although it isn't needed it would still be helpful to have some kind of small tutorial or information page about the icons on the screen.

- Match between system and the real world, There isn't much information that appears but the information that appears seems to be in a logical order. You open the app and see a giant play button and after you fail it shows your score, best score and a restart button(which doesn't even restart the game but returns you to the menu instead).There's also some kind of currency at the top right of the screen, which adds +x after every game. But since I lost almost every game early I got 0 points every time. So to me it's still unclear what score I need before I can start earning this currency. So apart from this and the restart button all the information seems fine. But the restart button should be renamed to "Back to menu" or be changed to actually restart the game. This problem is of severity level 2. You will see the wrong button after every game and the same goes for the currency.

Conclusion:

After extensive testing we can draw the following conclusion:
The game feels repetitive. There is no addictive feature. After the first try we already got bored. The app itself was pretty well developed but the game is mediocre. We think the number one priority should be a good game and not only fancy looks also advertising your own apps in this app is very unprofessional.
The overall design of the app is fine.

Suggestions:

We have the following suggestions for Ketchapp:

- We would recommend using one button to go back to the home screen and one button to restart.
- If you are not logged in to googleplay you can't take a look at the highscores. The button doesn't work.
- A pause button would be great.
- Switch the no-ads function with the rate function.