

# 30 Best Practices to Drive App Growth

branch 



# Driving App Growth Through Paid and Organic Channels in a Cross-Platform World

With the emergence of smartphones and apps came a hyper-focus on user acquisition. Marketing teams had a single KPI in mind: Get installs. But as marketers invested more in acquisition, costs began to skyrocket.

But this isn't the entire story. In fact, research from TUNE indicates that every paid install drives an additional 1.5 organic installs. Often, apps that run paid campaigns find themselves near the top of the list in app stores as a result of paid installs. As paid acquisition costs continue to rise, marketers must revisit their acquisition strategies to drive users from every channel into the app.

Striking the right balance of cross-platform organic and paid acquisition is critical to keeping marketing budgets in check. But app growth doesn't stop at acquisition.

In order to remain competitive in today's digital landscape, teams must develop cross-platform strategies that acquire, retain, engage, and turn users into loyal app advocates. And just as critical is the ability to accurately measure and optimize across channels and platforms, throughout the full user journey.

So let's dive in! These 30 best practices will help you drive app growth (beyond App Store Optimization) in a way that's scalable, efficient, and measurable. We'll cover everything from paid acquisition and web-to-app smart banners, to app onboarding, incentivized referral programs, and accurate attribution.



# What's Inside

Acquisition	1
Paid Channels	1
Mobile Web to App	3
Engagement	4
Onboarding	4
Push Notifications	7
Email	9
Retention	11
Advocacy: Driving User Referrals	14
Measurement and Optimization	17
About Branch	18



# ACQUISITION

## Paid Channels

### 1. Utilize New, Dynamic Ad Units Help Drive Engagement and ROI

Paid ads will drive low engagement if you don't give users a reason to click. New types of ad units can drive product awareness – and show users more than one product to drive a higher chance of purchase.

- a. Shoppable Units:** Maximize your ad real estate while promoting multiple products in one unit.
- b. Hybrid Native + Static Banner Units:** Need to further promote multiple contents to establish thought leadership? These hybrid units give your user/audience an option to pick between multiple different blogs/articles.
- c. Rich Media Unit/Interactive Media:** Use your ad unit as an extension of multiple promotional offers with a scrollable rich media and many other rich media unit options.

### 2. Test Facebook Dynamic Ads

Facebook Dynamic Ads are a great option for retargeting users, and have a [2X CTR and 50% lower CPA](#) than static ads.

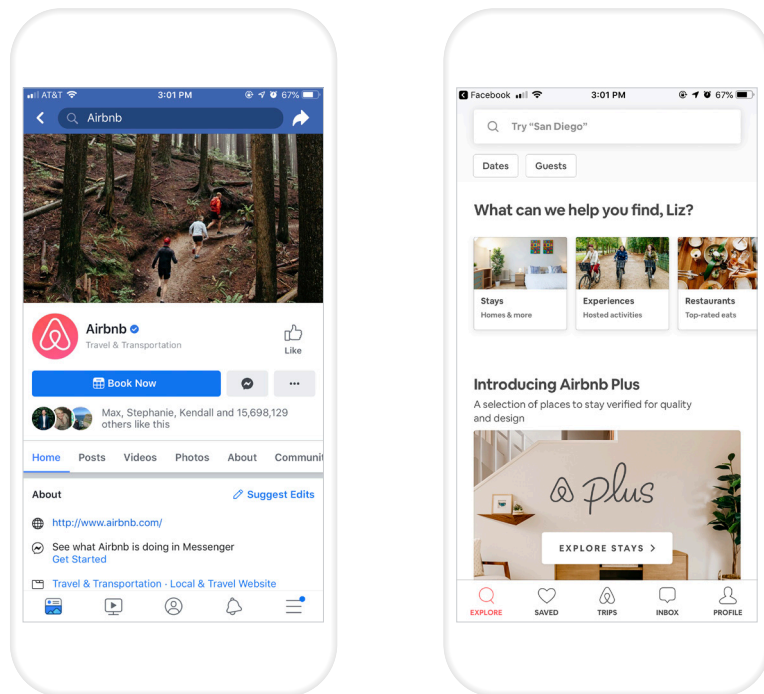
**Here's why:** Using a digital product catalog, these ads automatically show the right products to users who have visited your website, app, or other channels. Second, they enable personalized content tailored to user interest, as well as the ability to retarget users who haven't completed a sale.

Since marketers are planning to drive more installs and budget toward Facebook this year and beyond, these ads are worth a test to drive brand interest.



### 3. Deep Link From Paid Social Ads to Drive Revenue

Similar to paid install ads, if social ads and promoted posts don't land users within the app, they won't perform as well. Once again, cross-platform matters – if that's driving a user from a paid ad into the app or from a social channel into an app. Whether the focus is on organic or paid acquisition – or striking the right balance between the two – marketing teams have to ensure there's a seamless cross-platform experience that drives the user from every acquisition channel into the app or to the right app store for download. Without that in place, organic interest and paid installs will likely go to waste.



# ACQUISITION

## Mobile Web to App

### 4. Leverage Smart Banners on Mobile Web

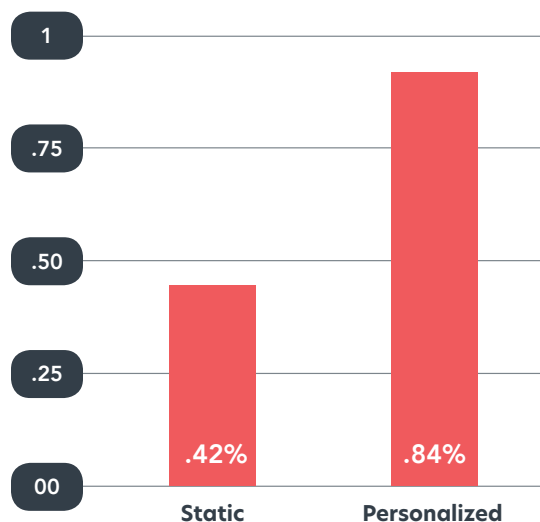
Capturing a user on the web costs [82% less](#) than driving an app install. By leveraging organic channels to first route users to your website, you can then convert them to app users and significantly lower your overall app user acquisition costs. That's where smart banners come in. A smart banner is a banner displayed at the top or bottom of the screen that gives users the option to download or open the app from a mobile website. When a user clicks the banner, the smart link will automatically open up the app if it's already installed or fall back to an app store page if not.

This is one of the best ways to turn high-intent organic search visitors into engaged app users, but smart banners are just scratching the surface of the cross-platform opportunity.

### 5. Personalize Banners to Drive Cross-Platform ROI

Branch research found that smart banners that were personalized to respond to user interests and locations with customized creative and messaging improved view-to-install rates by 2X.

#### View-to-Install Rates for Static vs. Personalized Smart Banners



Here, brands like The Knot, Rent The Runway, and Canva are responding to factors like user device, user acquisition channel, page visited, and more.

Source:  branch



# ENGAGEMENT

## Onboarding

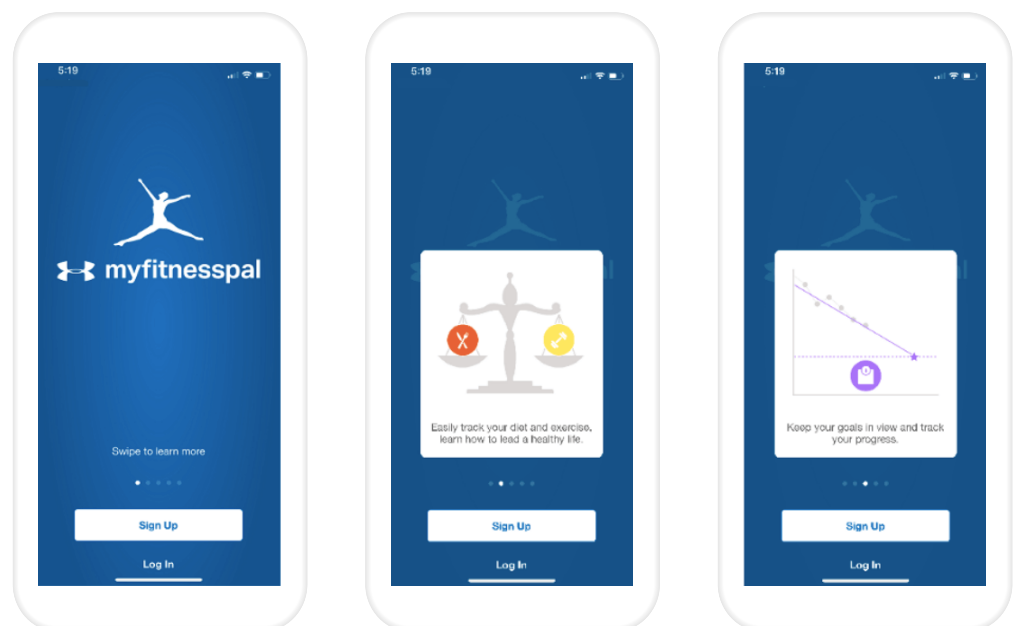
### 6. Get Your Welcome Screens Right

No user wants to scroll through 100 welcome screens. So choose a few welcome screens — and choose them wisely.

#### Make sure they display:

- Clear, concise copy
- Key benefits
- Important user-focused features
- Progress bars that let users know how much time they have left in the process

Of course, every app and every user base is different, so it's worth testing how many pages — and which pieces of content — will work best.



*One great example of onboarding: MyFitnessPal offers a simplified flow that shows clear benefits to the user.*



## 7. Personalize the Onboarding Experience

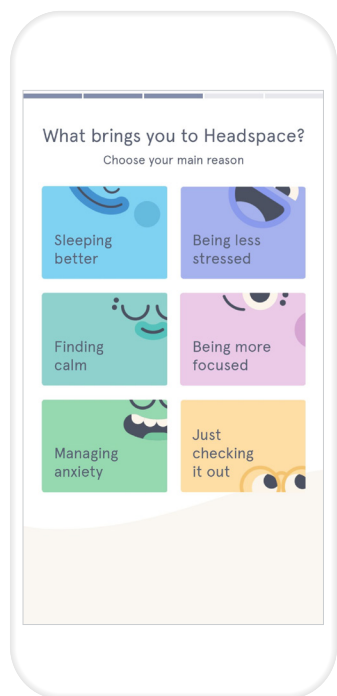
Epsilon research estimates that consumers are [80% more likely](#) to make a purchase when a website/app experience is personalized. Users share lots of information about themselves before they download an app – so use that information to greet them by name, or respond to their location if known.

## 8. A/B Test Your Way to Onboarding Success

Onboarding should be a testing and iterating playground. Bucket users by persona, then roll out tests to determine what works best for each audience to increase frictionless onboarding and continued engagement.

### A few options worth A/B testing in the onboarding process:

- Segment user onboarding based on known information to respond to their needs.
- Allow users to self-select their app experience – and put them in charge of their own onboarding path.
- Pre-populate lengthy registration forms with known user info to make onboarding more seamless.



*Example: Headspace, a health and fitness app, created a landing page with tiles that allow users to find their way to the right place.*





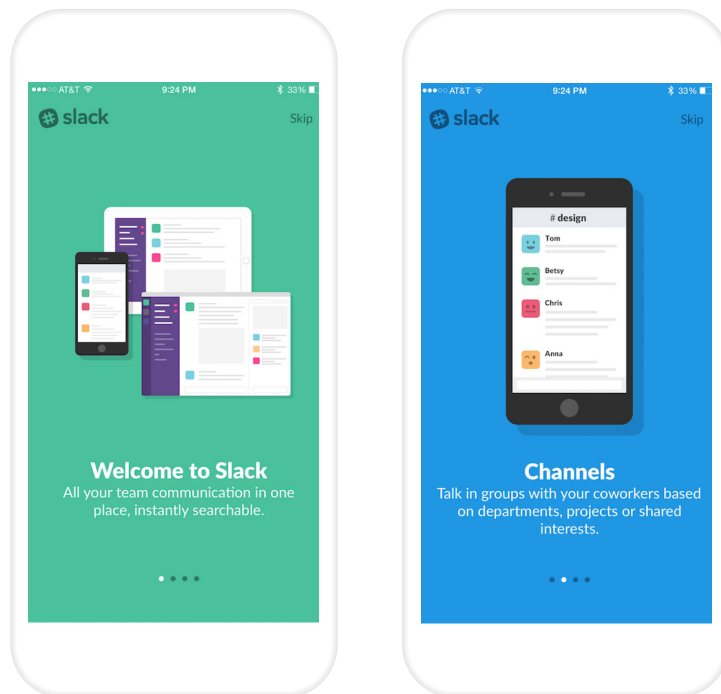
## 9. Discover the Aha! Moment

Samuel Hulick's [Elements of User Onboarding](#) makes a strong case for giving users "a small win that provides them with a positive outcome to their first excursion, and one that can be used as a springboard for future efforts." Onboarding pros often call this the "Aha! moment."

Figuring out the right Aha! moment for an app takes some serious digging into data. It requires finding patterns among users that indicate a likelihood they'll be retained. ([Appcues](#) has a great in-depth look at how to uncover the Aha! moment). But this research is critical for driving engagement and retention, especially for new users.

## 10. Let Users Opt Out of Onboarding

Users come and go – and certain users might have reinstalled the app, or used a different email address to register a second time. Giving users the ability to opt out of onboarding at any step of the journey will make sure only users who need an introduction to the app get one.



*Example: These screens from Slack are simple and helpful, but users always have the option to Skip if the onboarding isn't relevant for them.*



# ENGAGEMENT

## Push Notifications

### 11. Leverage Impactful Copy

Push notifications offer at most 120 characters to convey a message. With limited screen space and user attention span, it's crucial to pick the most important value proposition and write the copy as precisely as possible. Add value – and a reason to click through.

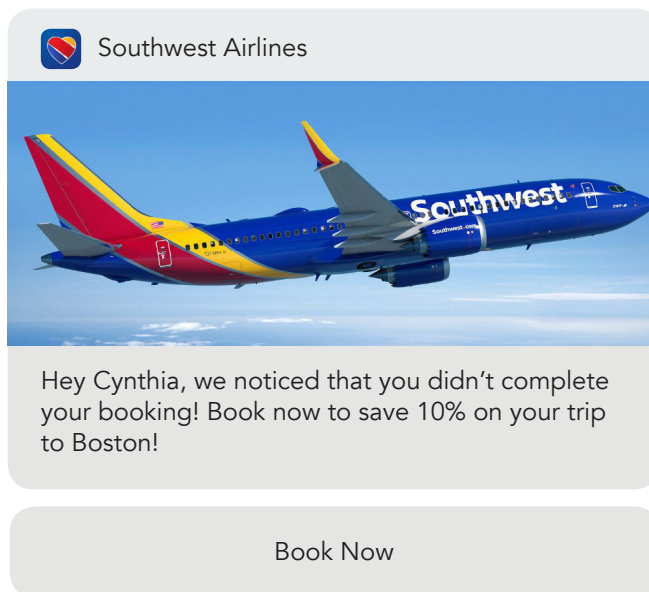
### 12. Keep it Creative

Playful, fun push notifications make users more likely to engage – and spread the word on social. From emojis to thoughtful puns and offers, a push notification that pops can delight users, drive engagement, and help an app go viral.

### 13. Re-Engage With an Offer Via Push Notification

10% off, a free gift, free shipping. For users who have not engaged with an app for some time, an offer can be exactly what's needed to drive users back into the app – especially if it's timed right when they are most likely to drop.

Even better? Try “vanishing offers.” These Limited-time offers and single-use promotion codes for high-value app users can boost engagement, LTV, and ROI. A few worth trying: Flash sales, one-hour discounts, and weekend deals.

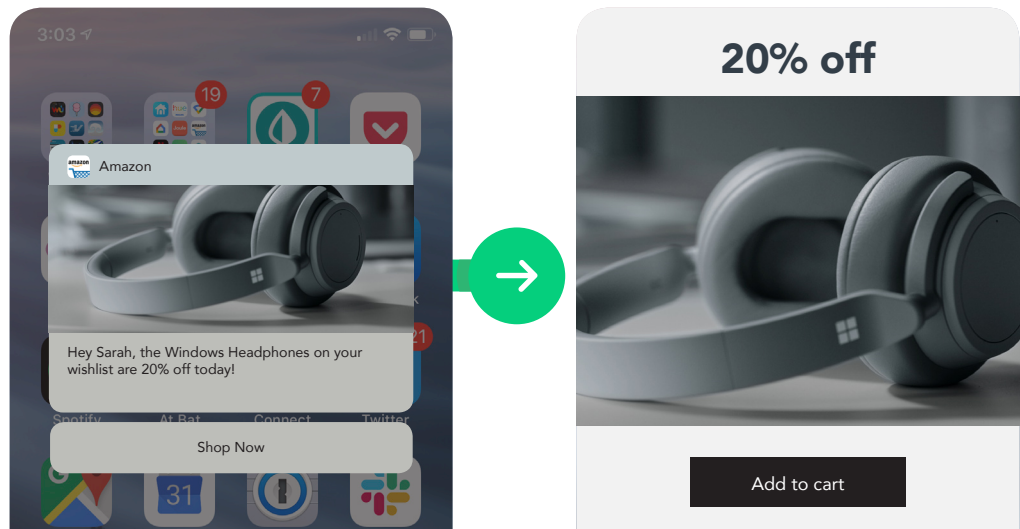


## 14. Leverage Data Triggers to Send 1:1 Notifications

Personalized push notifications that respond to users' actions or attributes can increase engagement. Test push notifications triggered by data, event, behavior, location, or user profile.

## 15. Deep Link Push Notifications into the App

Incorporating deep links into push notifications enables mobile marketers to link from push notifications directly to specific products, in-app promotion landing pages, in-app landing pages, abandoned carts, and more.



*Example: Our friends at CleverTap show how to deep link effectively from a push notification with this great ecommerce example.*



# ENGAGEMENT Email

## 16. Use Email to Encourage Users on Their Journey

It's best to leverage data on in-app behavior to respond to user needs and interests by surfacing app features they haven't tried yet – or updates to the app.

- **Highlight the Next Step.** If a user hasn't added a credit card yet, but it will improve their experience in future app sessions, send a prompt explaining the benefits of adding that info now.
- **Brag Up New Features.** Launching a new feature that app users asked for? Announce it via email to show how responsive the app is to user needs – and re-engage users who might have dropped off.
- **Send a Freebie.** This one is great for users who are likely to churn or have already dropped off. Send a 10% discount or a free referral code to drive engagement.

## 17. Deep Link Emails to Drive App Revenue

No matter how many emails are sent to encourage app engagement, the end result will be worthless if users don't land in the app on click. So many companies lose users at this critical point in the cross-platform journey. Often, users are routed to the mobile website or dropped off in an app store – rather than delivered into the app where they can receive an engaging, personalized, seamless experience.

Deep linking emails in order to effectively drive users into the app from email – no matter which device or OS they're using – is one of the key drivers of email performance and app revenue and engagement.

**Bottom line:** If emails don't effectively link users from mobile emails into the app instead of the mobile web, engagement will drop – and so will your KPIs.



## 18. Test Your CTAs: Six Tips for Success

A great call-to-action is worth a thousand clicks.

Keys to mastering the CTA, courtesy of [Campaign Monitor](#):

- **Keep it simple.** Too many CTAs can confuse users, so try to ensure emails only drive users to complete one action.
- **Test positioning.** Marketing teams are still debating whether above the fold or below the fold is better for CTA buttons, so test and iterate to determine what works best for each persona using the app.
- **Test unique colors.** Brands like Birchbox and De Beers use light blue and peach for their CTAs to draw the eye – and drive clicks.
- **Leverage white space.** Some of the most clicked emails are often the most plain – extra white space can make a CTA pop.
- **Use action words.** [This list](#) of 80+ actionable CTAs can help provide a starting point for testing and iterating on the right language to get users to click.
- **Measure email performance across platforms.** Email campaigns don't live in one channel – so the ability to see how email performs when driving users into the app, for example, is critical. Without effective deep linking, many marketing teams lose the ability to truly track email performance as it relates to app activity and conversions.



# Retention

## 19. Create Cross-Platform Experiences that Delight and Convert

Retaining users means more than sending offers via email. If acquired users don't receive personalized, seamless cross-platform journeys throughout their customer lifecycle, they are more likely to churn. There's no way around it: If users aren't recognized and responded to across channels in their journey to the app, they will churn.

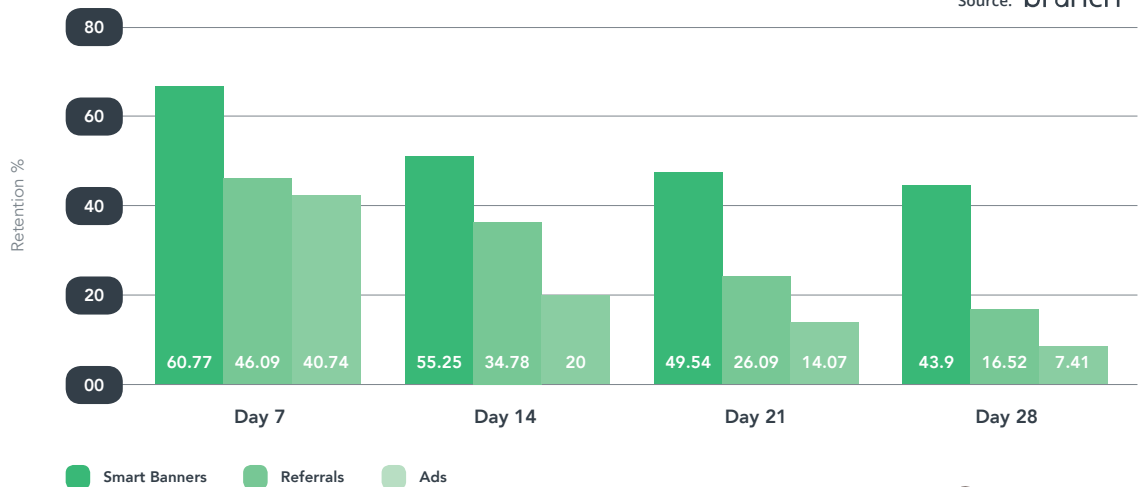
## 20. Determine Your Best Acquisition Channels for Retention

The way in which a user was acquired can have an impact on churn later on in the lifecycle. Case in point: Branch data found that users acquired by organic channels are more likely to be retained than users who were acquired by paid efforts.

It's worth digging into the data to find out which days users are most likely to drop from the app – and developing cross-platform strategies to drive them to re-engage.

Four-Week In-App Retention Rate by Acquisition Channel

Source: [branch](#)



## 21. Leverage Cohort Analysis to Understand Churn and Retention

Sophisticated marketers know an install doesn't tell the full story. As we move into 2020, marketing teams that leverage tools like cohort analysis will see greater success in their mobile growth strategies. In the context of marketing analytics, a cohort is a subset of users segmented by specific interactions with channels (e.g. app/website) and campaigns (e.g. email/text), as well as select behaviors (i.e. the first time a user downloads the app, the first conversion, the second conversion, etc.).

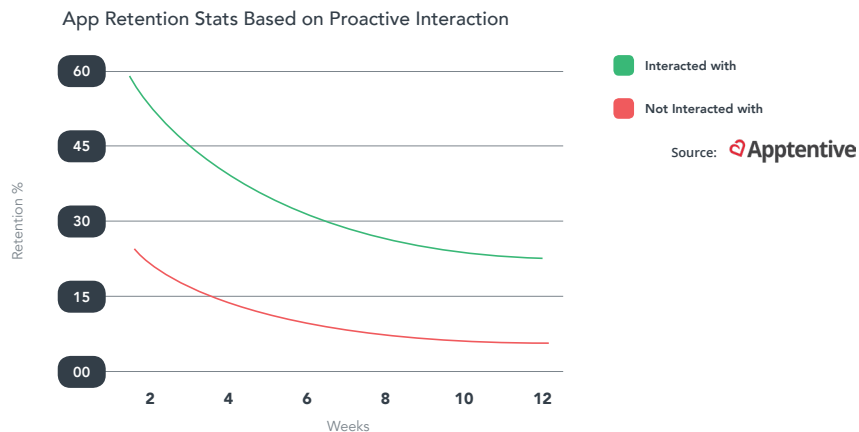
**Example:** Let's say a brand runs a user acquisition campaign through a paid ad campaign and a social media campaign. Cohorting determines whether users exposed to the paid ad campaign vs. the social campaign engage at a higher rate over time post-install.

## 22. Test New Offers and Content to Drive LTV

Driving retention can be as simple as offering the right incentive at a time during the lifecycle when a user is more likely to churn.

### A Few Ways to Counteract This Churn:

- **Fresh content.** Seems obvious, but it's true: Stale app content leads to less engagement and a higher chance of drop off. Fresh content can look different depending on the app category, but there are always ways to surprise and delight users with new content and ideas.
- **Trial periods.** Offer premium trial periods when users are more likely to abandon the app. One popular app offered three-month trial periods of their premium subscription to users who were identified as likely to churn – and found it helped increase retention.
- **Communicate in-app at the right time.** Users who are communicated to within the app during key mobile moments (such as completing a task) are more likely to be retained.



## 23. Retarget Cross-Platform to Drive Retention

Leveraging push notifications can help with retention, but many users opt out of those notifications. [Accengage](#) found the average worldwide opt-in rate for push notifications was 67.5% – meaning almost half the world’s app users might never see a push notification.

To keep the app top of mind for users who are at risk for churning, it’s critical to turn on all channels – and retargeting campaigns can have a huge impact on user retention and ROI.

**The only catch:** Retargeting ads served to users who already have an app installed must deep link back into the app to provide the seamless cross-platform experiences users expect.

**Example:** Checkout 51 leveraged paid retargeting ads for users with the app installed to get them to re-engage. By deep linking those paid ads to drive app users back into the app, Checkout 51 saw an [86% increase](#) in click-to-open rates. Retargeting campaigns that respond to a user with an app and drive them to the right place with the right offer at the right time simply work.

## 24. Let Users Explain Their Churn – and Then Win Them Back

Requesting user feedback is one of the easiest ways to identify friction points during the app lifecycle. One catch: When and how that feedback is requested has a huge impact on whether users will respond.

**Ask for feedback throughout the journey.**

[Zomato](#) asks for feedback throughout emails and product releases, and features a feedback button within the app so users can decide when and how to leave feedback and suggestions.

**Make opting out a feedback session.**

When users do decide to churn, make it easy – and build feedback into the process. Box asks users to self-select a reason for churning, then responds to that reason in an effort to re-engage the user.

**Example:** Users who express the service is too expensive will receive a discount encouraging them to come back to Box.





## ADVOCACY

# Driving User Referrals

### 25. Pick the Right Audience

Before kicking off any referral program, it's important to know that every user is not a great candidate to be a referrer. Determine which key metrics reveal a user is highly engaged or has a high prospective LTV, then offer referral program inclusion to those users.

#### Data Points Worth Considering:

- **Behavioral:** Does the user return to the app more frequently than others? Highly engaged users could refer the app to like-minded friends.
- **Psychographic:** Does the user live in an area where the app is very popular or alternatively not popular enough? In both cases, referrals can play a role in helping the app expand territory.
- **Demographic:** Age, gender, place of residence, and socioeconomic factors such as occupation can help determine if an app user is worth including in referral programs. Modeling ideal user types and personas, then offering referrals to those personas can help make sure more of the same types of users find the app.

### 26. Leverage Deep Links to Power Cross-Platform Referrals

Let's say a loyal brand fanatic wants to refer a friend to the app.

#### To send the referral, that user could:

- Use an in-app system that triggers an email
- Text a referral code or link
- Email a referral code or link
- Share an incentive referral coupon on social media

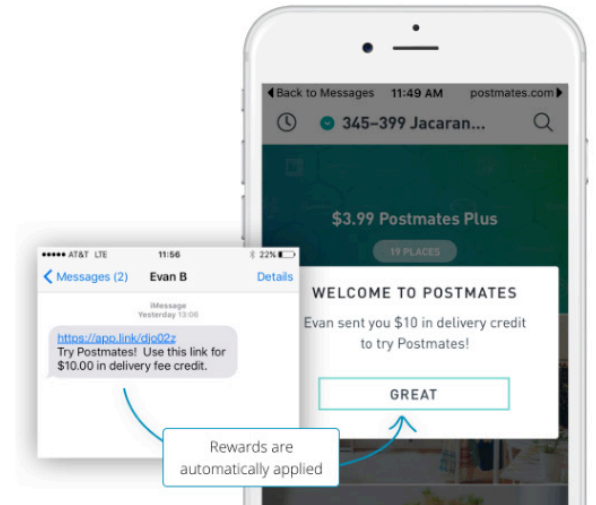
No matter which path the user chooses, the referral becomes cross-platform, cross-device, and cross-OS! That's where deep linking comes in.



Deep links enable link generation, referral tracking, reward attribution, credit balance, and more. (And apps that use Branch for this can create referral reward rules directly on our dashboard – which means referral coupons and discount codes can be applied in-link.)

Deep linked referrals, like the example from Postmates at the right, have been shown to [increase conversions by 31%](#) for Branch customers.

Even better? Effective deep linking ensures referrals are accurately attributed so marketing teams can determine exactly how much ROI those campaigns are generating.



## 27. Offer Referral Rewards Based on Current App Status

Referral rewards are a great way to drive interest – especially in the early growth stages of an app. That said, every company can't offer a \$50 credit for every referral. So let's look at some incentives and referrals that can work for apps at any stage.

### Early Stage App Incentives

In some scenarios, referrals can drive such a high-level of new users that it's worth leveraging freebies in the beginning of an app's launch.

**Example:** Chick-fil-A offered a free sandwich to all customers who installed the app over a one-week period. App downloads skyrocketed by 14,285% as a result.

### Mid-Stage App Incentives

Driving referrals when an app already has a solid base of users can help push it from "pretty cool" to viral. But it isn't necessary to offer coupons and money.



**Example:** Evernote, the ever-popular note-taking app, launched a referral program that awarded points to users who referred the app. The points could be redeemed for access to premium Evernote features and upgrades. Result: Evernote has more than 100 million users.

### Later-Stage App Incentives

For apps that already have a large pool of acquired users who are receiving regular discounts, coupons, and promotions, referral rewards might look a little different.

**Example:** Offering VIP badges, unlocked features, and leaderboards can help inspire referrals. Duolingo does a great job of this by encouraging users to share results and progress with friends.



# Measurement and Optimization

## 28. Deep Linking is the Foundation of Accurate Attribution

Deep linking users from any channel – social, paid ads, email, the mobile web – into the app ensures that those users receive a seamless experience and that those experiences can be attributed.

Accurate user identification is critical for deep linking. Deep links serve as the connective tissue between disparate data points across channels, platforms, and devices. Without the connective tissue, there is no way to understand the full user journey at every stage or truly achieve accurate attribution in a cross-platform world.

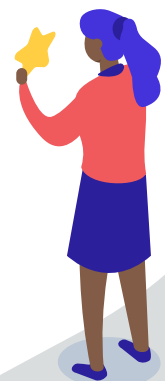
## 28. Go Beyond Fingerprinting

One of the biggest flaws with legacy attribution providers: They often rely on fingerprinting to identify users across devices. In web-to-web attribution, providers can use identifiers stored in the cookies of the browser to identify users across multiple sites. But those cookies don't work on mobile, so fingerprinting becomes the main way of matching these users to their devices.

Additionally, restrictions implemented by major web browsers and increased privacy-focused legislation around the world (such as GDPR and California's CCPA) indicate the tide is turning against cookie-based attribution.

### Revolutionizing Attribution with Branch

At Branch, we built a completely new way of doing attribution that nearly eliminates the need for fingerprinting all together: Persona Graph. It uses the wisdom of the crowds to build a large identity graph mapped to device IDs, generated from the tremendous amount of traffic Branch sees. Even better? Branch's Persona Graph keeps user privacy front and center.



## 30. Find the Right Attribution Provider: Five Tips

Finding the right attribution provider in a sea of options isn't easy. But there are some key things that will help find the right partner.

- **Implementation:** Ease of implementation will help speed up the process and ensure accurate attribution starts quickly.
- **SDK:** The ideal attribution provider will have lightweight, open source SDKs, offering transparency so you know what you're installing into your app.
- **Support:** The support team of any provider has to be top-notch to support attribution across channels and platforms.
- **Unified Dashboard:** The ability to see both paid and organic marketing analytics in one place is critical for achieving a unified view of performance.
- **Breakdown of Cost Data:** Without the ability to understand costs across campaigns holistically, attribution won't give a clear view of spend and ROI.

Finding the right provider can take time – and requires research. But for the most advanced deep linking and cross-platform attribution, Branch is here to help.

### About Branch

Branch provides the leading cross-platform linking and attribution platform, offering solutions that unify user experience and measurement across devices and channels. Branch powers mobile links and cross-platform measurement to more than 3 billion monthly users across the globe, and is a trusted cross-platform marketing, engagement, and measurement solution for over 50,000 apps – including Adobe, BuzzFeed, Yelp, OfferUp, and many more.

Ready to take your app growth to the next level with cross-platform linking and accurate mobile measurement? Our sales team would be happy to set up time to talk. [Contact us.](#)

