



YOU CAN TEACH AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS

In-App Purchases You Should Avoid

Arliss Pondicare was an IT guy with a unique talent. He understood the nature of people's desires. What they wanted from their technological tools. He had a true grasp of people's hardwired expectations. He just never learned how wanting and getting are two entirely different things.

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Arliss Pondicare was searching for the ultimate phone app. He never went anywhere without his phone. It was more of a personal extension of himself than a pocket computer. Flipping through the listing, he scrupulously avoided all the apps with in-app purchasing. Arliss didn't object to paying for software, he just wanted the price to be finite. Not an endless stream emanating from his pocket to the wallet of the developers... or more likely the greedy SOBs who ran the marketing department.

Then one application struck his eye. It wasn't the bright advertising colors catching his eye, although they were impressive. No, it was rather the concept this software espoused. It claimed to be a universal reference for *anything*. Arliss had never been afraid of putting all his eggs in one basket. In fact, he was rather fond of it. The more a piece of software could do, the more useful it was. He never liked having to flip from page to page, just to find the one app he was searching for. The software called itself *Everknow*.

Scanning all the five-star reviews, Arless couldn't find any negative appraisals. It was the only thing he found strange. There were always negative reviews. At least one. Arliss had been involved in making apps himself. Putting your app out in the real world was always a merciless adventure. A bit like asking your neighbors to take potshots at the family dog. What never surprised Arliss was how willing everyone was to take those potshots. They didn't care how much you loved your dog... or how much work you put into your software creations. To them, they were just something to shoot at. But the most negative comment he could find was a complaint the app was too extensive. The reviewer couldn't imagine ever running out of things to look up and learn.

He pressed the download button. What did he have to lose? If nothing else, it might give him a few ideas about how to structure his next smartphone app. Launching it he did find the app was loaded with all sorts of classes. It was like the Master Class series or the Great Courses on steroids. There were 220 entries in the language section alone. Arliss flicked his thumb across the screen. Somewhere down about the middle was French. It was an odd place to find it. Perhaps it had lost a lot of its allure over the years. Arliss pressed the button.

All he got was a short light show on the screen. The colors exploded and flowed across the surface like a drug addict's dream. It was an impressive effect... the kind of thing you see in the movies, but there was nothing to it. In the end, Arliss felt cheated. He sighed and then chalked it up to another in his long list of disappointments with his phone software. He didn't even bother with giving it a negative review. His response was to simply put the phone back in his pocket and try to forget the whole dissatisfying event ever happened.

Arliss walked the long corridor down to his cubical. Row after row of duplicated tiny spaces passed before him. Each with more space for the ever-present computer than the human residing in it. The floor had a slight stench of carpet cleaning fluid about it. But at least the carpets looked clean. He passed Marie Faure on the way. She mentioned something to him about the mail system. The Canadians were always having some problem or other with the translation routines in the mail system. He gave her the standard answer. The department had been getting so many complaints about it, it was almost automatic. Marie glared back at him with amazement. Arliss decided his best tactic was not to engage her further, so he proceeded along toward his tiny cubicle.

John Hill, who sat in the cube next to his, was there to greet him. "Since when did you learn French?"

“What are you talking about?” Arliss spat back snidely.

“French,” John repeated, “I just saw you speaking French to Marie Faure.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Arliss muttered. He yelled something back to Marie over the cubicle walls. She replied in her half-broken English and Arliss felt satisfied.

“There,” John poked him, “You did it again.”

In his mind, Arliss when over the exchange. Nope, he defiantly told her off in English. He didn’t even know if the French even had an equivalent for the phrase he had used.

“Don’t be daft,” Arliss reported.

“I’m telling you; you just spoke French.”

Arliss waved him away and sat down at his desk. He put some numbers into a spreadsheet but found he couldn’t resist the temptation. He pulled out his smartphone and open the new app up. He scanned his way back to the language section. Rachel Fuentes sat across from him and spoke Spanish. Arliss didn’t know a word of it, so he selected Spanish next. All he got was the same pointless light show on the screen. He put his phone back in his pocket.

“Hey Rachel,” he yelled over the carpeted walls, “How do you say, ‘I’m a hopeless sucker’ in Spanish?”

She stood up and peered at him over the cube walls, raising one eyebrow. “Why did you ask me about something you already know?”

“Something I already knew?” Arliss shot back.

John Hill poked his head up and joined the conversation. “Wow. Multiple languages. What are you two babbling about in Spanish?”

Arliss looked at him. Everything he’d heard or said had been in English, yet other people were hearing and talking back to him in another language. He politely brushed the two of them off and then sank back into his chair. He didn’t get much work done for the rest of the day. He was going to be late with delivering the metric reports to the central office, but he couldn’t keep his hands off his phone.

He tried a section in the sciences department. He pressed the button on Theoretical Physics and watched the light show. Then we went off to a Physics quiz he’d found months ago on the Internet. The first time he took it, he’d gotten a .03% score. The thing was impossible. Questions Stephen Hawking couldn’t answer. Now though, the questions felt easy... a bit like being asked what number came after four. He scored 100%.

The rest of the day was spent learning all sorts of esoteric nonsense. From Chinese quinine to US income tax code. Arliss leafed through pages and pages of psychedelic light shows. Arliss had always desired to be a well-rounded person, so he launched upon his next course of action. Taking one course in each of the sections. He was so enthralled with his new-found efforts he forgot about lunch. By late afternoon Arliss had finally gotten to the bottom of the list, a subject group simply listed as ‘Others.’

Arliss was intrigued. Even more so by the fact, there was only one course in his category, 'See What Other People Cannot See.' He pressed the button. Only this time he didn't get the flashing lights. All he got was a text message.

WARNING: HIS COURSE MAY ALTER YOUR PERCEPTION

It read like a redundant warning. All the courses were altering his perceptions. He waited for what he thought would be the next logical progression. The requirement for the inevitable in-app purchase, but there was nothing. Finally, Arliss pressed the 'continue' button. This time there were no colorful lights. Only a stream of flashes. They had the odd effect of appearing to highlight shadows and define different levels of grays. Then the lights in the room flashed. Everything was remarkably darker as if a massive thunderstorm had rolled in.

Yet, his phone usually gave him annoyingly loud warnings about these events. Arliss looked up to see what was going on. What he saw would have given Dante nightmares. Even the air smelled different. Gone was the smell of overused carpet cleaner. What replaced it was a smoky, pervading odor Arliss could only guess was brimstone. At least it was what Arliss imagined it was. He had no idea what brimstone actually smelled like. Everyone in the office was still there, going about their soulless tasks, but the room was also filled with horrible creatures. Some had a frightening amount of solidity behind them. Others appeared transparent or barely perceptible. Each was whispering the most horrid suggestions to his co-workers. One of them even fit Arliss' mental image of what Jack the Ripper should have looked like. Arliss held his breath. Others appeared more alien than things makeup artists had dreamed up for Science-Fiction Horror films.

It wasn't long before they all took notice of him. Arliss got the instant impression they felt most comfortable not being noticed. They took umbrage to his awareness. They descended on him like a pack of rabid wolves. What he saw made gore-fest movies look tame in comparison. He felt an overwhelming sense of dread. The thundering noise of their overlapping voices was deafening. He could hardly even hear himself think. Arliss shook his head... no, correction, he couldn't hear himself think.

Arliss had only been up to the building's top floor once. There had been a broken video system up there the executives wanted to be fixed immediately and he'd been the only IT guy in range. He ran up the stairs. The whole idea of being trapped in the elevator with these gruesome creatures was too much for him to bear. He huffed as puffed as he assaulted the steps one by one. As even more terrifying sights assaulted his eyes and senses, he started taking the steps two at a time.

He passed by director Fermin's office. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw plots that would have made the Lincoln assassination nothing more than a childhood tea party. There were layoff lists and termination dates plastered on the walls of Fermin's usually desolate walls. Arliss tried to put it out of his mind, but even closing his eyes gave him no respite. Pulling his phone his pocket, he tossed it across the room. It bounced off a cement wall and clattered to the floor in a shower of broken screen bits and electronic chaff.

Arliss picked up a chair and pounded on the remains. Both the phone and one of the chair's casters ended up pulverized in his zeal. Nothing changed, except the creatures appeared to revel in his destructiveness. Then he tossed the chair across the room. He heard the distinctive sound of glass

breaking. The sound only barely registered through the racket of horror which was pouring into his ears as if molted lava was being decanted on his eardrums.

Charging through the window, Arliss didn't even feel the tearing of his flesh from the glass shards. They didn't feel like anything. But he immensely enjoyed the total silence which accompanied him on his journey. He followed the office chair he had thrown out the window right into the solid cement of the street.