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How to Get the 'Nokia OK' on Your Mobile Application

The Nokia OK program lets you take advantage of the powerful Nokia brand name for selling your mobile applications well as prevent installation warnings from appearing on your customers' devices. Here's how it works, and what you have to do to qualify.

by Michael Koch

The concept is simple: Extend the world-renowned Nokia brand to applications that meet certain development standards, making it easier for consumers, businesses, and operators to identify third-party apps that they can buy and use with confidence. With tens of millions of Nokia phones in use worldwide, it's no surprise that this concept enjoys growing popularity among developers.

Over the past few months, hundreds of copies of the Nokia OK Application Guidelines have been downloaded from the [Nokia OK](#) section of [Forum Nokia](#), a global gathering place for developers using technologies supported by Nokia, including J2ME, Symbian, and WAP. Of some 130 applications submitted, already 50 have qualified for the Nokia OK designation, with more pending approval.

Developers seek Nokia OK approval because Nokia delivers volumes of devices to the market and offers multiple sales channels for them to sell their applications to carriers, consumers, and enterprises. According to Ilkka Paananen, CEO of Finland-based game maker Sumea Interactive, "We wanted to get formal certification that would prove the quality of our games."

Getting Nokia OK approval is also the only way for developers to remove the installation warning from their Symbian applications. Similar to what you see on a browser when you enable cookie warnings, users are warned that the app they're downloading has not been tested with the device and could be potentially harmful. Nokia OK fixes that.

Are You OK?

Here's the procedure you must follow to gather underneath the Nokia umbrella:

1. Become a registered member of [Forum Nokia](#) (registration is free).
2. Choose the type of app (terminal or server software) and Nokia device you are interested in.
3. Prepare your software using the Nokia-supported application development [tools](#) and [SDKs](#), while following established guidelines and requirements for functionality and design.
4. Apply for acceptance into the [Nokia OK program](#) and have your app professionally tested and evaluated by an independent Nokia-approved testing facility of your choice.
5. Enter the Nokia sales channels with the Nokia OK logo and start cashing in.

Sounds simple enough. Is there a catch?

Sort of. For starters, you have to accept the fact that all applications are subject to review and acceptance by Nokia. Each applicant is screened to ensure that the developer or company can be trusted as a reliable business partner and is able to meet the terms of the [Nokia OK License Agreement](#). Once approved (which is almost always the case), you submit your application to the Nokia-approved testing facility of your choice (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, National Software Testing Labs, or Cap Gemini Ernst & Young) for testing and evaluation.

Also, unlike the tools that Nokia provides developers to help craft their wares, the Nokia OK marketing tool is not without cost. The average price to test and evaluate your Symbian app varies from \$2,000 to \$4,000, depending on the complexity of the app and the time it takes to finish testing it; J2ME apps currently run \$400 apiece. Nokia OK Program Manager Risto Helin says, "We try to make Nokia OK as affordable as possible. But price is not the main decision factor for Nokia OK. The testing must assure quality [for] the end users."

Following a Nokia-defined process that includes providing you with a cost estimate, the testing house applies an existing set of Nokia-defined criteria to test and evaluate the submitted app for usability, performance, functionality, and interoperability with the device(s) for which it was designed.

What to Expect When You're Testing

Testing time varies anywhere from one week on up, depending on the type of app being tested (Symbian or J2ME) as well as the technical shape the app is in. "Most of the applications require at least one retest—some even three retests—which adds, with developer repairs, to the testing time and cost," says Helin.

More often than not, reasons for not passing on the first try—at least in the terminal app category—are UI-related. That means anything from missing infrared activation menu commands and misspelled menu text to ambiguous user instructions. In most of these cases, according to Helin, developers could have made the grade the first time had they done their homework: "Developers should go through our guidelines carefully before applying to ensure the application meets all the criteria."

According to Sampo Raudaskoski, founder and CTO of Finland-based game maker [Mr. Goodliving](#), and a recent Nokia OK logo recipient, "The guidelines are good and easy to follow...and make UI development easy for the developer because the UI described in the guidelines is consistent with the UI of the phone."

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Special Report

Wireless Special Report: Marching Towards Mobility

Fabio Ciucci, CEO of [Anfy Team Mobile](#), agrees: "Just by reading the Nokia OK guidelines we were able to submit a nearly OK application." Ciucci, who develops games for Nokia's J2ME-enabled devices (Nokia 6310i and Nokia 3410), used Sun Microsystems J2ME Wireless Toolkit with the emulator for the Nokia 6310i. He had to resubmit his app because of a menu/submenu issue that didn't meet Nokia's criteria.

Sometimes, however, even upon close reading, the Nokia OK guidelines may not answer all the questions you have, especially when it comes to implementing solutions programmatically. As Mr. Goodliving's Raudaskoski explains, "The operation environment for mobile applications is so limited, mobile applications by default are kind of embodiments of compromises. I doubt it is possible to create a comprehensive document that completely covers design issues for all kinds of applications unless the application is extremely simple."

The Support You'll Get

If you have a question that is not addressed in the guidelines, Nokia will not leave you stranded. Nokia's Helin recommends that you take advantage of numerous free resources available to registered users through Forum Nokia's Nokia OK section and the [Knowledge Network](#). "We have supporting documentation for the developers and provide a basic set of testing tools that will give developers a pretty good idea whether their application will pass the test," he says. Testing tools include the Nokia Testing Suite for the Nokia 9200 Communicator series, as well as emulators for various J2ME-enabled phones.

Thorough testing has made a difference for Vladislav Voronin of Moscow-based [MacCentre](#). Voronin worked with the Nokia 9210 SDK, which he says "lacks some documentation" but overall provides "a normal, well-balanced set of tools" to develop localization software that adds Cyrillic support to the Nokia 9200 Communicator series of phones. When he supplemented the Nokia Testing Suite with his own testing methodology, his app tested successfully on the first pass. "Test everything thoroughly before you submit, from code to PKG files; it will save you time and money," Voronin says.

Adds Artur de Sousa Rocha of [Spruce Technologies](#), developer of Java-based software solutions for mobile phones, "Test on real devices; don't just rely on documentation regarding the target device's supposed behavior." During testing, de Sousa Rocha ran into some issues with the phone emulators (still in beta) for the Nokia 6310i and Nokia 7650 models that were not consistent with the actual handsets.

If the available documentation and testing tools don't help solve a problem, you also can consult a fee-based [technical support](#) service, or contact Nokia directly with issues related to a tool or documentation through the developer [feedback](#) channel. Says Helin, "If necessary, we will look into problems ourselves to help developers find the answer to a puzzling problem. However, our main task is to assure that developers have everything they need to pass the [Nokia OK] testing."

Judging by the responses of recent graduates, Nokia appears to be doing its job when it comes to providing developers with the support they need, when they need it. Summarizing his experiences with the Nokia OK program, Voronin confirms, "Everyone was extremely cooperative; we even got some free assistance from Nokia OK staff." Sumea's Paananen also attests to the efficiency of the current feedback system: "We ran into a couple of bugs and oddities in the actual phones. We got rapid feedback when we submitted the bug reports." Help is out there; all you have to do is ask.

The Bottom Line

Once an application has successfully completed all testing and a license agreement has been signed, you receive the Nokia OK logo on CD-ROM. You can use that logo in sales and marketing materials following the Nokia OK usage guidelines until—and here's one last catch—you decide to upgrade the product. According to the agreement, your use of the logo is tied to the version number of the software; once you upgrade it, you have to resubmit the application for testing (which, according to Helin, is faster and is cheaper the second time around) or else forgo the benefits of using the Nokia OK logo on your sales and marketing materials.

These benefits can be substantial. Applications that are Nokia OK enjoy premium placement and visibility in Nokia's global and regional sales channels, which can make a world of difference. Says Andrey Sherbakov, CTO of [Epcoware](#), maker of the Nokia OK Code Vault and ZIP Manager Pro, "The [Nokia Software Market site] has been a great channel for us" (see Figure 1).



The screenshot shows a mobile application interface for 'Code Vault'. At the top left is a yellow safe icon. To its right, the text 'Code Vault' is displayed in a blue, serif font. Below this, the price '\$19.95' is shown in a bold, black font. Underneath the price are two blue buttons: 'Try now' with a floppy disk icon and 'Buy now' with a shopping cart icon. To the left of these buttons is the Nokia OK logo, which consists of the word 'NOKIA' in white on a blue oval background, with 'OK' in white on a smaller blue oval below it. Below the buttons and logo, a block of text reads: 'The perfect companion for securely and conveniently managing all of your important information in one place! With Code Vault you can store passwords, charge card information, travel info, insurance policies, online shopping accounts and much more. It's the one place for everything important in your life!'

Figure 1: Example of a mobile app with a Nokia OK logo that Nokia sells in the Software Market sales channel.

have a better chance of recuperating their cost quickly, given the sheer number of users. By contrast, those who specialize in apps for the high-end Symbian OS-based Nokia 9200 Communicator series will face the comparatively smaller market of corporate and business users. However, these users typically are willing to pay more for tools that help them make business decisions faster. Says MacCentre's Voronin, who develops apps for the Nokia 9200 Communicator series, "We think [the cost of participating] was worth it because people are not afraid to use certified software and will pay for it."

To learn more about Nokia business opportunities, point your browser to the [Nokia Business](#) section. For more information on the Nokia OK program, visit the [Nokia OK](#) section of the Nokia Forum site or start with the links in this article.

J2ME developers especially should be aware that Nokia currently offers a testing promotion—for a limited time, the first 150 J2ME applications (MIDlets) will be tested and evaluated for only \$400 each.

Do you absolutely need the Nokia OK logo to succeed? Not necessarily. As a registered member of Forum Nokia, you can still build and test your app using the tools and documentation Nokia provides to ensure that you give your customers what they expect in terms of usability and functionality. In the end, however, what you save in the process you may have to invest in additional marketing efforts to make your app stand out among the expanding selection of mobile software titles, which range from corporate applications to personal productivity and content tools to entertainment titles.

For Mr. Goodliving's Raudaskoski, participating in the Nokia OK process, was not an option: "Many of our customers, the service providers, require the Nokia OK stamp of approval before accepting the downloadable applications for their service. And even those who don't [require it] appreciate seeing the Nokia OK. [They] value the fact that the applications have been thoroughly tested and found worthy of approval."

Developers who have their eyes set on mass-market devices, such as the Java-enabled Nokia 6310i, Nokia 3410, and Nokia 7560 handsets, may

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