



## Just Landed Is Shutting Down

I've recently made the difficult decision to sunset and eventually shut down my company's popular iOS travel app, Just Landed, which launched on the App Store in June 2012. As of today, Just Landed is no longer available for sale on the iTunes App Store, but will continue to operate normally for existing users. The servers powering Just Landed will shut down completely in just over 5 months time, on July 31st 2016, at which point the app will cease to function. I expect that this will be an unpopular decision, so as a courtesy to our users, I want to take this opportunity to explain the reasons behind the shutdown.

First, let me say that I'm extremely grateful to all of you who used and supported Just Landed over the past few years. As an independent developer who made Just Landed with a couple of friends, it was thrilling to have hundreds of thousands of people not only use something that we created, but also write glowing reviews, and recommend it to their friends and colleagues. Just Landed also received high praise in the press, was frequently featured on the App Store by Apple, and was even mentioned on TV a couple of times. We never expected such a great response to the app.

So what went wrong?

### 1. Lack of Innovation in Flight Data

The first thing that makes running Just Landed difficult in the long-term is a serious lack of innovation in the flight data industry. An app like Just Landed relies on access to high quality flight data to function correctly. However, since the airline industry is extremely fragmented, and uses

antiquated IT systems and many incompatible data formats, it is not practical for a small independent developer like us to negotiate data-sharing contracts with each individual airline, and then unscramble their jumbled data feeds into a usable format at a reasonable cost.

In fact, commercial flight data has been such a mess for so long, that a few specialized companies have sprung up to deal with this enormous headache. These companies act as middlemen who gather, sanitize, debug, and resell flight data to developers like us. Without the help of these companies, Just Landed could never have existed, because it was totally impractical to take on this huge data challenge ourselves just so that we could make an app.

Unfortunately, because there are only really a couple of these flight data resellers, there is effectively a duopoly in the flight data business—these companies enjoy significant pricing power and very little outside competition. Unlike most technology companies, they feel little pressure to innovate, and are not particularly concerned with modernizing their services, improving their data quality and reliability, or adding new features.

This lack of innovation in flight data has been a huge source of frustration for us, and ultimately limited our ability to improve upon the Just Landed app and the experience for our customers. In particular, flight data inaccuracies account for virtually all of the customer complaints that I receive, and the sad truth is that I have really no control over these errors, and little influence to improve the situation. For a long time I've viewed this as unsustainable, because we are at the mercy of companies who are both indifferent to the needs of our customers, and resisting progress.

## 2. Rising Costs

Since Just Landed launched in 2012, the cost of running the service has steadily increased over time. While flight data remains expensive, the real source of the cost increases has been adapting to the demise or restructuring of supporting services such as StackMob, UrbanAirship, and Bing Maps that Just Landed previously relied on. Traffic and mapping data in particular, much of which used to be free, has become quite expensive, and is now tightly controlled by big companies under oppressive Terms of Service.

Another reason for rising costs is that the profile of the typical Just Landed user has changed over time. While the app was initially used primarily by individuals who made a few airport pickups per year, today Just Landed is increasingly used by professional limousine and taxi drivers, airline professionals, and travel companies. These power users consume 100–500

times as much flight data per year as casual users, and so the cost of supporting will soon begin to overwhelm revenue from new app sales.

Just Landed's pay-once business model relies on pricing the app above the average lifetime cost of acquiring and supporting a user. This was previously not at odds with typical App Store pricing (\$0.99–4.99), but nowadays many of our users are anything but typical, meanwhile typical app prices globally have continued a steady slide to \$0. Clearly this points to a broken business model, which leads me to my next point...

### 3. Deteriorating App Economy

With well over 2 million apps by now (officially 1.5M as of July 2015), the iTunes App Store is an incredibly crowded place where it's almost impossible to get noticed. Despite the persistent myth of the app developer millionaire, it's extremely hard to make a profit—let alone a living—as an iOS app developer. The Google Play Store is a similar story, except with the added bonus of rampant piracy and a zillion devices to support. There really isn't gold in them hills, at least not anymore, and independent app development will soon be in sharp decline, if it isn't already.

Essentially, there's a massive oversupply of apps, and the app markets are now saturated and suffering from neglect and short-term thinking by the companies who operate them. As competition has intensified, developers have resorted to giving their apps away, often at the urging of the app stores themselves. Consequently, the willingness of users to pay for apps, even unique apps like Just Landed, has declined sharply, while expectations of what an app should deliver have never been higher. Developers have been forced to get absurdly creative with their business models and marketing strategies just to make any income at all, rather than making the best product for their users. Just Landed, being a paid app with high running costs, has been on the wrong side of these trends, and what worked in 2012 no longer works in 2016.

### 4. Limited Resources

The Just Landed app hasn't been updated in over 2 years, which is pretty much an eternity on the App Store. This happened because other projects I was working on took priority, and because the economics simply don't justify the cost of updating it. For a long time I wrestled with the idea of potentially giving the app new life by overhauling the design, changing the business model, supporting more languages and devices, and launching in more countries. However, I don't believe that even such dramatic changes would be enough to overcome all of the systemic problems that I've outlined above.

Simply put, the odds of financial success for Just Landed 2.0 are slim to none, and I just don't have the will or the resources to attempt such a foolish endeavor.

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## Not Waiting for the Other Shoe to Drop

Just Landed has outlived several of the services that it originally depended on, and each time a service provider has disappeared, I've had to find a suitable replacement to keep the app alive. However, this is getting more difficult each time, and can't continue forever. As technology marches on, it's clear that eventually a key service provider is going to pull the rug out from under us, perhaps with little warning, and there won't be an easy replacement to keep the app working. I could be forced to either shut the app down abruptly, or hastily build a replacement service myself. I feel it's better to get ahead of this, and gracefully shut down Just Landed on our own terms, in a way that is fair and respectful of our customers—particularly recent buyers of the app.

If you made it this far, I hope that you now understand the reasons for my decision to shut down Just Landed, and will forgive this disappointing outcome. If you still feel sore about it, you're welcome to ask Apple for a refund of your purchase, but I hope you'll see that we made an honest effort to do right by our customers, and that you feel you got your money's worth out of the app. Sadly, no app lives forever, and Just Landed had a good run.

Thanks for giving us the opportunity to make your airport pickups easier!

– The Just Landed Team



