User Onboarding Lessons from the Top Media Apps

Discover Music

Find your new favorite jam with customized recommendations made by musicologists.
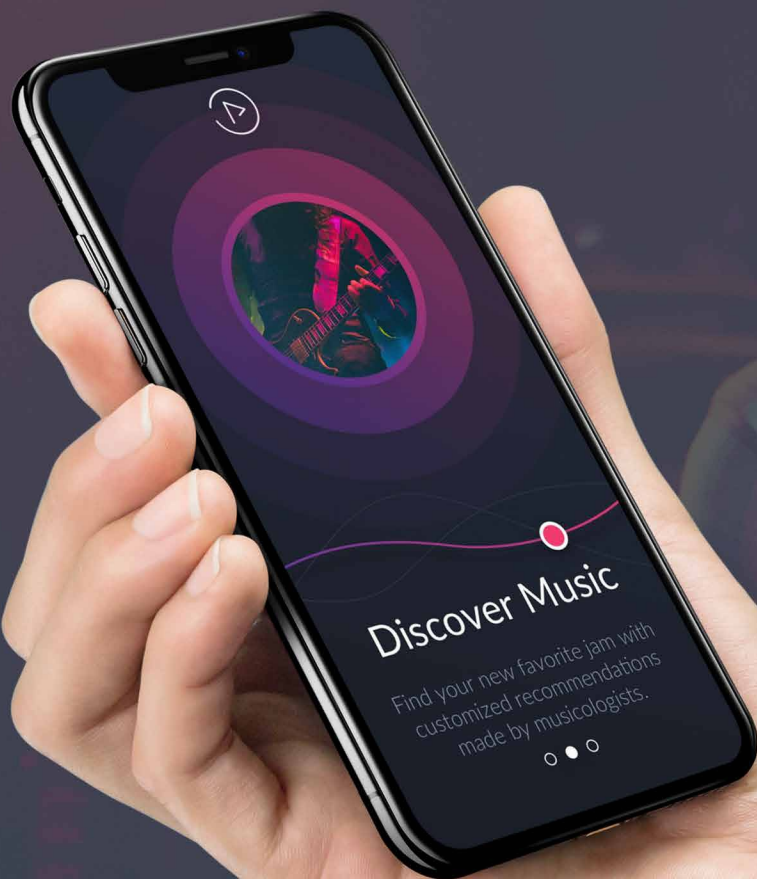
APPTIMIZE

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Introduction

User onboarding, the process of introducing a user to your app to increase the likelihood of adoption, is incredibly important to overall growth and profitability of mobile apps.

If you don't trust us when we say that user onboarding is one of the most important parts of the mobile customer lifecycle, take a look at the numbers:

> *The average media or entertainment app loses more than 70% of its daily active users just one day after it's downloaded.*

CLASSIC RETENTION: MEDIA + ENTERTAINMENT APPS
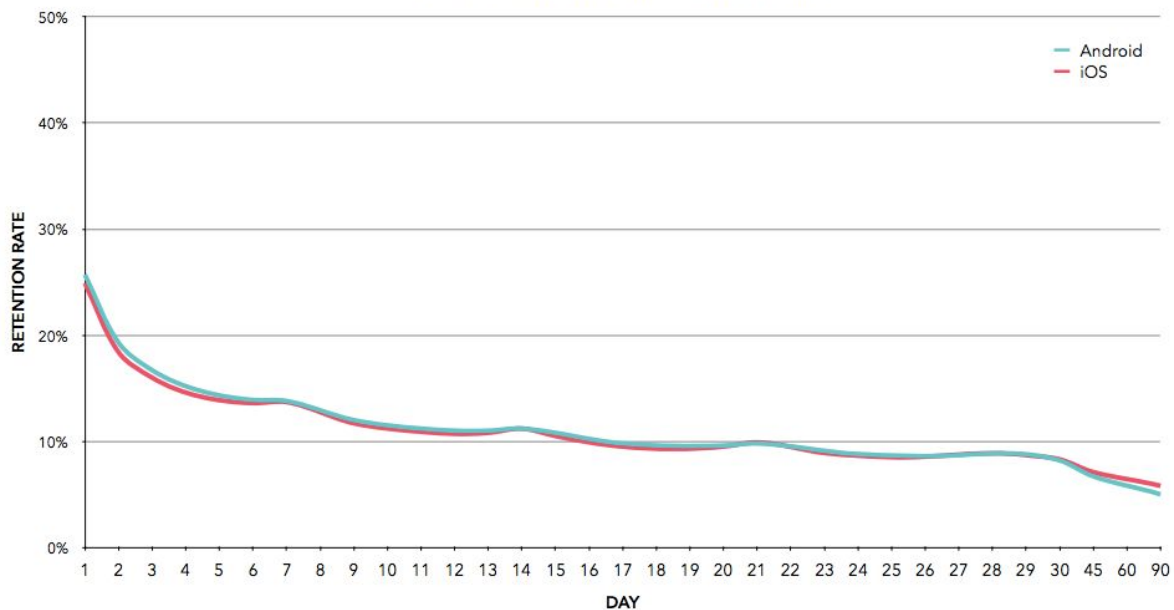
Source: Appboy 2016 Mobile Marketing Benchmarks Report

If 70% of new users stop using your app after a single day, then just focusing on driving growth through new user acquisition is the wrong mobile growth strategy. Continuing to acquire new users without making a concerted effort to retain already acquired users is like trying to fill a bucket with a giant hole in it. The only way to sustainably grow active users, and consequently make your app more successful is by plugging that hole by creating a better in-app experience.

In this mobile onboarding guide, we look at some of the most popular media and entertainment apps, and how they organize their onboarding flows to cultivate engaged audiences.
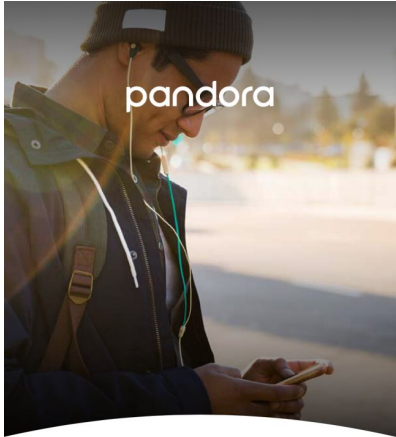
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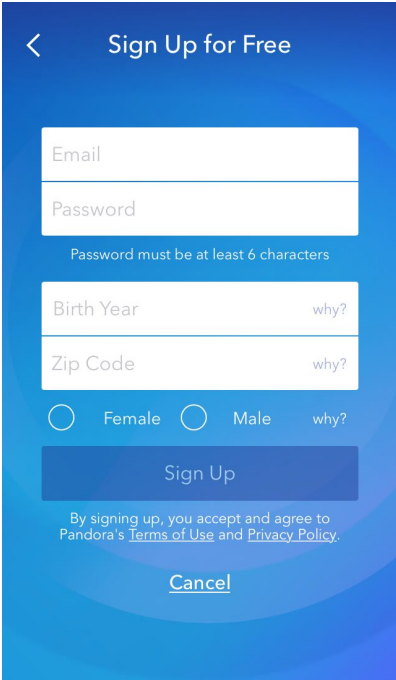
Personalized Recommendations

An endless content repository is a double-edged sword. If users can't find what they are looking for or discover content they are interested in, they are almost guaranteed to abandon your app. Many apps aim to prevent app abandonment by helping users constantly discover relevant content that is aided by their self-reported preferences. The foundation of this type of personalized in-app user experience is often built during user onboarding.

Pandora, one of the most popular music streaming apps, is powered by the Music Genome Project. Though Pandora has a team of curators, music analysts, and data scientists that sift through millions of tracks to create personalized recommendations for users, Pandora still uses self-reported user information as a building block for designing this curated experience.

As first-time users sign up for a free Pandora account, they are required to fill out their birth year, location, and gender. Users hesitant about providing this information can tap on the "why?" in the form fields to learn why Pandora needs that information.
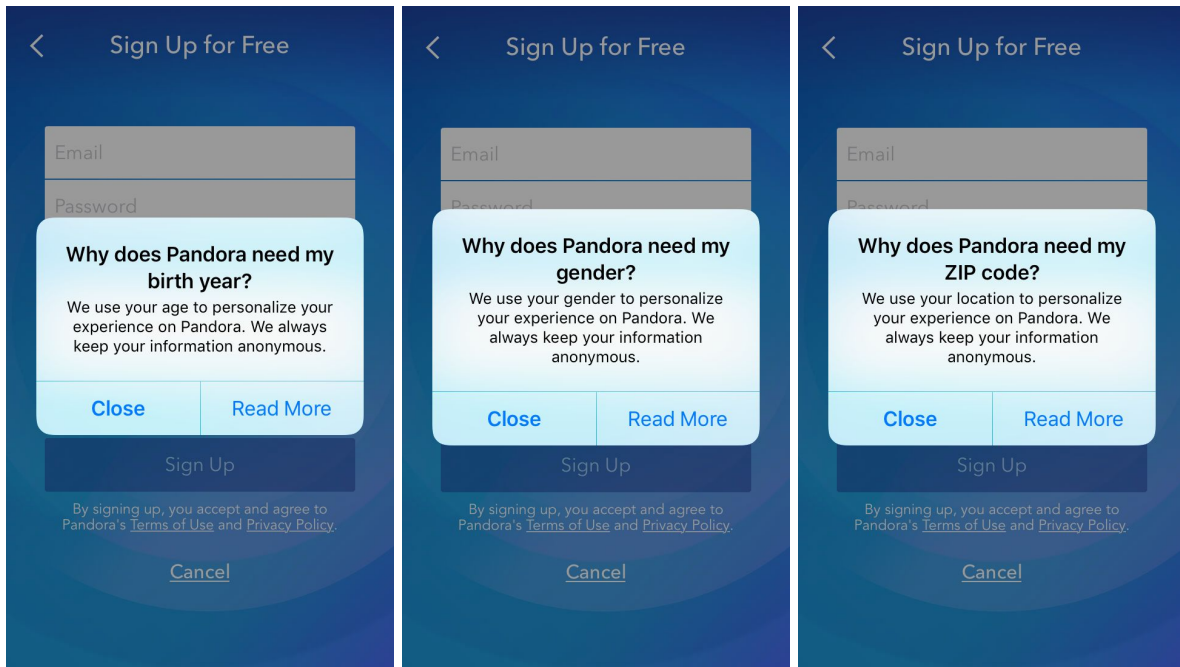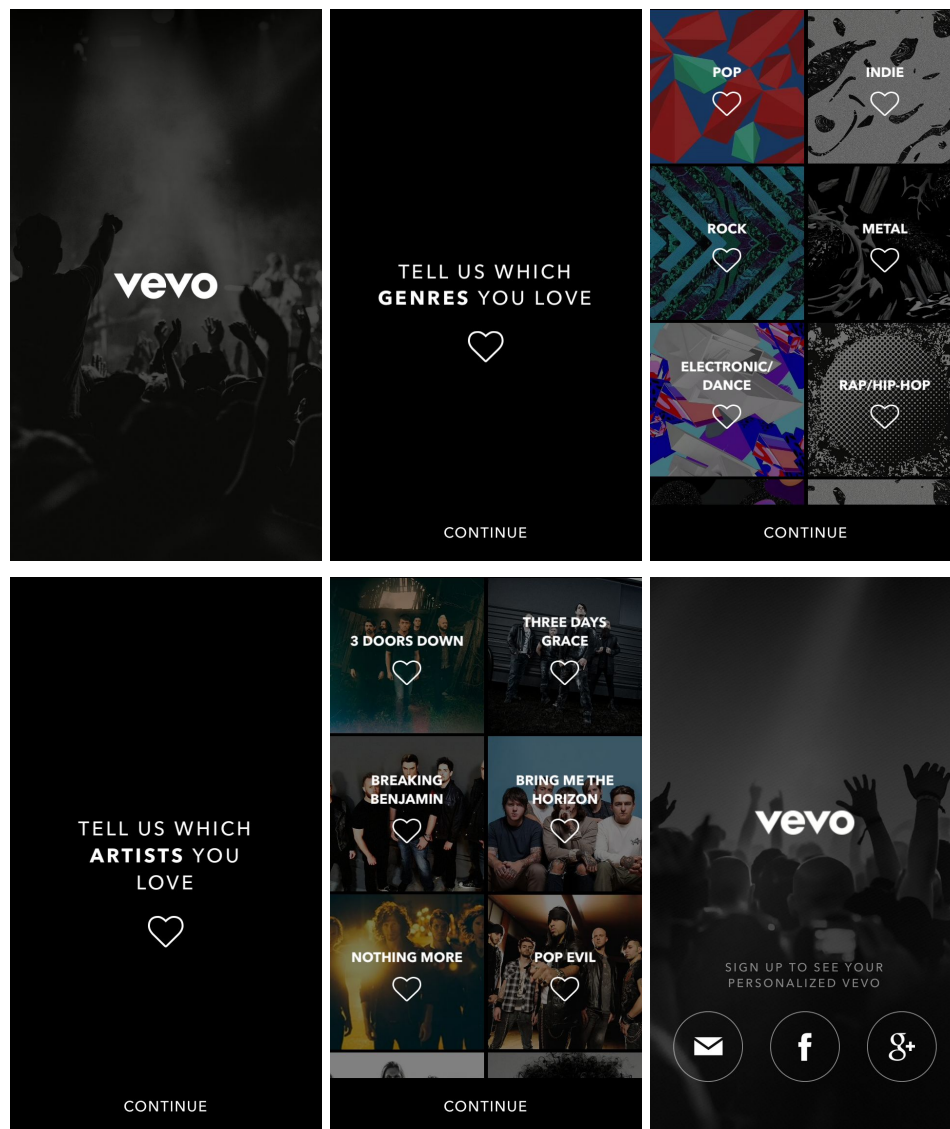

Source: Pandora

Unlike Pandora, which [does not use machine-listening or other forms of automated data extraction](#), Spotify leverages [AI technology to surface the right content to the right user at the right time.](#) However, just like Pandora, Spotify also asks new users for their date of birth and gender as they sign up for a free account during onboarding. Spotify does not justify this ask to its prospective users.

Test Idea: Does explaining why you need users to provide their gender, age, and location increase signups?

In contrast to Spotify and Pandora, Vevo begins a first-time user's journey by inquiring about their favorite genres. Once the user has submitted that information, Vevo asks them to select their favorite artists from a list of suggested names. This list of suggested artists is customized based on the genres the user selected in the previous step. Only after users have invested time reporting their preferences does Vevo ask them to sign up to see their "personalized Vevo."
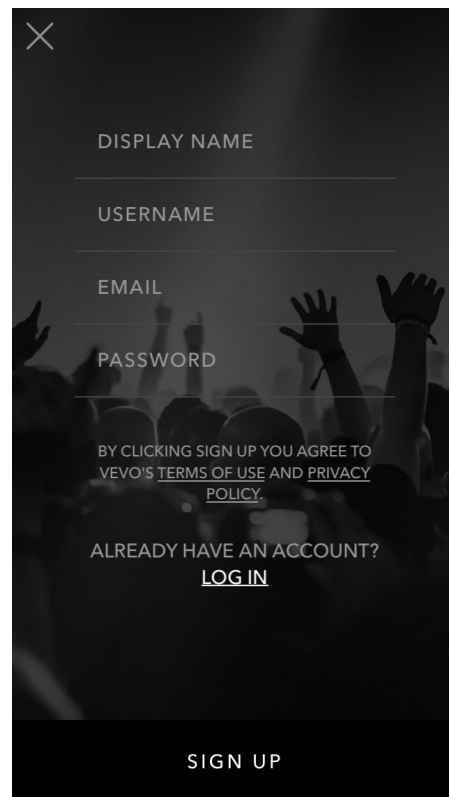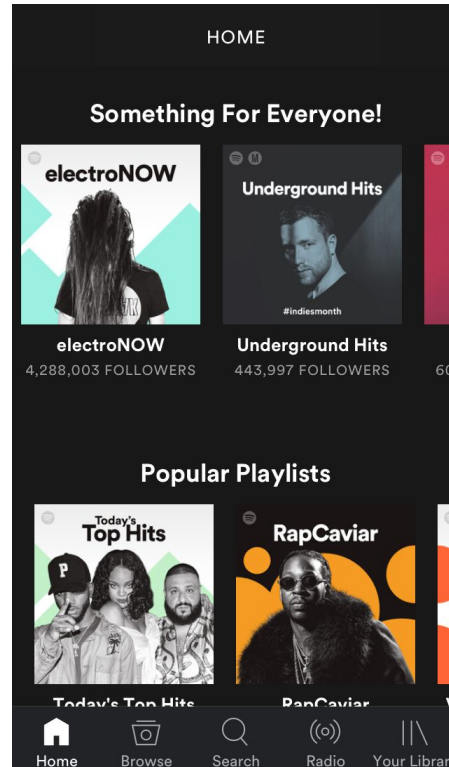

Source: Vevo

Test Idea: Should the user information collected in the first step help customize subsequent steps in their onboarding flow?

Compared to Spotify and Pandora, Vevo's signup form is fairly simple, as it doesn't ask users for their age, gender, or ZIP code. Upon signing up, users are taken to their personalized home screen, which includes artists and suggestions based on their self-reported preferences.

Test Ideas: How many fields should you include in your signup form? Which combination of login options (email, Facebook, Google, etc.) maximizes signups?

Like Vevo, ESPN's onboarding process allows for optional user curation. However, users can only start this process of adding their preferences after passing on the ability to sign up or by actually signing up.

Test Idea: Should you ask users to sign up before or after you ask them for their preferences? Does investing upfront time and effort customizing their preferences make users more likely to sign up? How does each piece of data collected to personalize the in-app experience impact long term engagement and retention?

Source: Vevo

ESPN also spearheads its users' onboarding journey by asking them for location permissions, which it uses later to suggest teams to follow.
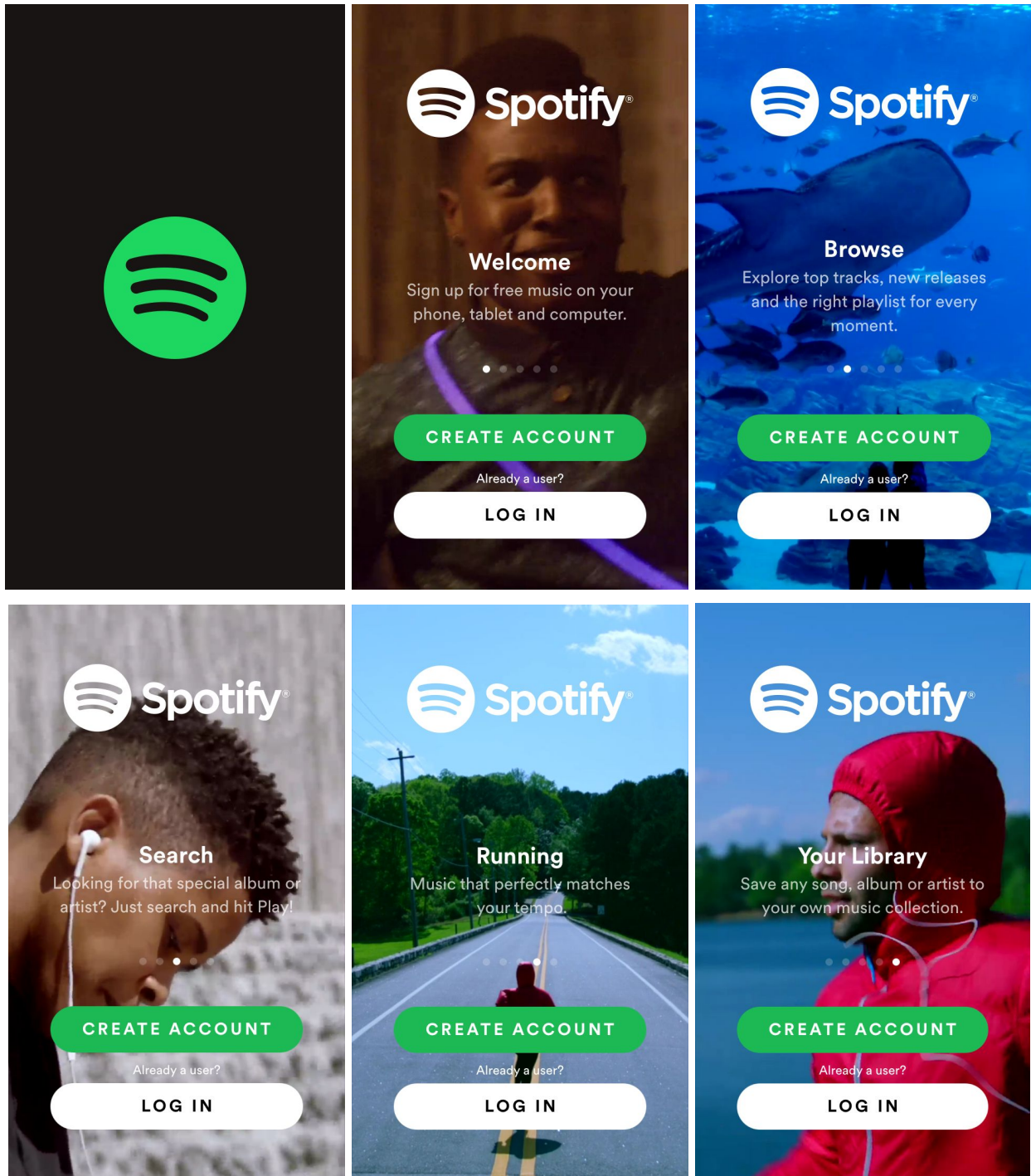
Test Idea: Where in the onboarding flow should you ask users for location permissions?

Source: ESPN

Welcome Screens and Onboarding Tutorials

Source: [Spotify](#)
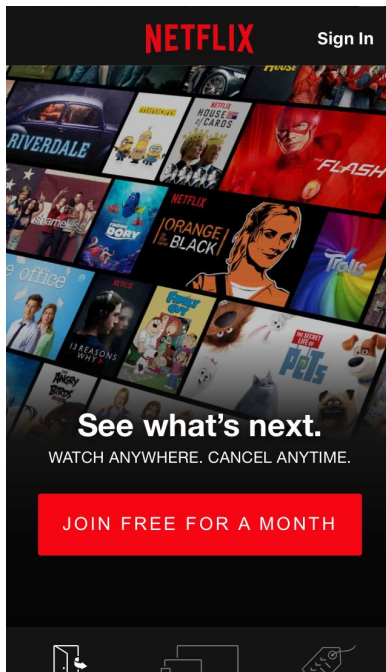
Source: [Netflix](#)

The welcome screen is usually your app's first (and maybe only) impression on new users. Optimized welcome screens and onboarding tutorials are key to maximizing engagement and reducing bounce rates. Spotify's welcome screen features a colorful video background. Five value propositions scroll automatically, making a case for why and how new users can use Spotify. The welcome screen of Netflix, on the other hand, is static. Much like a mobile-responsive page, users can scroll down and toggle back and forth between three value propositions.

Test Ideas:

There are countless tests you can conduct to continuously optimize a user's' first impression of your app. When it comes to the welcome screen, should the background be static or dynamic? Which hero image or video maximizes signups? Should the value propositions scroll, or should users have to swipe through them at their own pace? How many value propositions should you share with users? Which copy, call-to-action, and design on each screen maximizes favorable actions, while reducing fallout?
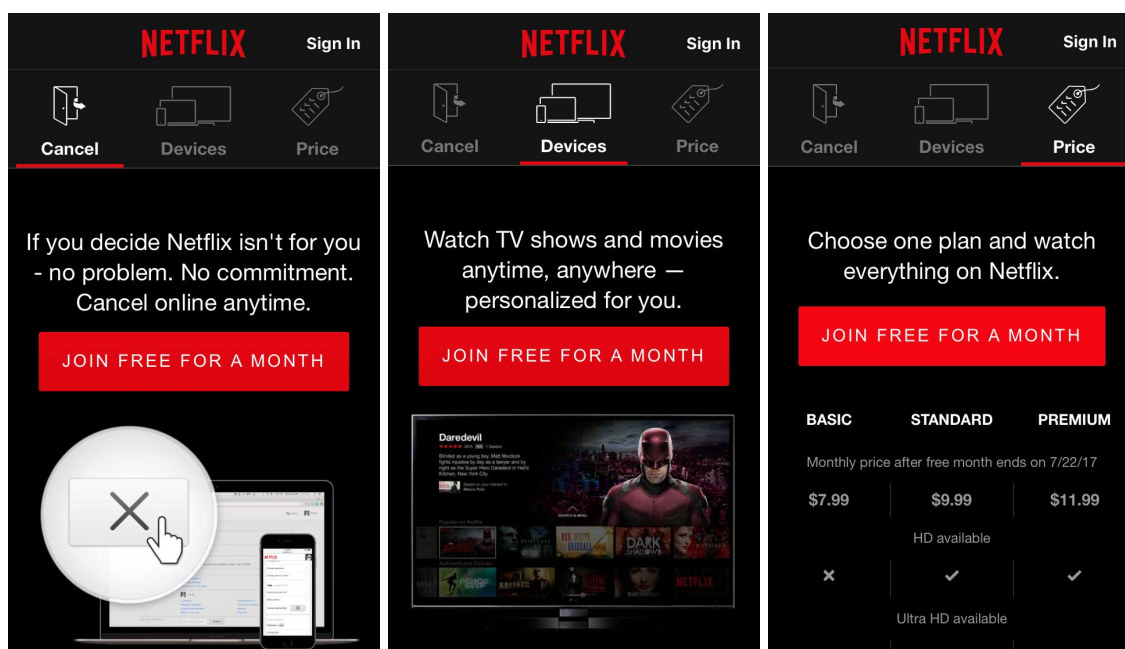
Source: Netflix

Creating and Launching Visual Tests

Non-technical users on product and marketing teams can update UI elements, and go live with a test in minutes with Apptimize's best-in-class WYSIWYG Visual Editor. You can test everything from value propositions to CTAs to hero images and more in the onboarding flow without writing a single line of code. LEARN MORE
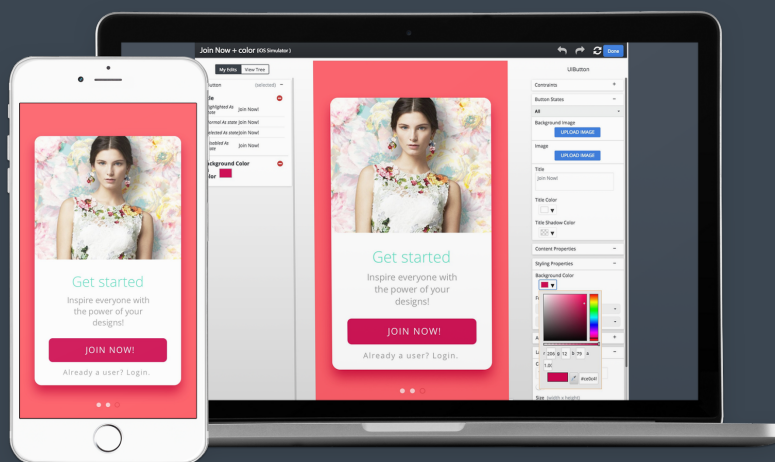
Notification Permissions

According to [benchmarking data by appboy](#),
only 46% of users opt in for push permissions for
iOS media and entertainment apps. Though
push opt-in rates for Android apps usually
exceed those for iOS apps,media and
entertainment apps lag behind the average
acceptance rates.

When iOS users first open the New York Times
app, they are greeted by the default permission
modal for push notifications. Vevo, on the other
hand, has a dedicated screen for push
notification permissions during its onboarding
flow. This screen precedes the default (and
mandatory) App Store permission modal and
explains the immediate benefit of enabling push
notifications.

Source: [The New York Times](#)

> **Test Idea:** Where in the onboarding flow
> should your app ask for permission to
> send notifications? Like NYT, Should it be
> the first thing users see when they open
> the app? Or should it have a dedicated
> screen during the onboarding flow like
> Vevo?
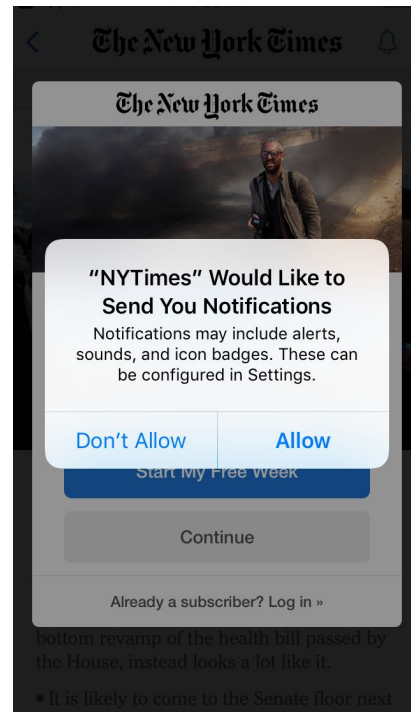
Source: [Vevo](#)

Driving Users to the Core In-App Action

Most onboarding flows aim to drive users to the app's Aha! moment - that core in-app action that unlocks the primary value, both for the user and the app - as soon as possible.

Pandora's onboarding flow ends with a home screen that focuses on one key action: creating a station. This core action is key to long term retention as well as monetization.

Unlike Pandora, which focuses on showcasing value before trying to upgrade users to a premium version, The New York Times focuses on upgrading users to a paid account from the start.

Like NYT, The Wall Street Journal also knows that the Aha! moment for new users is accessing the high quality content on the app.

> **Test Idea:** Which messaging, value propositions, and calls to action work best to entice users into achieving their core in-app action?
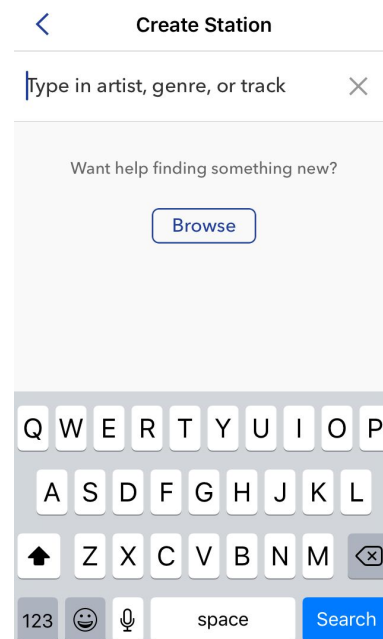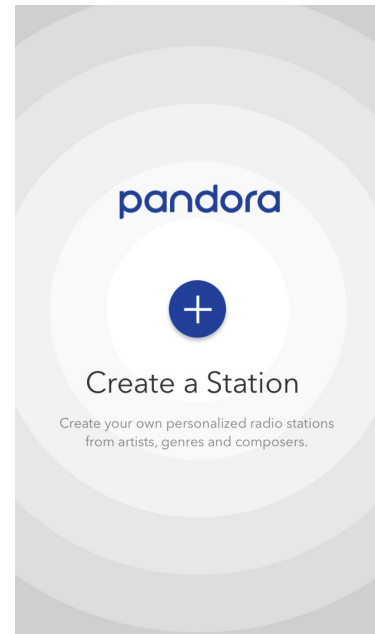
Source: Pandora
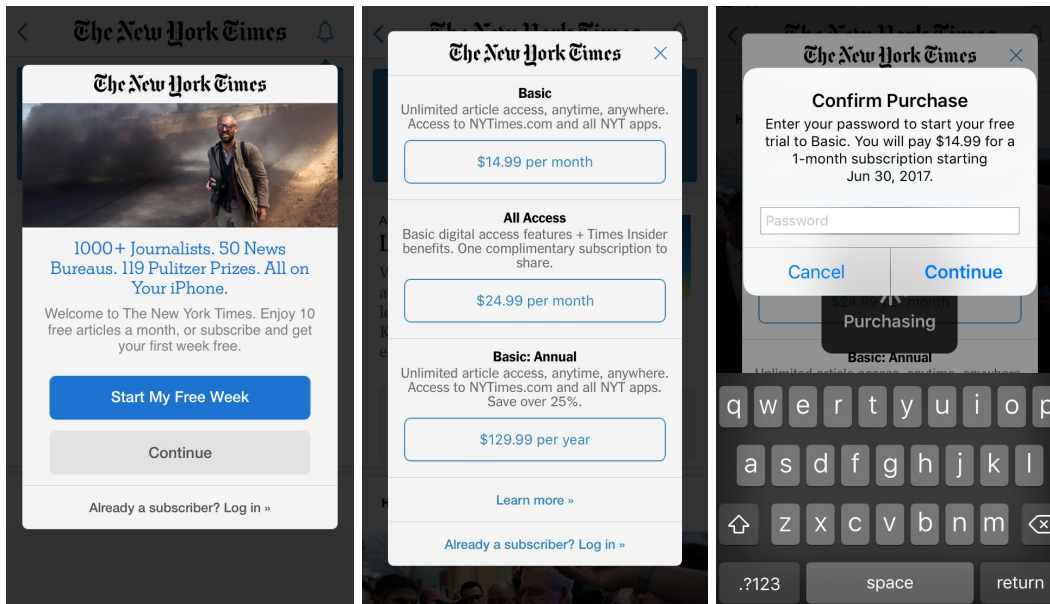
Source: The New York Times

Test Ideas: Can you eliminate steps from the conversion flow for the first critical in-app action? Does providing users multiple options to complete an action increase conversions or cause decision fatigue that leads to abandonment?

Source: The Wall Street Journal

Improve User Onboarding to Grow Your App

Optimizing your onboarding flow is a crucial part of activating a larger share of users that download your app and converting them into engaged, long-term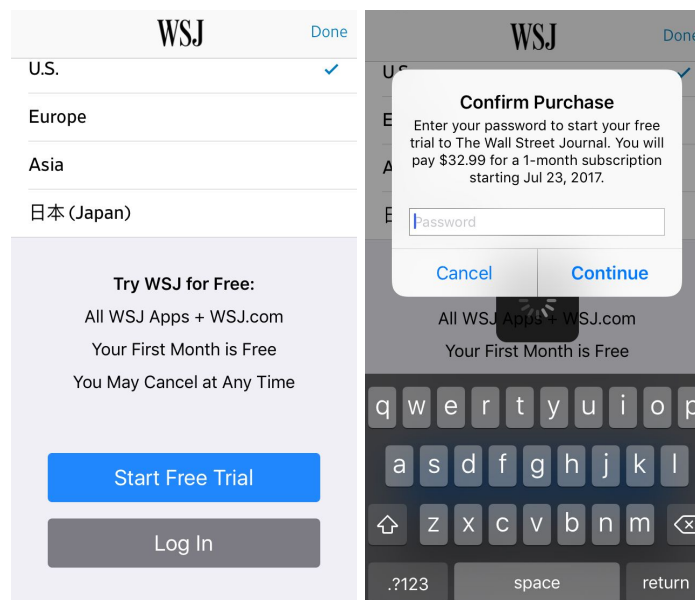 users. So whether you are thinking of adding self-reported demographic data or preferences (or even a combination of both, like ESPN) to kickstart a user's personalized experience, or trying to maximize signups on your welcome screen, here's how you can go about optimizing your onboarding flow:

1. **Test everything.** How much information should you ask? Does the added long-term benefit (increased engagement and retention) of each piece of user-information collected during the onboarding flow justify the cost incurred (fewer users due to drop-off) in collecting that information?

    From the business model to the user base, each app is wildly different. One-size-fits-all best practices rarely work. This guide isn't a list of best practices and probably left you with more ideas than answers. The only way to accurately answer these types of questions, and optimize your onboarding flow, is by testing.

2. **Don't stop at high-level results.** Sometimes your results may be counterintuitive until you dig in and see the whole picture. For example, maybe personalized recommendations have caused users to open less new content but actually spend more time on each piece that they do watch. A deeper analysis of test results can help you make a more informed impact that a change has on the LTV of users.

3. **Roll out in stages.** While the end goal of onboarding is to drive growth through better engagement and thus retention,introducing a new block of code into your app has potential risks from both a stability and usability standpoint. One way many mobile teams mitigate this risk is by using Feature Flags. Feature Flags enable teams to target features to specific users efficiently, or simply roll out a new feature in stages, starting with a small percentage of the overall user base.

ABOUT APPTIMIZE

Apptimize empowers product teams to efficiently run A/B tests, roll out and manage new features, and deliver personalized user experiences. Based in San Francisco, Apptimize is backed by US Venture Partners, Google Ventures, Y Combinator, and others.

Join companies like Vevo, Sky, and Wall Street Journal; fuel data-driven growth for your mobile app with the best-in-class mobile A/B testing.

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