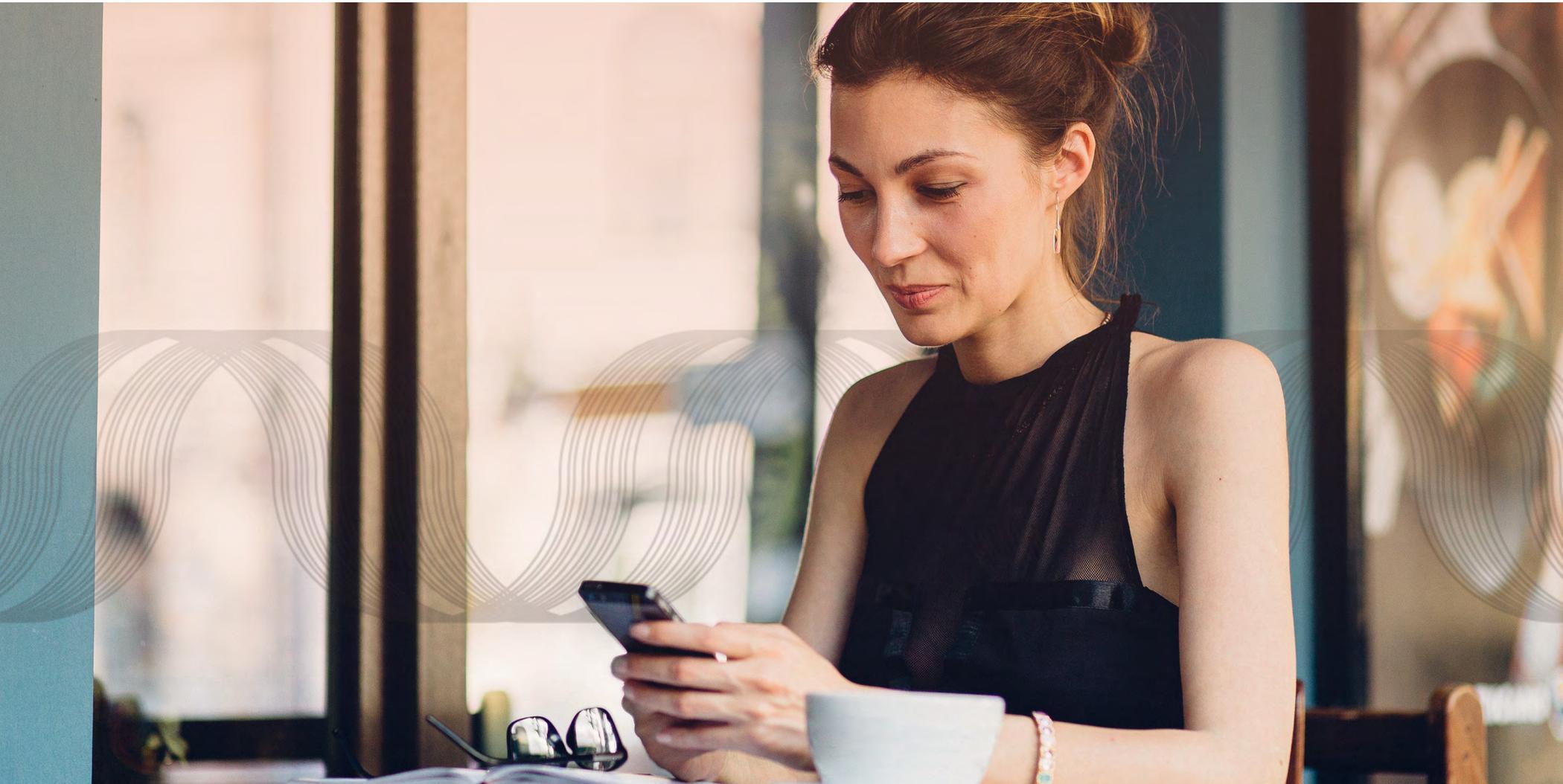




FIVE MINUTES ON MOBILE

The Swrve Guide To Onboarding And First-Time User Experience



INTRODUCTION

Most of us are already aware of the numbers:

- Over **20%** of all mobile app installs are used once and never again
- Nearly **80%** of mobile app users are lost within the first week since install
- The average mobile user has 100+ apps on their phone - but spends **90%** of their time using only a handful

In any mobile business, those numbers are damaging. Or to put it another way, changing them - even a little - is often **the difference between success and failure.**

Implementing and optimizing onboarding is often the simplest way to grow your app business.

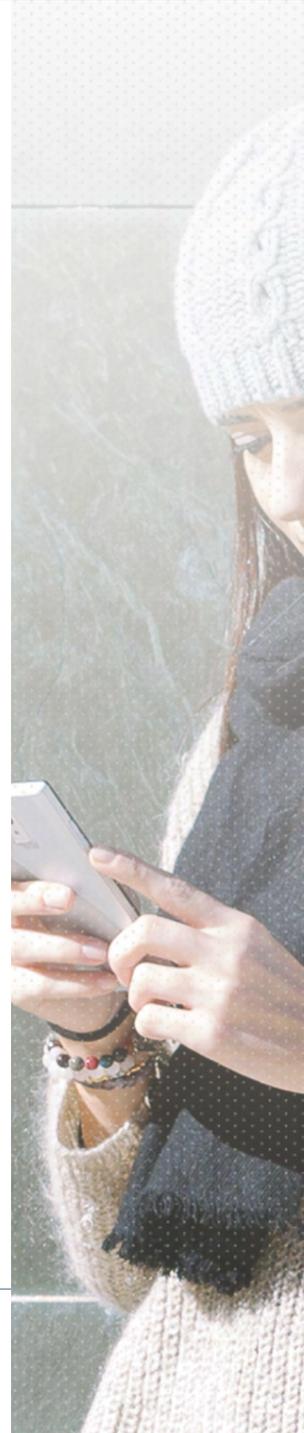
In terms of customer loyalty, getting onto the user's smartphone screen is huge. But being the app that is regularly used is even bigger. **The first step in making that happen is through a focus on the initial user experience.**

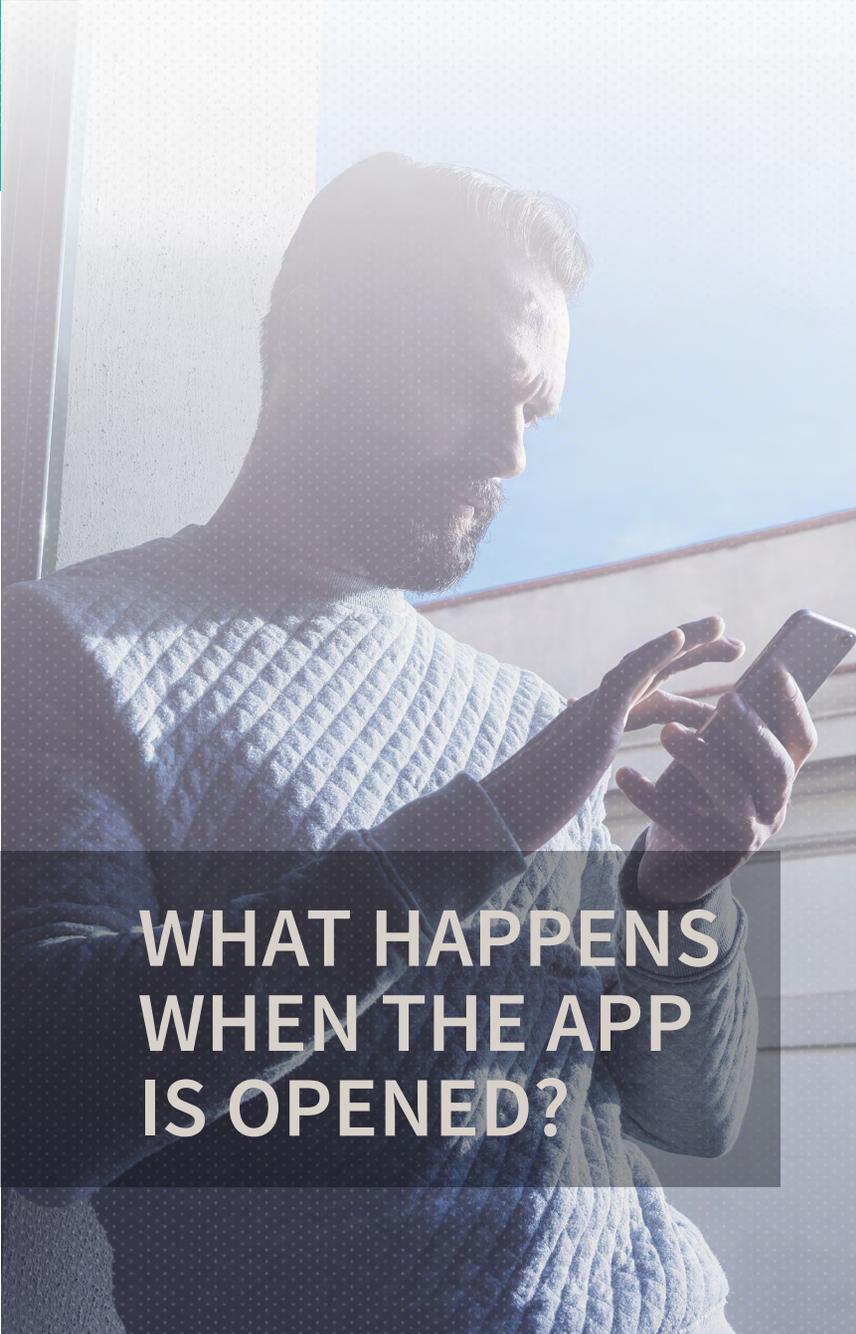
The first 5 minutes, or the first screens a user sees, can make a huge difference to how long users stick around, and in turn how successful any mobile strategy is. **That's onboarding.**

About This Guide

This short whitepaper takes a look at ways to improve mobile app onboarding, including practical examples of those methods in action.

We'll look at the challenge from two angles - considering both **processes** (like A/B testing) you might want to adopt, but also actual **campaigns** we've seen work in the field. We hope you find it useful.





WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE APP IS OPENED?

It is worth considering what precisely is running through the consumer's mind when they open a mobile app for the first time. In a minority of cases, such as when the user is bringing an app they have already used onto a new device, that consumer knows precisely what is going on.

In most others, however, they will typically be asking themselves some variation on the following three questions:

- What does this app do for me?
- How do I use it?
- What is the full scope of this app?

The goal of any onboarding process is to answer these questions as effectively as possible, without putting unnecessary mental burden on the user.

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In that sense, the process is always a balancing act between these extremes:

- Don't show any custom onboarding process at all, and the user is liable to get confused, lost or frustrated.
- Show an exhaustive guide to the app, and the user will become impatient about getting to the core experience

It also worth remembering what isn't appropriate at this critical time. Only send messages designed to activate and nurture. Don't tell the user about new features, or app reviews, or other apps in your portfolio, or super power features they may not have used. Those are conversations you have with active loyal customers. Not new users.

With all that in mind, let's look at some smart tips for getting onboarding right and making sure your mobile users stick around long enough to deliver ROI on your investment in development and acquisition!

A sample onboarding process from Sight



PROCESS CHECK:

GET ONBOARDING OUT OF THE “CORE” APP

Building a set of on-boarding screens is a standard response to ensuring first-time user experience (FTUE) is just right. But where should you build them? For many that may seem an odd question. They are built right into the app like any other content or interaction.

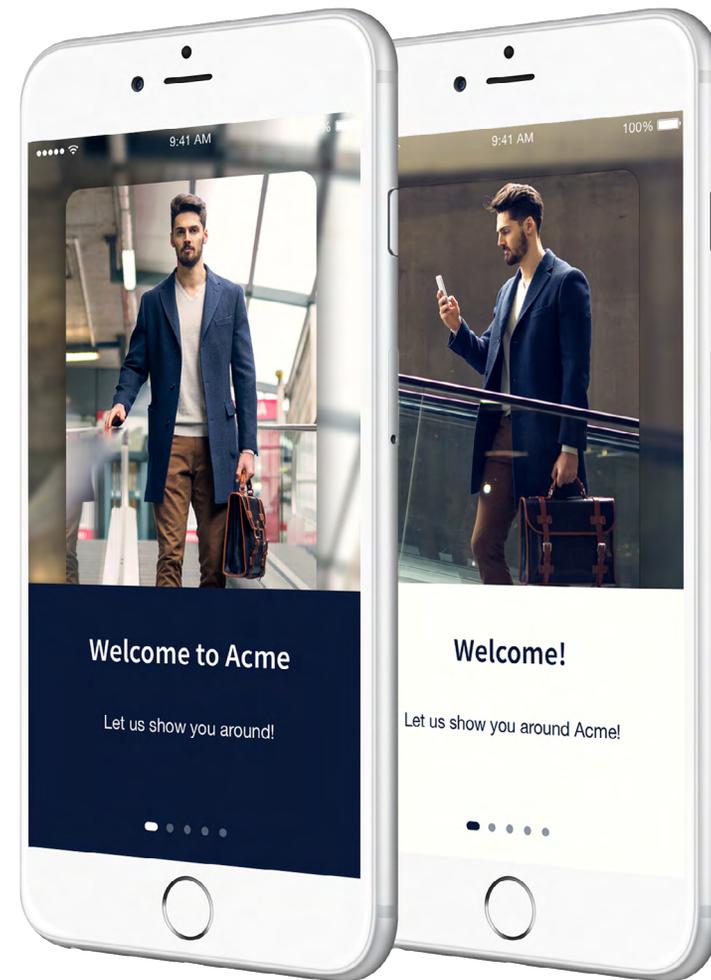
That’s certainly a valid approach. But there are huge costs associated with it. Anything ‘hard-coded’ into the app is hard to change. If you happen to wake up one morning believing that your app onboarding process is sub-optimal, what happens next? Typically the process might feel like this:

- Call engineering to discuss your requirements. Join the queue.
- After a couple of weeks, engineering work begins. You’ll be in the next release, shipping in two month’s time
- Two months later, send the release to Apple for approval. Pray they say ‘yes’!
- A week or two later again, you are finally ready to send your new onboarding screens into the wild

All in all - and depending on how functional your organization is (or isn't), you might be talking at *least three months* from idea to reality. In the mobile world, that really isn't good enough.

The solution to this issue is to deliver onboarding screens and experiences via a cloud-based marketing platform, one that serves content dynamically and 'in-the-moment'. By taking this approach, changing the onboarding process is as simple as creating new images and uploading them to the platform. Half a day perhaps.

In addition, by serving content screens in this way, we are able to both **test** and **personalize** FTUE. We'll discuss both in more detail later on, but neither are truly possible without bringing control of onboarding out of the 'core app'.



A/B testing can be a smart way to quickly find answers when it comes to first time user experience

PROCESS CHECK:

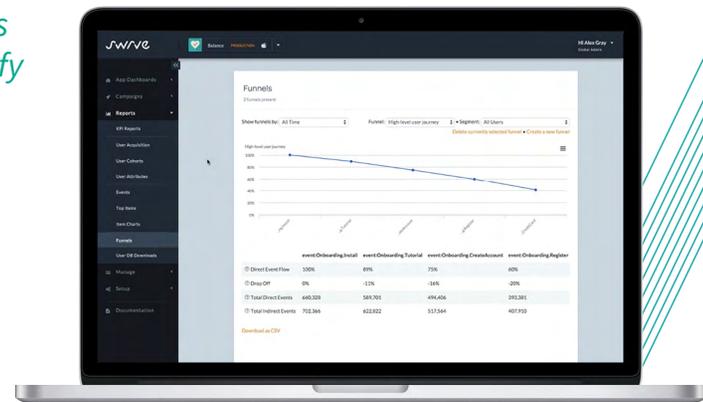
ENSURE YOU HAVE THE DATA

Before going any further - it is essential to gather as much data as possible relating to your onboarding process. If you're not doing this, you are essentially 'developing in the dark' and as liable to make things worse as make them better.

Start with a simple funnel analysis identifying where in your first few screens users fall off. Make sure you understand common journeys and how different users flow through them- this information will be vital when it comes to optimizing these steps in future.

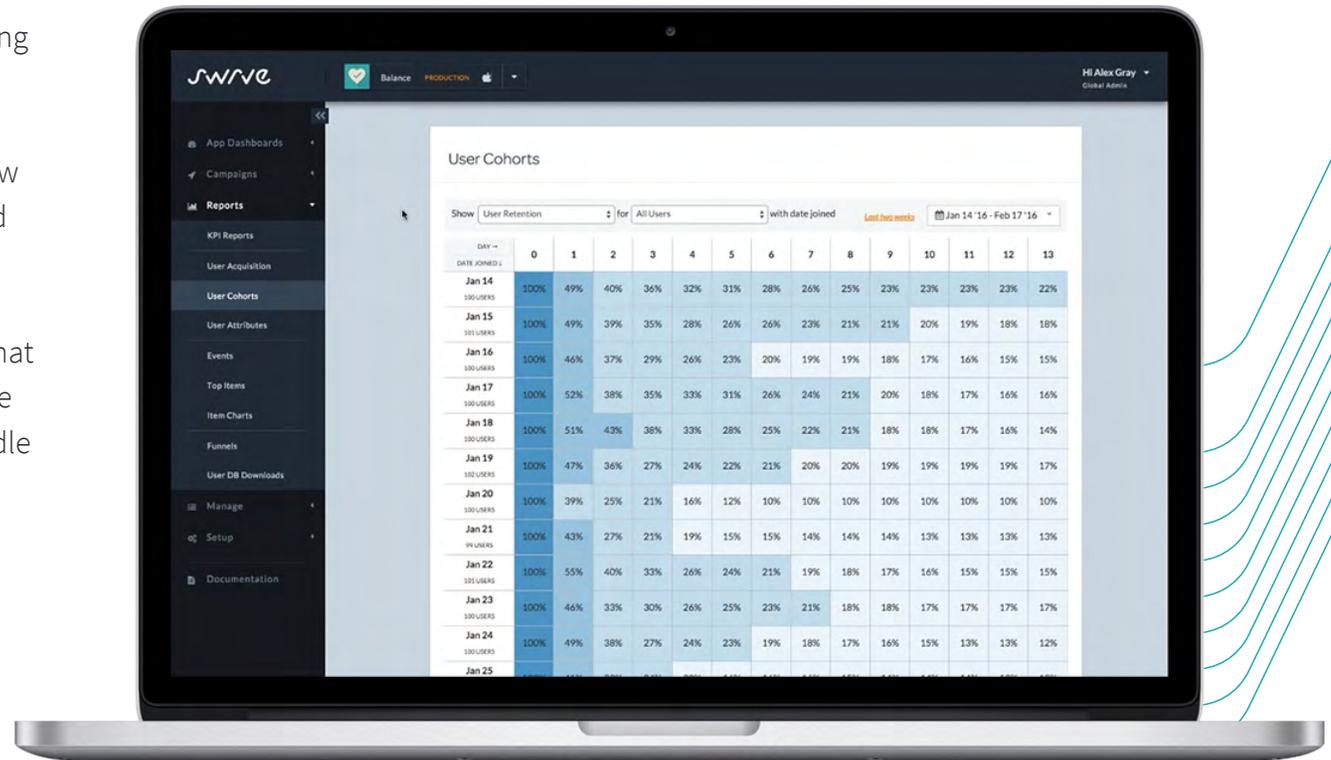
Perhaps most importantly of all, ensure that you have a clearly defined understanding of what successful onboarding looks like for you. That usually means the customer reaching an 'activation state', a point at which they have performed a key task (such as signing up for a free trial or making a first order) or simply stayed in the app for a given amount of time. Ultimately, all your efforts should be measured against getting users to this point.

Funnel analysis can help identify pain points



Cohort analysis can be useful: by taking all new users on a specific date and comparing them with similar groups for other time periods, we can see how changes to experience have impacted our KPIs over time.

At the very least, it's worth ensuring that you have funnels created for your core onboarding process, and a clear handle on your Day 1 and Day 7 retention numbers. That's a minimum.



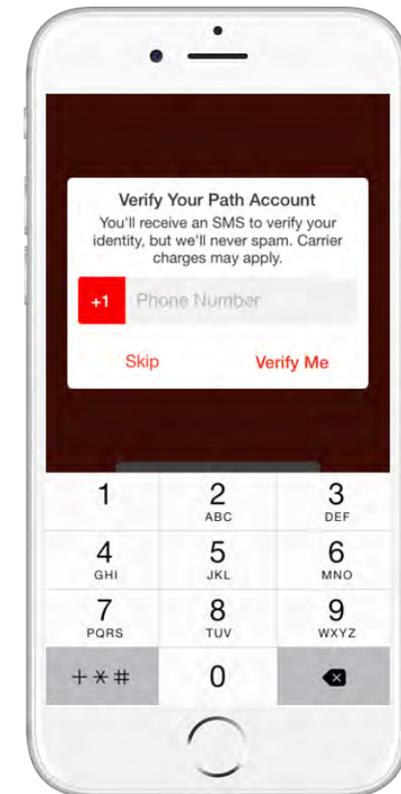
Cohort analysis: a great way to identify trends and changes in onboarding performance

PRACTICAL TIP:

ALLOW USERS TO SKIP AHEAD

For new users, some form of onboarding is usually helpful. But it's important to understand that not every 'new' user is actually that. They may have used the app on a previous device, or be familiar with it after a friend or colleague showed it to them previously. If that's the case, each additional onboarding screen is an unnecessary barrier between the user and the core experience.

To support these cases, always provide a 'skip' option that takes the user straight to the core experience. Not a huge thing, but something that is often forgotten in the excitement around building the onboarding process in the first place.



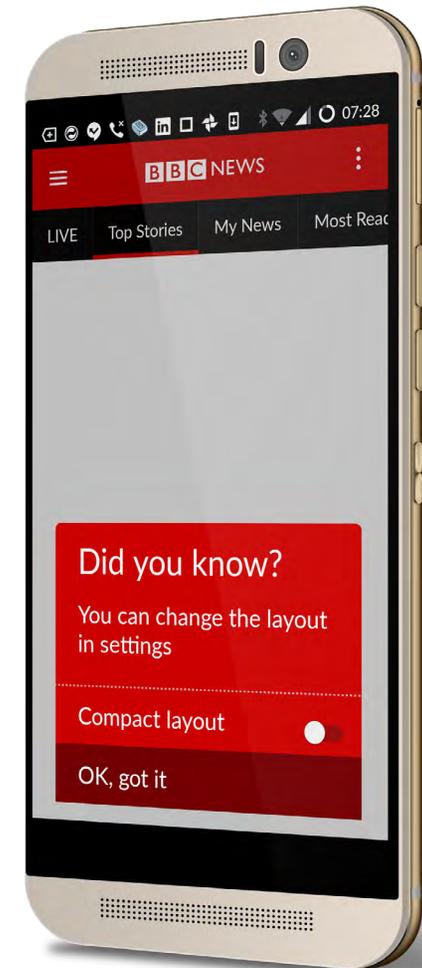
A clear 'skip' option in Path

PRACTICAL TIP:

ONBOARDING OVERLAYS

As an alternative to full screen in-app messages, you may want to consider overlays. As users first start using your app, and indeed within a phased onboarding approach as detailed below, using “tool tips” layered on top of your apps UI can be a smart tactic.

With this approach users can learn about what to do in the app while taking those actions in real time. That stops them having to remember how the app works after seeing static content. Learning by doing is often much more effective, and more intuitive for the user picking up how to use the more sophisticated features of the app.



The BBC uses overlay messages to introduce new display options

Onboarding does not stop on Day One. Often times it starts on day one.

Anyone considering the onboarding process faces a dilemma already touched on above. Namely, how much information up-front is too much? We have to make a decision around the scale of the onboarding process, finding a balance somewhere between too much and not nearly enough.

Of course most of us can instinctively make a decent stab at finding a decent compromise in this situation, and the 'skip' option noted above can cover a myriad of sins. However, a smart phased onboarding setup can make compromise of this type unnecessary.

PRACTICAL TIP:

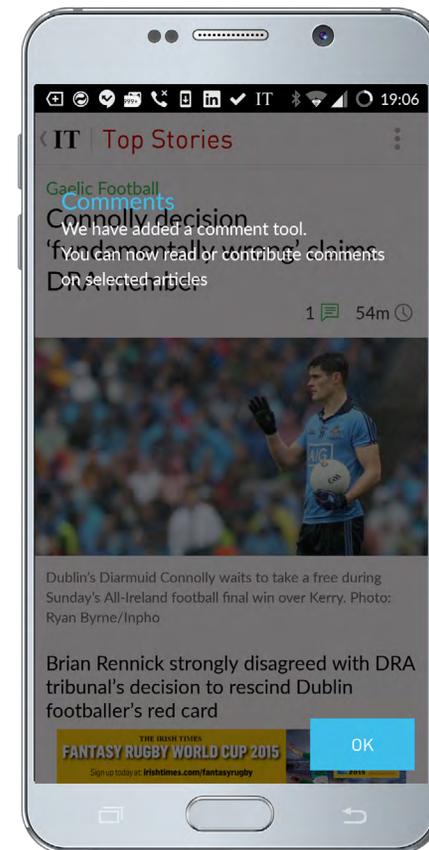
**PROVIDE
PHASED
ONBOARDING**

What does that look like in practice? Take a look at the screen illustrated (from newspaper app The Irish Times) informing the user about the ‘comment’ feature within the app. What is interesting is that this message is displayed after using the app several times, but without using the ‘comment’ feature.

The developer of the app has almost certainly delayed showing what essentially remains as onboarding content, and targeted it specifically at those users who have engaged with the app for a certain period of time, but never used this particular feature.

By delivering ‘how to’ content in this way, it is possible to tailor the onboarding experience for each individual, and most importantly strip back the initial number of screens to the minimum, confident that we can always catch those who don’t appear to have discovered everything for themselves later.

This is a good example of how the ability to segment and target the user base (and then talk to those target groups!) can help greatly improve key mobile metrics like retention and engagement.



Phased onboarding in action in The Irish Times

A man with glasses and a yellow jacket is looking down at a tablet computer. The background is a blurred outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark grey box.

PRACTICAL TIP:

TIME OPT-IN REQUESTS CAREFULLY

Could you imagine Google maps without location turned on? Or WhatsApp without push notifications enable. For many apps, access to system permissions are critical to their core functioning.

Similarly, most mobile businesses are keen to maximize the rate at which users opt-in to receive push notifications. And that is no surprise at all, after all, push remains a super-effective way to drive engagement when users are not in the app (when it's done right at least).

But to make the most of push notifications, **you need users to opt-in.** Unfortunately, too often mobile apps refer to the default option, which consists of asking the user on first app open, without any meaningful context around the request - as in the example from CNN shown.

There are two key problems here. The first is that these screens are the first thing the user sees. Before they have any idea about whether they are going to like this app experience, or any clear information on how push notifications are going to be used, they are asked to opt-in to what can be an invasive communication channel.

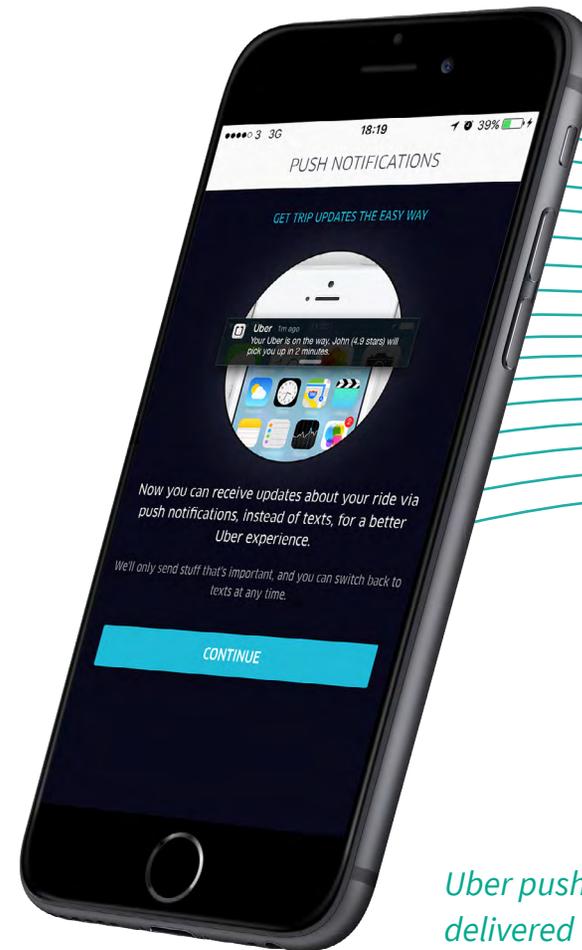
The second is that insufficient information is given to me around why I would wish to opt-in. Providing that information is vital - otherwise the user may quite rightly assume there's nothing in it for them.

The illustration from Uber (right) shows how this should be done. In this instance a push opt-in request is delivered 'in context' - just after a car has been ordered - and it is absolutely clear why the user should opt-in for push notifications: they will be informed when the car arrives.

That might sound trivial, but that is far from the case.

Research suggests that over 50% of users opt-out of push notifications, and A/B testing confirms that a significant contributing factor is that mobile businesses simply aren't asking the question in the right way.

At the very least, it is imperative to test when to ask the push notification question. There is no 'right' answer to this, but we've found with many customers that asking for push opt-in immediately on first session start is definitely a wrong answer. So experiment with various timings. Similarly, make the opt-in invitation explain what's in it for the user, and test various forms of that content.



Uber push opt-in request is delivered 'in context'

PROCESS
CHECK:

A/B TEST!

On mobile, we don't deal in 'right' answers. Ultimately the best onboarding process is the one that works for your users, not the one that looks great in an agency presentation or that the CEO feels is the best approach.



*Testing alternative
layouts and content on
Epicurious*

With that in mind, it is absolutely essential to adopt a ‘test and learn’ strategy for every aspect of the onboarding process, so that whatever you develop and deliver, you can be confident it is getting the job done. And when you’re engaged in that process, remember the following key points:

- **Do it right.** Make sure you’re using genuine A/B testing, controlling for all variables and reporting results that are statistically significant. That may seem incredibly obvious, but you would be surprised how often shortcuts are taken - which ultimately means that results cannot be treated with confidence.
- **Test the big stuff.** Use funnel analysis and user journey data to identify problem areas and focus on these when designing and delivering A/B tests
- **Get creative.** When onboarding is delivered via in-app messages, it’s the easiest thing in the world design multiple alternatives, deliver them simultaneously within an A/B test, and establish which works best when it comes to successful onboarding.
- **Measure what matters.** A successful message isn’t one that gets clicked on, which is why click-thru is such a dangerous metric to use when evaluating success. Instead, make sure competing variants are measured on the results you want to see: retention, revenue, progression to the end of onboarding

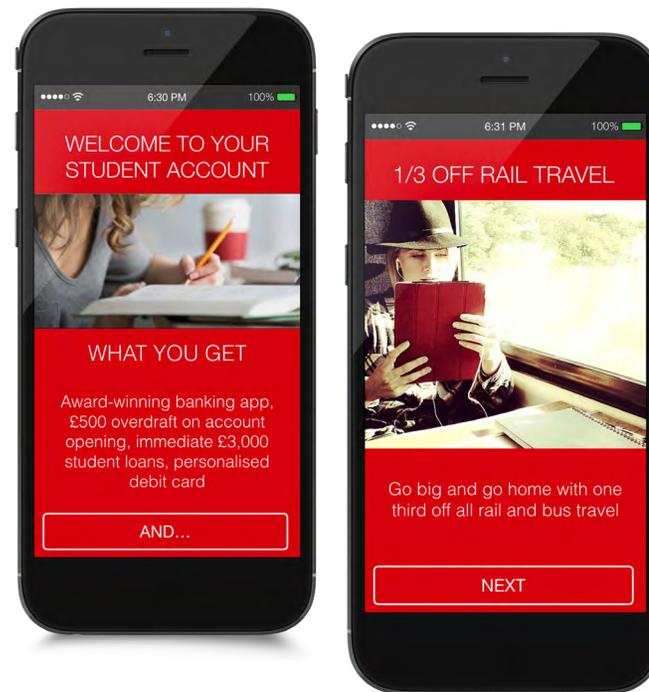


PRACTICAL TIP:

PERSONALIZE!

Designing a great onboarding process usually involves compromise. What features are most important to communicate? If we can't show every aspect of the user interface, which elements are prioritized? These are decisions that are often made with the benefit of A/B testing results or (worse) by sitting around a table arguing.

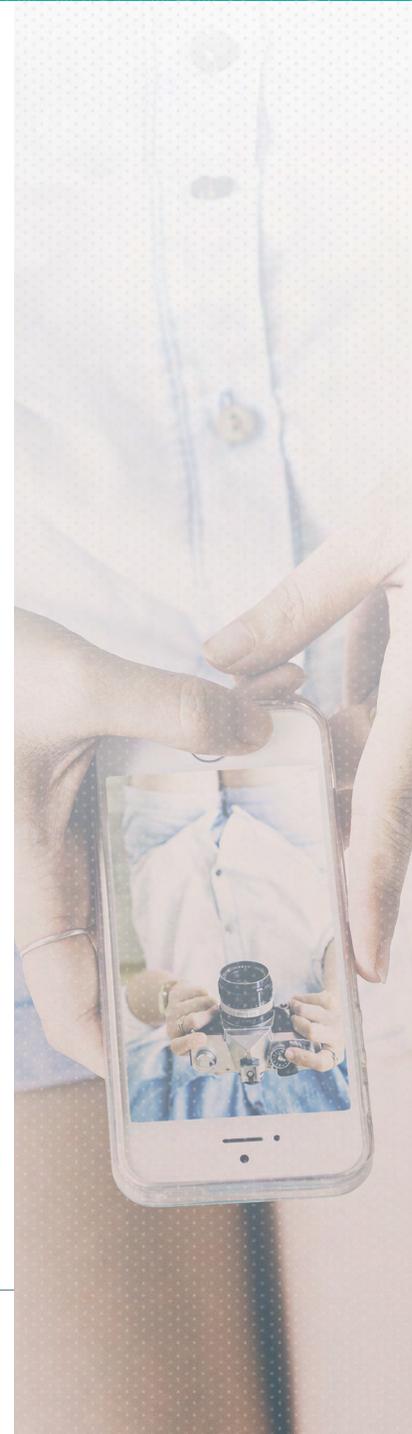
But there is another way again - personalized onboarding experience: showing in-app screens that vary based on what we know of the individual user, rather than being the same for everyone.



Personalized onboarding: specific new account types are delivered custom experiences

Of course to some extent this is a challenge. During onboarding we don't necessarily know a huge amount about each individual using the app. But in many cases we know enough to make a significant difference to how we approach onboarding. To give a few examples:

- **It's often known where a new user comes from, in terms of acquisition channel.** This can either relate to the channel in which ads have run, so users from Facebook are treated differently than those from organic acquisition. It can also relate to the offer that users responded to - so students downloading a banking app can receive personalized onboarding, for example.
- **We can learn quickly.** With real-time data processing now a reality it is possible to learn and adapt in the moment, based on the very first actions the user takes. For example, if the user immediately skips the core onboarding process, we can subtly adapt future experience, perhaps by supplying in-context user help as new features are encountered.
- **Don't forget onboarding is an ongoing process.** As a practical example - if on day 15, a user hasn't opted into paid content or a free trial on a media app, they are unlikely to ever convert. They are a good audience to reach out to with a generous promotion - confident in the knowledge that no revenue will be cannibalized.





GROW YOUR MOBILE BUSINESS WITH SWRVE

The Swrve Mobile Engagement Platform is designed for digital marketers who are focused on transforming the way brands connect and interact with customers in an increasingly mobile-centric world.

Understanding how to engage users quickly and maximize revenue is a core competence of Swrve's, and recognized by our partners - including Sony, The Guardian, Condé Nast, Warner Brothers and Microsoft. Swrve customers have delivered more than one billion mobile messages, and every single day the Swrve platform processes over six billion events.

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