5 Keys to Unlock Mobile Growth

Facebook created a $13 billion dollar mobile-advertising business in 5 years. Snapchat went from an app for teens to a $20B sensation.

If you're a marketer from a conventional brick-and-mortar industry like retail, you inevitably look at these successes with a sense of envy. Mobile seems like a massive opportunity to generate money from thin air, but the day-to-day struggle to keep users entertained and engaged feels like an uphill battle. You get stuck trying to figure out what time of day you should time your push notifications, or nailing the exact word count of your next marketing email.

It's counterintuitive, but successful campaigns on mobile aren't about the tactics you use or immediate ROI. Mobile isn't just another distribution channel where you can sell t-shirts or airplane tickets. Mobile is about something much bigger—shaping the behaviors and habits around how users interact with your brand.

Mobile marketing campaigns based on creating amazing in-app experiences are one of the strongest methods to achieve this. Mobile's superpower is that it allows users to get things they've always wanted, from directions to a car on-demand, only faster and easier. Successful mobile campaigns are the ones that hook users into coming back for more.

In this guide, we'll run you through some of the most successful examples of these campaigns, the motivational principles that make them tick, and how you can launch your own.
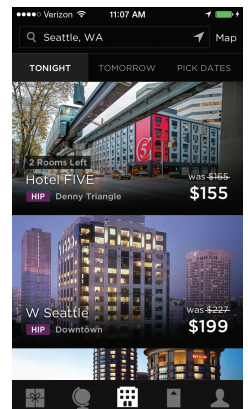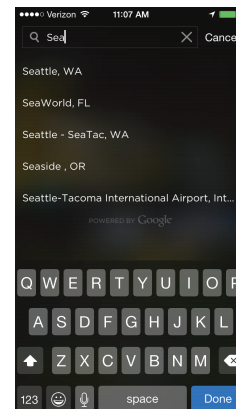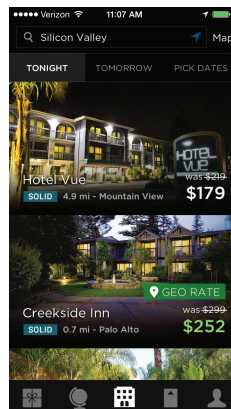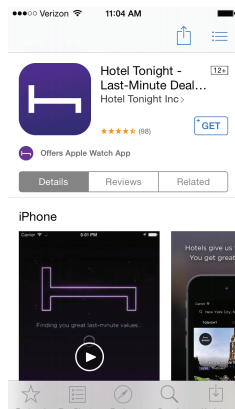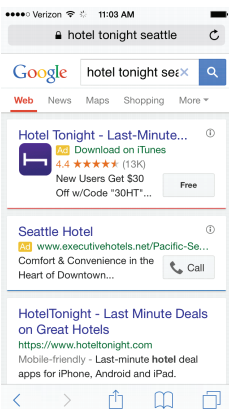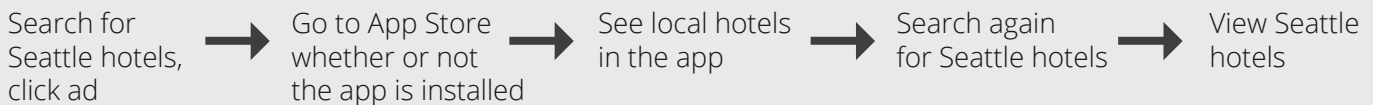
1

DRIVE USERS STRAIGHT TO AHA! MOMENTS

If you're launching a mobile marketing promotion aimed at boosting app installs, one of the worst things you can do is treat new users to a generic welcome screen. Over 80% of mobile apps are only used once before they're tossed out. You only have one chance to make a good impression and you can't waste it.
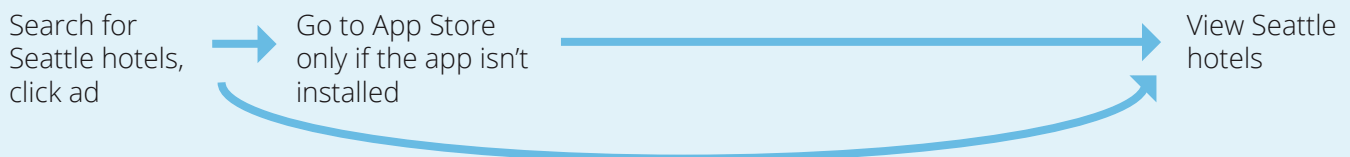
By launching a mobile campaign with a personalized onboarding flow, HotelTonight, the last-minute hotel booking app, increased install-to-booking conversions by 18% for its search campaigns. Refining the campaign even further, the company achieved:

* 94% increase in total bookings
* 80% increase in the number of installs
* 99% increase in total month-over-month revenue

Standard deep link flow

Search for Seattle hotels, click ad → Go to App Store whether or not the app is installed → See local hotels in the app → Search again for Seattle hotels → View Seattle hotels

Branch link flow

Search for Seattle hotels, click ad → Go to App Store only if the app isn't installed → View Seattle hotels

(source: Apptimize)

2

The last thing users want to do when they're trying to book a hotel on their phones is flip through six different screens before trying to type in your credit card number with your thumbs. HotelTonight's marketing campaign used search ads on Google and deep links to create a personalized experience for users, depending on whether they already had the app on their phone:

Users who already had the app and clicked the ad were taken straight to a list of Seattle hotels that they could book the same night.

Users without the app were taken to the app store and directed to install the app. When they opened it for the first time, they were taken straight to a list of Seattle hotels.

Instead of showing users a generic welcome screen and prompting them to start a new search, Hotel Tonight took them straight to what they were looking for in the first place. In doing so, it also takes them to the app's aha! moment—the ability to book a luxury hotel room at discount rates with the tap of a finger.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

When you're trying to get someone to make a purchase with your search ad, you need to understand the **user intent** behind what they were looking for. This is especially true for mobile. Hotel Tonight's mobile campaign worked because it got users where they wanted to go, only faster.

According to Google, marketers who only rely on demographics for search ads risk "missing more than 70% of potential shoppers." 69% of smartphone users are more likely to make purchase from companies that help them find answers to their questions, quickly.

Nix your generic welcome screen.
There's a lot of friction inherent to getting users to download or even open your app. Tools like deep-linking allow you to point users to a specific page in-app after the install, which allows you to maintain context between where users are coming from and where they go in your app.

Reduce the number of steps
it takes users to find what they're looking for. Getting users what they want, faster is one of the key ways quickly get users to engage and start building a habit. For example, if your mobile application lets customers book flights, apply your mobile promotion automatically and take users straight to the checkout page and on their way to Cancun.

2 SEEING = BELIEVING = BUYING

(source: Gizmag)

The best mobile campaigns aren't the ones that just try to sell users more stuff. They're the ones that allow users to interact with your brand and products, and create new experiences. This is what's made Ikea's Catalogue app one of the most effective mobile marketing campaigns ever:

* Following the 2012 launch of the app, 6.2 million users installed the Ikea Catalogue app within the year
* While users spent 3 minutes on average flipping through the print catalogue, they spent 8 minutes on average in the mobile app
* In 2013, the number of app installs jumped to 10 million

Since 1951, Ikea has published a yearly catalogue of all its products. The problem was that no one actually read it. To make things worse, Ikea found that 14 percent of customers who bought furniture through the catalogue ended up taking home furniture that was the wrong size.

The Ikea Catalogue app was engineered to tackle both of these problems. The Ikea Catalogue app didn't just translate print to a tablet or mobile phone. Instead, it leveraged the power of mobile to create new behaviors.

Within the app users could find a product they liked—say a Billy book case. They point the in-app camera to their living rooms and can see the bookcase right where they'd want to put it in real life. Users could move furniture around to different places, and customize products with different colors.

 Ikea's mobile app isn't just some cool toy, but a tool that allows users to visualize products in their own home. The novelty is what hooks them in and the utility is what keeps them coming back.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Ikea Catalogue app leverages a psychological principle called the **Ikea Effect**. It's the principle that we tend to put a disproportionately high value on things that we make ourselves. A 2012 Harvard Study by Michael Norton gave two groups of test subjects IKEA boxes. The first group was given pre-assembled boxes. The second had to put the boxes together themselves. At the end of the study, the second group was willing to pay far more for the boxes than the first.

With the Ikea Catalogue app, users don't just build boxes, they build their own homes. The process of interacting with the pieces of furniture and customizing their rooms—even digitally—creates an emotional connection with the company's products. Ikea's app allowed users to feel connected with the products they played around with in-app, which meant they were more likely to buy them as a result.

Allow users to try before they buy.
When you let users see how a new yellow t-shirt would look on them, or a pull-out sofa in their bedroom, it creates a sense of ownership between them and the t-shirt. They might not buy it immediately, but they'll remember that they can.

Think outside of the app.
Use mobile campaigns to allow users to interact with your brand in new ways. If you have a retail store, for example, use your mobile app to point users to special discounts and offers when they're close by.

3 | HARNESS THE POWER OF THE WAITLIST

We all want what we can't have and the more we can't have something, the more we want it. This is a timeless marketing law that applies as much to mobile as to more traditional marketing channels. Robinhood, the mobile stock trading company leveraged this principle perfectly with the launch of its Robinhood Instant product. The company created a pre-launch waitlist so popular that it made the app viral.
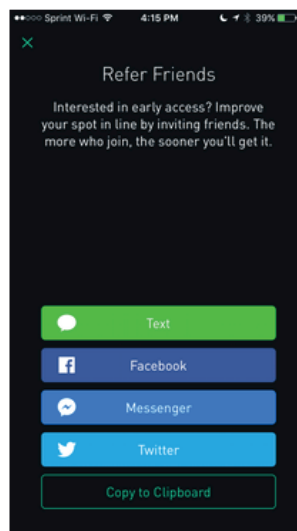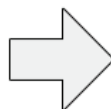
* At peak, the waitlist for Robinhood Instant grew to over 800,000 people long. It was so successful that people auctioned off waitlist spots on eBay.
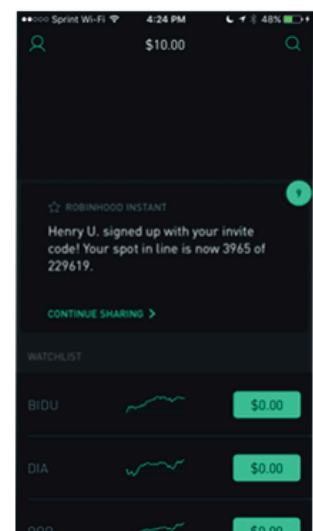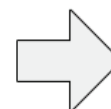* Later that September, Robinhood raised another $13 million in funding

Most online stock brokerages force customers to wait three days between when they deposit funds and when they can trade. Robinhood Instant lets users trade the moment after they initiate a bank transfer. Demand for this feature was so huge that the early access list grew to 10,000 within the first hour.
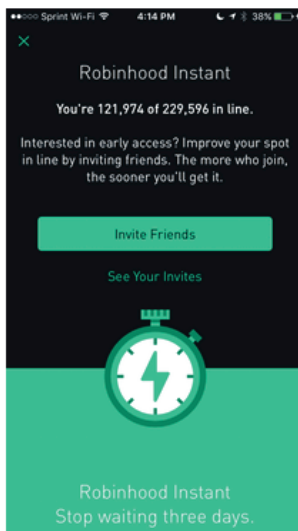
Signup for Robinhood Instant #121,974 out of 229,596 in line → **Refer a Friend** → **Cut 118,009 spots in line**

This is where the brilliance of Robinhood's mobile campaign kicks in. Users who referred a friend got to jump to the front of the line. This created a viral loop where users signed up for the waitlist, referred friends to skip ahead, who in turn referred their friends.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The **scarcity heuristic** is a psychological principle that influences how people value things based on availability. The more of something there is, like water or air, the less we value it. The less available something is, the more we want it. Robinhood leveraged this basic principle to turn its feature launch into a magnet for new users.

Make in-app referral seamless and easy.
Referral is one of the most effective marketing channels for mobile apps. A whopping 77% of app users find out about apps through the recommendation of friends. The best part is that referral marketing lowers your cost of customer acquisition by leveraging your existing user base.

Foster a sense of exclusivity
with your mobile campaigns. This doesn't necessarily mean having a waitlist millions of users long. Try offering special promotions and discounts that are only available in-app. Users will begin to expect them and turn to your app out of habit.

4 | STUNT MARKETING

(source: Uber)

Stunt marketing can be a very effective mobile marketing strategy, but only when it aligns with a real understanding of user behavior. For mobile, Uber is the undisputed master of this. Its campaigns aren't just publicity stunts—they're highly-geared toward helping users build new habits.

In 2011, Uber launched a two week competition between Facebook and Google employees to see which company could rack up the most rides. At South by South West, it let users order barbecue for $10. In 2014 during San Francisco's Gay pride weekend, it allowed users to order a wedding package. This kind of marketing is a pillar of Uber's marketing strategy.

UberPuppies is one of the best examples:

* In 2015, UberPuppies raised $12,000 for animal shelters and found 70 dogs homes.
* Within four days of launch, the initial UberPuppies campaign racked up 120 headlines.
* For the first time last year, the use of Uber among professionals in America eclipsed rental car revenues.

In promoted cities, UberPuppies allowed users to order puppies on demand. It cost users $30 for 15 minutes of playtime with a puppy and the proceeds were donated to charity.

While the UberPuppies campaign was great publicity for Uber, it served a far more important purpose for the company.

Uber users know that they can order a car through the app. But they're often blind to new product categories, like UberRush or UberEats.The key principle behind the UberPuppies campaign is that it gets users in the app and using it in a way that they wouldn't normally. This is the first step to creating a bigger commitment to using the app.   8

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The **consistency principle** states that as humans, we like the choices we make to be consistent with the choices we've made in the past. It's one the most powerful ways to shape human behavior. If you can get users to make small commitments to use your mobile app, you lay the seeds for more habitual usage over time.

With UberPuppies, this begins by showing users they can order a puppy on-demand. Although this isn't something users want to do every day, it starts them off with a small, fun commitment that leads to bigger ones over time. The next time users open the app, they're reminded that they can also order food from their favorite restaurant, or courier documents to the office. What seems like a PR stunt is actually a clever way to get users to think about Uber's service in a fundamentally new way.

Do things that don't scale.
Many of the most successful mobile marketing campaigns aren't about immediate ROI and money in the bank. Good mobile campaigns allow users to tell stories and create new experiences around your brand. This is one of the most powerful ways to carve out space in your users' minds and it's what will keep them coming back.

Surprise and delight users.
Everyone likes special deals, but users value them more when they come out of the blue. Compared to traditional advertising, variable rewards can boost intent to purchase by 133%.

5 TURN YOUR MOBILE APP INTO A UTILITY WITH PERKS
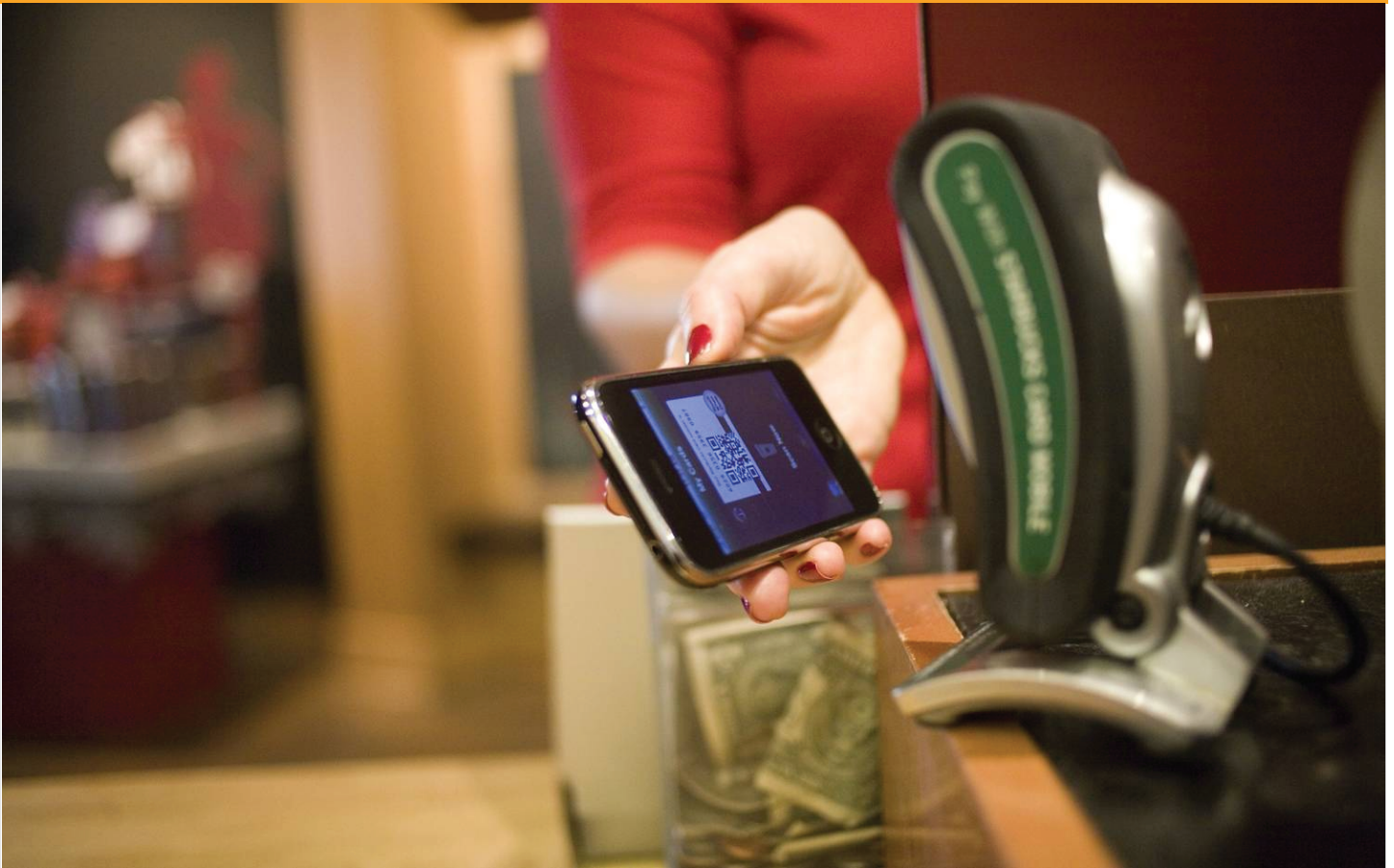
(source: Forbes)

When you're launching a promotion for your mobile app it's easy to get lost in all the cool things you could do and what's actually useful for your users. But creating utility for your users is one of the most powerful ways to get them to keep using your app and in the long run, buy more stuff. Understanding this is what has made Starbucks' mobile app the winner of mobile payments.

Since Starbucks added mobile payments to its app:

* Starbucks' Rewards program had 10.4 million active members in 2015, a 28% increase from the previous year.
* Mobile payments now account for 20% of in-store transactions in the US.
* Starbucks has more money on deposit than most small banks, with the equivalent of $1.2B loaded into Starbucks cards and its mobile app.

Starbucks has always had a healthy business in gift cards and the company sells millions over the holiday season alone. By introducing payments into their mobile app, Starbucks took this key part of their business and transformed it into a utility. Ultimately, this is what's made Starbucks' mobile app

By pre-ordering a cappuccino through Starbuck's mobile app, users can skip the 20 minute line. They wave their phones in front of a scanner, grab their coffee, and head straight to work. The mobile app also keeps track of Starbucks' loyalty program which rewards frequent customers with free treats and special promotions. Instead of having to hang onto a punch card, mobile users can just open an app.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Starbucks' mobile app works according to renowned psychologist B.F. Skinner's theory of **operant conditioning**. This states that human behavior can be shaped by rewarding simple tasks. You see this often in video games, where progress toward some goal is sustained through incremental rewards of rupees, experience points, or whatever else. Ultimately this means that people keep on playing.

With the Starbucks app, users are incentivized to keep using the app because it makes their lives easier and because the app offers actual rewards—free coffee, in-store refills—for using it. This creates a cycle of reinforcement

Create a rewards program.
Rewards programs are a natural way to build up retention through your mobile app, especially if you're in retail. Rather than force them to search their wallets for a loyalty card, let them open up your app.

Convenience is king.
If you're sending users a digital coupon through an email or a display ad for example, don't make them type in a code to realize the offer. Apply it straight to checkout.