How One Person's Passion Project Became a No Code App Connecting People Around the World

Did you know that seeing the Northern Lights is actually tricky? The Northern Lights, formally known as the Aurora Borealis, are only visible between August and May and only under the following conditions:

- The sky must have a solar flare or solar wind
- Viewers must be far from any light pollution
- It must be a dark, clear night

When Ronnie Sherard moved to Alaska and joined a group obsessed with tracking the Northern Lights, a friend suggested he create an app to help with spotting nature's light show. With conditions changing quickly, the friends needed a place to track their data and a way to share it with others who wanted to see the Northern Lights. Sherard had web design experience but never made a mobile app. With the Northern Lights season ending, he needed to create an app fast, so he turned to no code.

Sherard began researching no code platforms but found the majority of them were too cookie-cutter for his needs. Sherard needed a tool that was customizable, worked with his already established website, and allowed him to develop for both iOS and Android. When he found Thunkable, it all clicked, and he was able to publish an app in five weeks.

> "We're talking five weeks for somebody that's never written a mobile app or programmed a mobile app in his life to go five weeks and have an app that would eventually take off this crazy. It was awesome. That shows how easy Thunkable was to use."

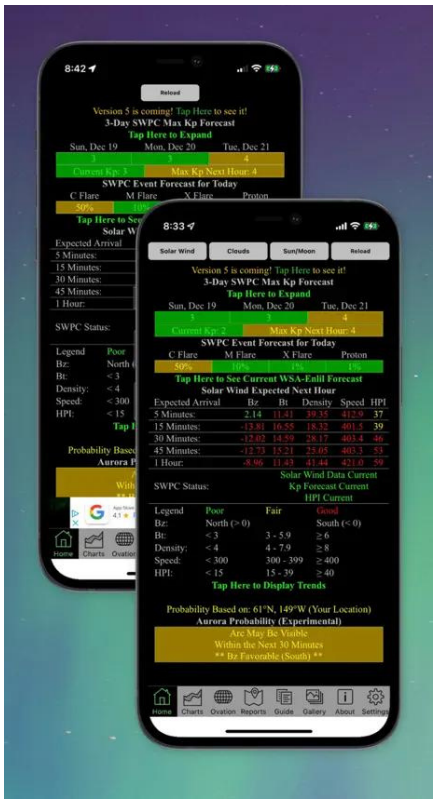
Ronnie Sherard
Creator of Amazing Aurora

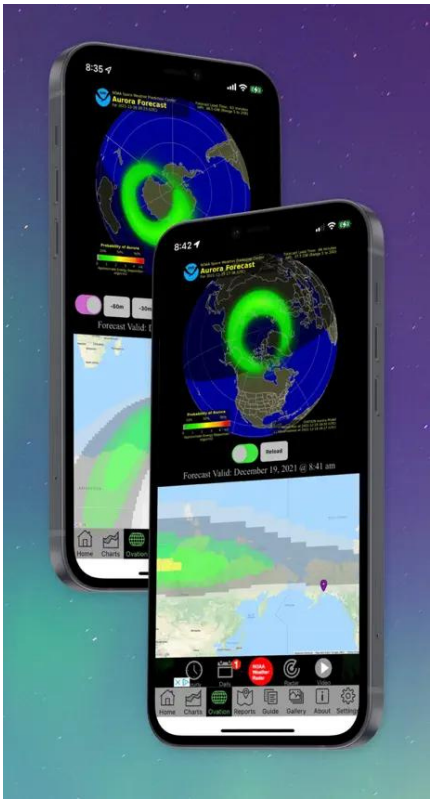
FIRST TIME APP BUILDER

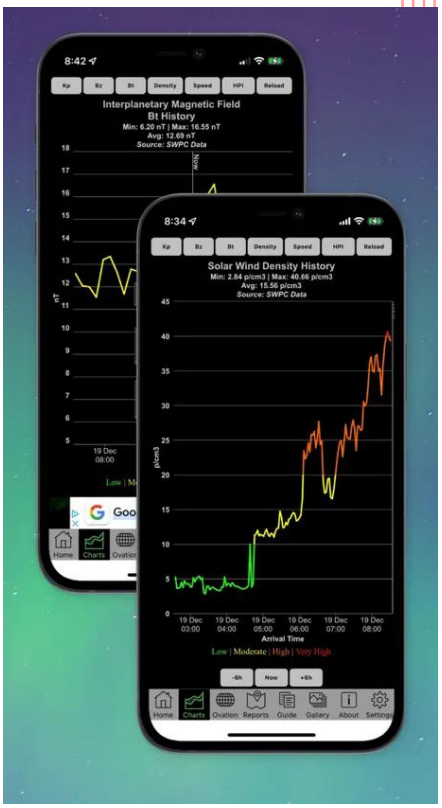
Sherard launched the first version of Amazing Aurora in five weeks and was impressed with Thunkable functionality:

- Visibility: “It looks like a mobile device that I'm developing on, and I can see a general idea of what [the app] looks like on the screen. That was big for me. It helps with layouts and knowing how things are going to look on the screen.”
- Live-Preview Feature: “I've got the app on my iPad and on my iPhone. I can live test, put my code in, and get a good visual of what I'm going to see on the device when it's actually live on the app store."

Sherard knows his way around web design and programming but found Thunkable to be intuitive and user friendly. "I have a web programming background, but there's none of that needed in Thunkable. It's just a snap to place and drag and drop. You're building your app on the screen, seeing what it is, and then when you publish it, that's what you've got."







UTILIZING IN-APP PURCHASES

Sherard initially launched Amazing Aurora with no monetization mechanisms and paid for server space, weather data, and more out of pocket. But, his app quickly took off. The more users Amazing Aurora had, the slower the app ran, so Sherard moved to a subscription-based model to offset rising costs. "I saw that [in app purchasing] was one of the things that Thunkable had to offer. I was excited because the cost to run my app is about $200 a month. I figured people are going to use the app regularly and offering an annual subscription made sense to share the cost of running the app."

In-app purchasing functionality offered at Thunkable allowed Sherard to implement the new feature in less than two months, making Amazing Aurora self-sustainable. Sherard was especially grateful for the Thunkable community — staff and users — who assisted him in troubleshooting any issues he had along the way. "It's a pretty awesome community to be a part of because when people have questions, you not only have the Thunkable staff that's there to help but users that have experienced the same thing, sharing their experiences and helping everybody grow together," said Sherard.

Sherard's goal was never to have Amazing Aurora be a secondary income but a way to share chasing the Northern Lights with more people all over the world. He's grateful Thunkable helped him achieve his goal, stating, "When I open up my app, and I see 50 people reporting activity across the globe, to me, that's payment. I think [2021], mid-April, when I surpassed 500 users, the first time I opened it up and I saw people from Sweden and Iceland and Canada and the US and then here in Alaska, checking in on the app and saying, 'Yes, I see [the Northern Lights],' ... That was big."

AMAZING AURORA

The Amazing Aurora app is designed to assist those who want to witness the beauty of the aurora borealis, aka the Northern Lights. The app includes solar wind data, cloud forecasts, and sun/moon data to aid in recommending times to best see the aurora. Amazing Aurora attempts to take all of the scientific data and put it in a form that is easy to understand and help its users determine when the best time is, within an hour, to try seeing Lady Aurora in all her beauty!