# The Rise of the Sidekick App

From Slack chats to Zoom calls, the pandemic has fundamentally transformed the way we communicate. In this shifting landscape, there is one technology innovation that stands out: **sidekick apps**. These are tools that work in the background and only surface when you need them, helping you perform more efficiently and effectively while also increasing your job satisfaction.

A particularly clear example of a sidekick app that is transforming the way we work is [Grammarly](). It's an AI-powered writing assistant that empowers users to communicate more confidently and leave more of an impact on their readers.

Anyone who has used Grammarly to rework a hard-to-read sentence or write with the appropriate tone knows that its impacts are tangible. And this is only the start.

The pandemic is just one factor that has catalyzed the sidekick app revolution. Innovative technologies such as machine learning algorithms are improving on a daily basis, unlocking new business use cases. Knowledge workers are using these tools to optimize their performance like athletes. In turn, employers are taking note and are adopting new digital tools by the dozen.

## What is a sidekick app? Four main characteristics

### 1. Works in the background and surfaces when you need it

Sidekick apps run innocuously in the background of your video calls or as a plugin on your web browser, sparing prime screen real estate. They are a quiet companion that has your back when you need them, but knows how to keep out of the fray when you don't.

### 2. Makes the user better, faster, and happier at work

Sidekick apps amplify their users' performance in a variety of ways. [Guru]() is a knowledge management app that makes it easier to find internal documents like vacation policies, saving time and reducing frustration. Sidekick apps like [Gong]() enable companies to optimize their sales calls, helping them to hit targets more efficiently and effectively. These small time- and stress-savings add up quickly, making us happier at work.

### 3. Connects to and unlocks a novel dataset

The digital-first workplace has generated more data about how we work, communicate, and collaborate than ever before. Sidekick apps take advantage of this trend by integrating directly into the tools we already use, from email to Trello and Teams. They collect data related to our activities and then use machine learning and other tools to analyze this data, providing insights often in real-time.

**4. Designed with privacy and security in mind**

Sidekick apps can be privy to our most sensitive information, so privacy and security are top of mind for sidekick app developers. Data encryption, SOC2 Type II compliance, and SAML-based SSO all come standard for most sidekick apps.

## How can sidekick apps help?

Sidekick apps can play a major role in any tasks that involve content creation. Activities across a wide range of business verticals – think sending emails, drafting marketing copy, writing job descriptions, and creating presentations – will all be intelligently assisted.

Initially, the most relevant uses of sidekick apps will be at the core functions of a company. Sales is a particularly clear use case. Take Gong, for example, which is used by companies as diverse as Zillow, LinkedIn, and SurveyMonkey. The app runs in the background of your sales reps' Zoom calls, analyzing their tactics and suggesting behavioral shifts to improve sales. Similarly, SetSail connects to sales reps' email accounts and incentivizes them to work on bigger, longer-term deals instead of chasing short-term wins.

Increasingly, sidekick apps will be used in engineering contexts. They can help suggest code if an engineer gets stuck, offering intelligent assistance for R&D and product development teams. These apps will also be able to help them collaborate with teammates when they need a hand.

## How did we get here?

On top of the pandemic's digital-first push, there are a few factors that contributed to the rise of the sidekick app.

First is the trend towards employees choosing their own tools. Okta reports that in 2020, technology companies on average used 155 apps. That's a steep rise from an average of just 20 in 2015. Much of this adoption is bottom-up, whereby tech savvy employees experiment with new apps that eventually become more widely used across an organization. Companies are increasingly open to procuring these novel technologies, in part because of the increased level of trust stemming from improved security settings.

Along with this proliferation of apps is the trend of knowledge workers aiming to optimize their performance like athletes. They sprint, they rest, and they recover – and, all the while, they need the best tools to help them work at their highest level.

These tools themselves have developed and become more relevant to a broader swath of business contexts. For instance, machine learning has improved significantly over the last few years. Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Natural Language Understanding (NLU) are

central to many sidekick apps' products. Meanwhile, this technological advancement has helpfully coincided with a lowering of barriers to deploy and ship software.

## The future of sidekick apps

It's still early days for sidekick apps. We're starting to see them being deployed on a user-by-user level, but we are likely to see more company-wide deployment in the near future.

Founders and investors looking to dive into the world of sidekick apps should consider two overarching questions.

First, what is the problem users are facing? For instance, AI-powered speech coach [Poised](link) is tackling a very well-known problem: public speaking. What is the user journey? Who is their product's champion? Is their end-user the buyer?

Second, what is the unique data set? What data points will a sidekick app analyze and leverage to provide actionable insights?

Ultimately, sidekick apps have the potential to go a step further and move from coaching to automated work. That way, sidekick apps will act upon their advice and actually do the task on the user's behalf, freeing up users' time and energy. But for now, sidekick apps can go a long way to make us better, faster, happier at work.