First Impressions Matter

A Guide to Building Engaging Apps

^ppnovation

Contents

Opening Note

According to a Kleiner Perkins report, roughly **a quarter of global internet traffic** is due to the use of mobile apps. Users have become ruthlessly discerning about their apps, **deleting them within days** of downloading if the experience is poor.

To put it bluntly:

first impressions matter.

A phenomenon known as the halo effect explains the far-reaching impact first impressions can have. While getting acquainted with a brand, a customer who encounters a careless error, even if small or trivial, may then base their overarching opinion on that single mistake and form a negative sentiment towards the brand, taking their purchasing power elsewhere.

Fortunately, the **halo effect can also work in reverse**. Just as customers will remove an app without thinking twice if it doesn't meet their needs, they'll also spend upwards of 30% more on a brand that offers a stellar customer experience.

How to achieve that?

Build for **value.** Build for **engagement.**

At Appnovation, we've built digital solutions for large-scale global brands and new emerging players. One thing that holds true across industries and continents is that an app must provide immediate value to the customer so they actually want to use it.

Engagement success is often determined by your users' initial few interactions with your app. To aid you in perfecting these crucial experiences, we'll demonstrate how app engagement is handled within some of our key sectors. In this guide, you'll learn core principles to create a great first impression for your app.

App Considerations Checklist

- In Development

- Pre-Download

- First Experience

- Onboarding

- Retention

IN DEVELOPMENT

[ ] Find a Focus

It can be difficult to align disparate teams, especially on large projects, but it's imperative to define a clear purpose for your app right from the start so everyone builds towards a unified outcome. Go beyond just the solution and explore what's genuinely motivating your audience. Find your answer... and you find your app's focus.
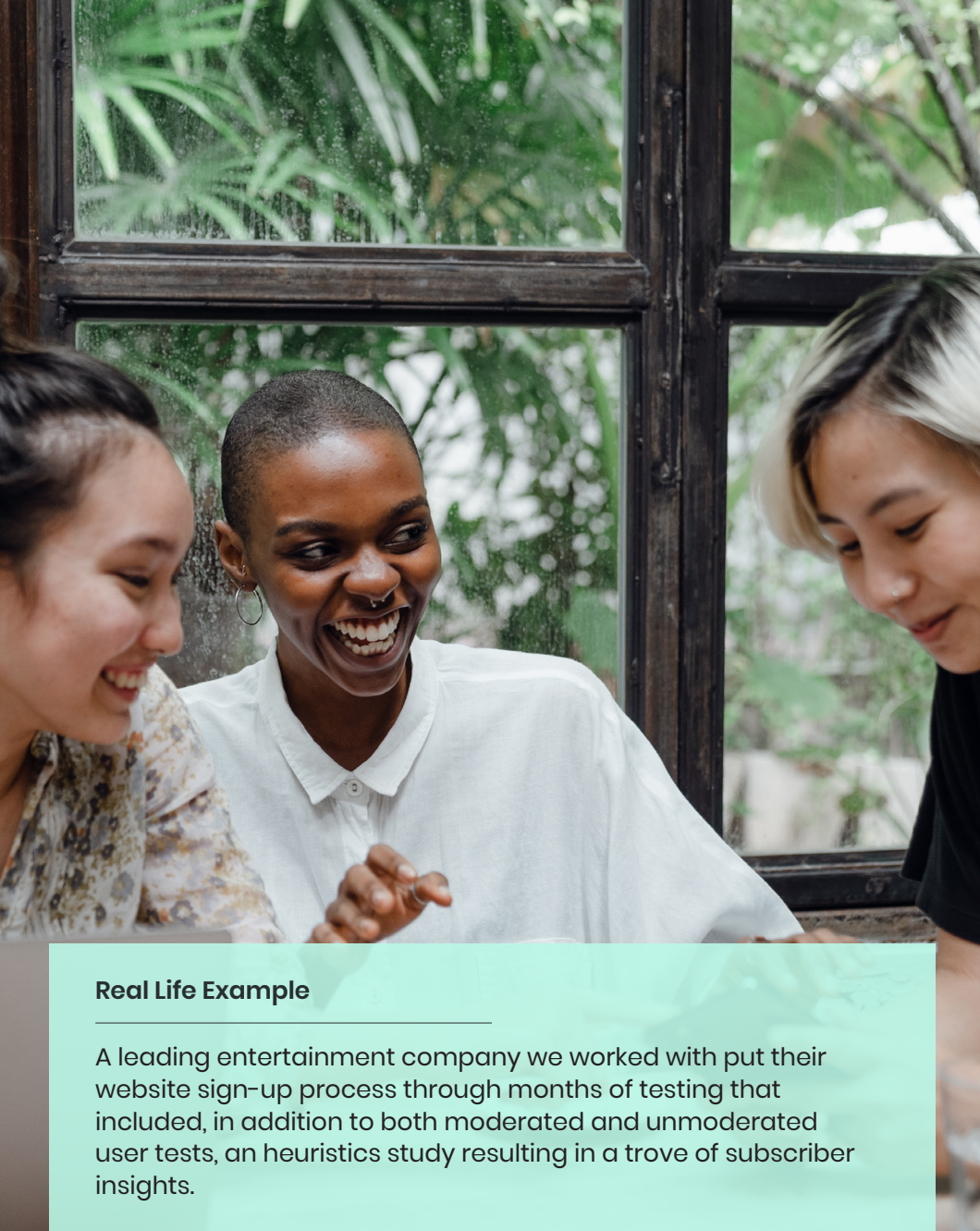

Real Life Example

Appnovation applies the "Jobs to be Done" technique to clarify the vision for their clients' solutions. The practice shifts the emphasis beyond the app's surface task to the fulfillment it will ultimately provide. For instance, for someone buying a drill, the Job to be Done isn't the actual purchase, it's the enjoyment they'll get from the artwork hanging on their wall.

IN DEVELOPMENT   PRE-DOWNLOAD   FIRST EXPERIENCE   ONBOARDING   RETENTION

[ ] Test Your Concept

It sounds simple enough, but have you designed a solution that definitely meets your audience's needs? Are you 100% certain they even want this app? The best way to know is by early testing, not just of the functionality, but of the concept itself, to validate that an app is definitely the ideal digital channel to engage with your intended audience.

Testing efforts shouldn't stop after your app has launched either. The idea is to make research a habit... not a phase. Though be careful not to overdo it. For user testing, five users are typically enough to identify issues; any more tends to deliver diminishing returns.

Real Life Example

A leading entertainment company we worked with put their website sign-up process through months of testing that included, in addition to both moderated and unmoderated user tests, an heuristics study resulting in a trove of subscriber insights.

IN DEVELOPMENT   PRE-DOWNLOAD   FIRST EXPERIENCE   ONBOARDING   RETENTION

PRE-DOWNLOAD

[ ] Convey the End Benefit, Not Features

Just as people judge books by their covers, users judge apps by their descriptions. Explain your unique value proposition (UVP) concisely. Keep it simple and focused. Use relevant keywords.

If your messaging easily answers the question of why someone should engage with your digital solution, you've hit your bullseye.

Real Life Example

App stores don't offer much space for text and users don't want to scroll endlessly to reach the point of your product, so brands must be thoughtful. Retailer Wish takes an intriguing, but effective approach by asking the question, "How is Wish so affordable?" as a lead-in to portraying their UVP.

The General Auto Insurance App punches their purpose in the first line of their description: "... manage your policy anywhere, at any time."

IN DEVELOPMENT   **PRE-DOWNLOAD**   FIRST EXPERIENCE   ONBOARDING   RETENTION

[ ] Don't Overlook the Release Notes

While not every user pays attention to what's included in each release, there are certainly some who do, and they may use that as an indication of your brand's overall level of care (as per the halo effect mentioned earlier). Sparse mentions of little more than generic bug fixes could be interpreted as a lack of interest in the maintenance of your app and cause the user to keep looking for alternative solutions.

Customers' research leads to what Google has termed the **"Zero Moment of Truth,"** and release notes could be that tipping point that determines whether or not a user decides to hit download.

Real Life Example

Whether or not a potential user is truly interested in the updates made, Lemonade Insurance's release notes are an entertaining read that somehow manage to work in the Rockettes, New Year's well-wishes and M&Ms.
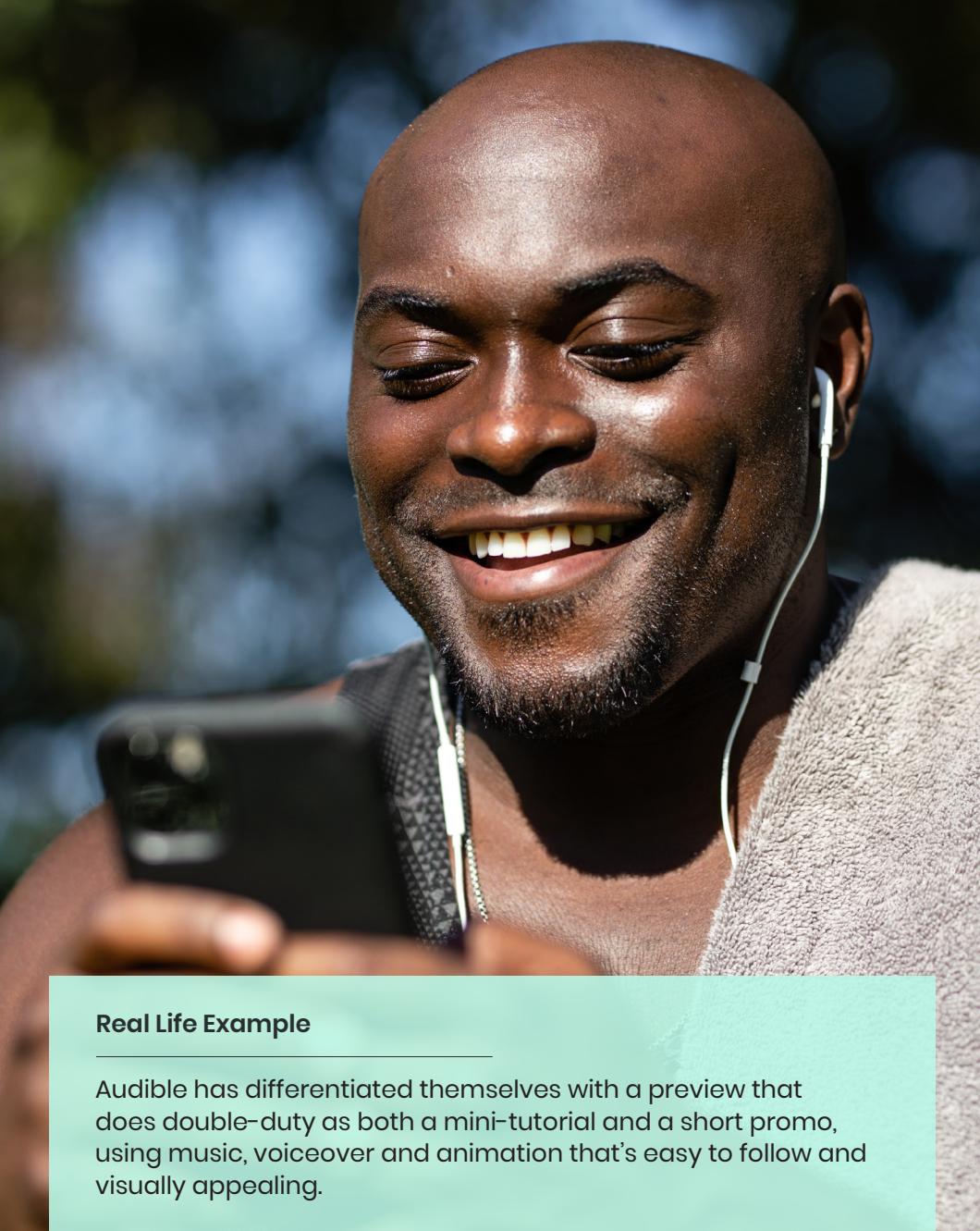
IN DEVELOPMENT **PRE-DOWNLOAD** FIRST EXPERIENCE ONBOARDING RETENTION

[ ] Stand Out by Tapping into New Trends

App stores are constantly evolving and one of the latest added features is preview videos, which have been shown to **increase conversions by over 20%.**

A well-crafted video can serve as a stunning first impression, building immediate engagement while also showing how the app works. Despite those obvious advantages, preview videos remain largely underutilized.

Real Life Example

Audible has differentiated themselves with a preview that does double-duty as both a mini-tutorial and a short promo, using music, voiceover and animation that's easy to follow and visually appealing.

IN DEVELOPMENT   **PRE-DOWNLOAD**   FIRST EXPERIENCE   ONBOARDING   RETENTION

FIRST EXPERIENCE

[ ] Try Before You Buy

Share a flavor of your app's experience before the customer commits to the download. If possible, offer your app for free–at least upfront. Or share some content that gives a sense of the total experience, without requiring them to hand over any personal data.

It's also generally a good idea to avoid blitzing people with ads. Doing so is more likely to build frustration than engagement.

Real Life Example

Headspace supports their customers from the first point of engagement, with free educational resources on managing stress, improving sleep and learning to meditate. Users get ample opportunity to build trust in the brand so they can confidently purchase the app.

IN DEVELOPMENT   PRE-DOWNLOAD   **FIRST EXPERIENCE**   ONBOARDING   RETENTION

ONBOARDING

[ ] Use Progressive Disclosure

After downloading an app, users want to get straight to, well... using it. Lower their interactive cost by letting them experience the solution's value as quickly as possible.

Instead of complex tutorials, use the **progressive disclosure technique,** which educates the customer about the app in small bites, possibly using streamlined content previews, accordion elements, megamenus, sliders or animated hints. Start with the basics and then disclose the more complicated aspects of the solution once the customer actually needs them.
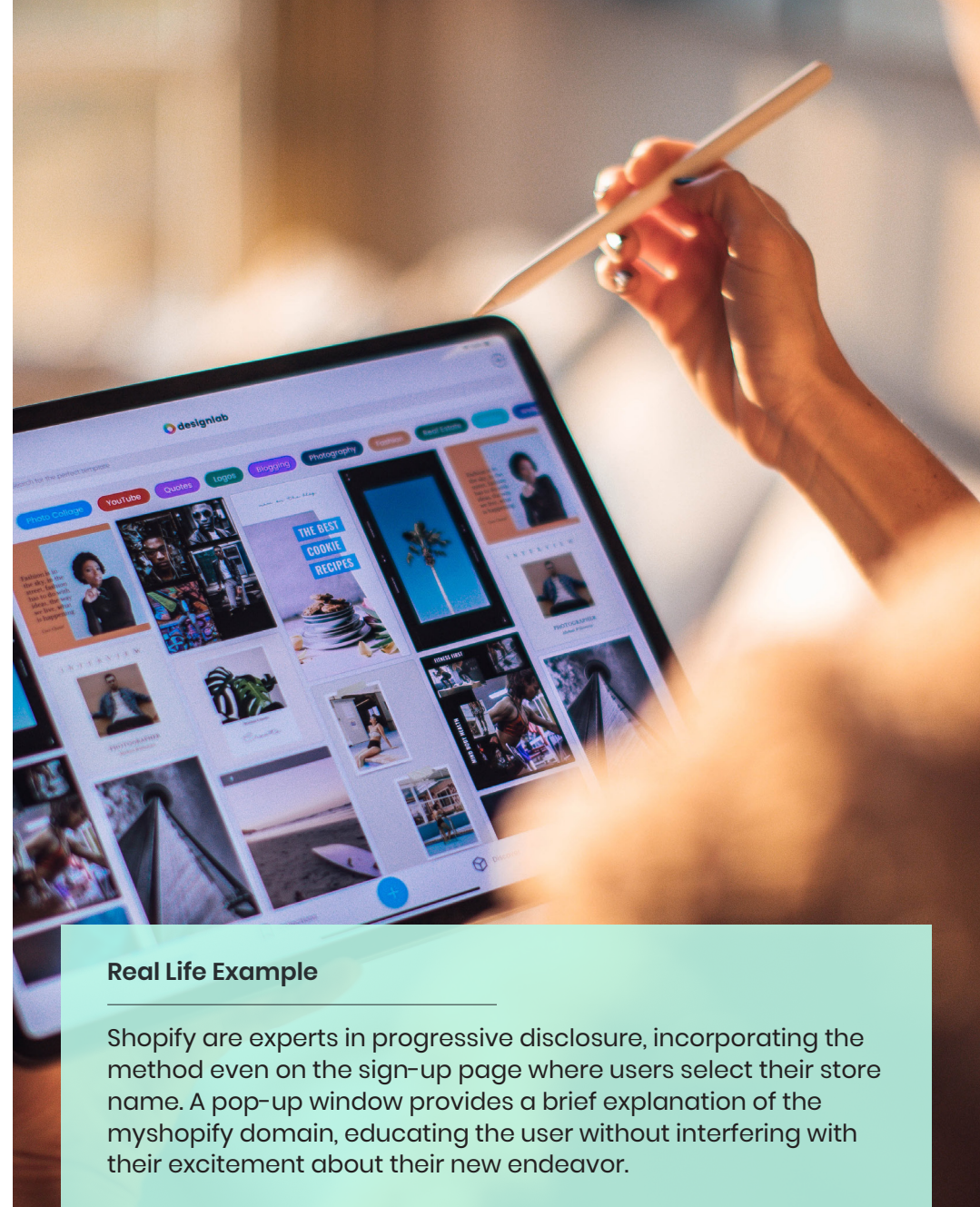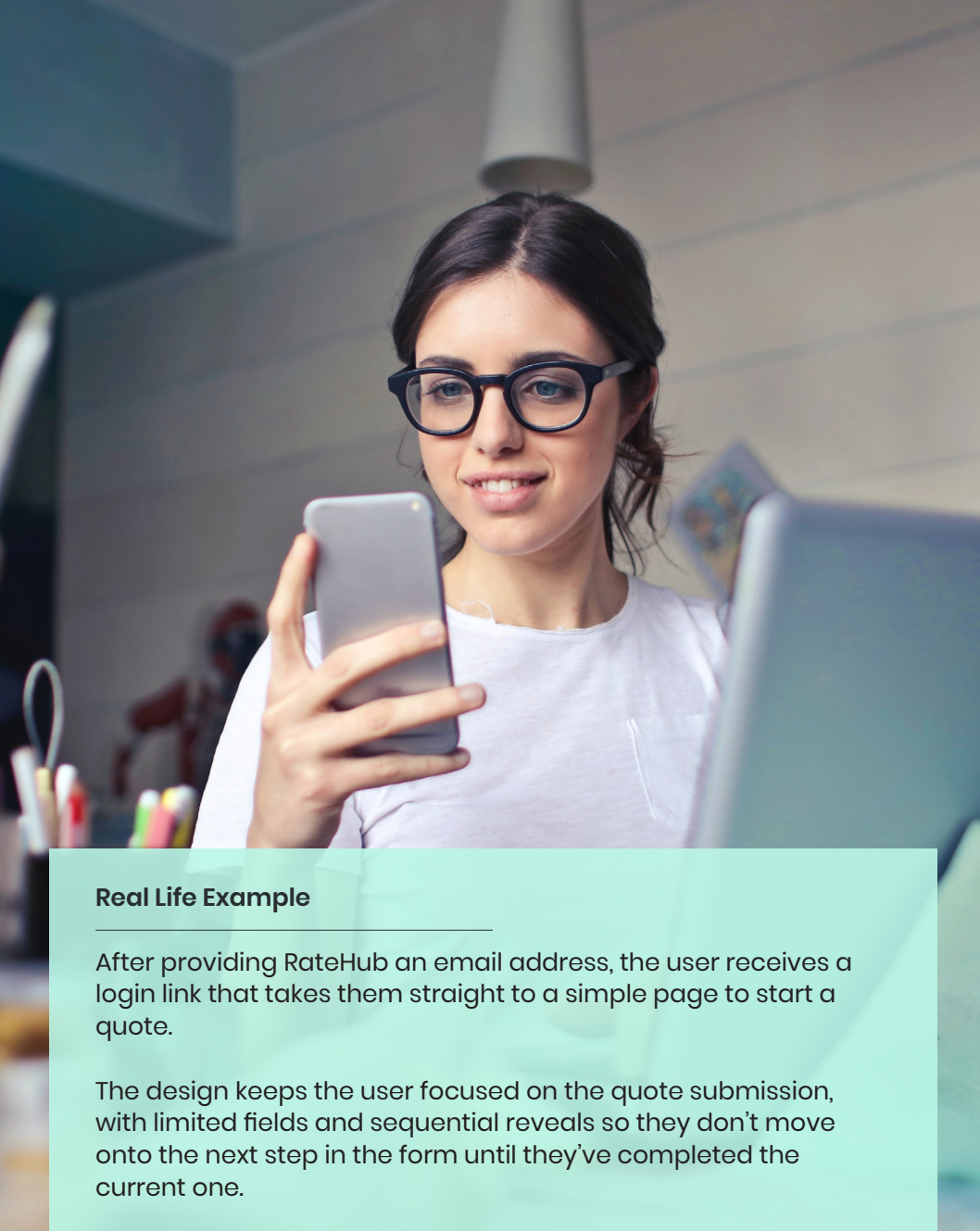
Real Life Example

Shopify are experts in progressive disclosure, incorporating the method even on the sign-up page where users select their store name. A pop-up window provides a brief explanation of the myshopify domain, educating the user without interfering with their excitement about their new endeavor.

IN DEVELOPMENT   PRE-DOWNLOAD   FIRST EXPERIENCE   **ONBOARDING**   RETENTION

[ ] For Essential Onboarding, Do Your Homework

There are times when some degree of onboarding is unavoidable, for instance if you need user information to get started, if the app is highly tailored to the users' context, or if the interface workflows are unique depending on the user's responses.

When registration processes are a necessity, ensure they're user-friendly and well-tested.

Real Life Example

After providing RateHub an email address, the user receives a login link that takes them straight to a simple page to start a quote.

The design keeps the user focused on the quote submission, with limited fields and sequential reveals so they don't move onto the next step in the form until they've completed the current one.

IN DEVELOPMENT   PRE-DOWNLOAD   FIRST EXPERIENCE   **ONBOARDING**   RETENTION

RETENTION

[ ] Prompt Action With Instant Reward

Once you've successfully gotten a customer to onboard your solution, welcome them in a way that provides instant gratification.

Show how their engagement directly leads to personalized rewards or results, rather than merely tell them their lives are about to improve.

[ ] Go Easy on Notifications

Push notifications, while a seemingly potent form of engagement, can instead do as the name implies and push users away–the exact opposite desired effect.

It's a difficult balance, particularly for digital health solutions that require regular inputs to monitor a chronic condition. If in doubt, err on the side of being conservative, and use purposeful messages to communicate with your audience.

Real Life Example

The Mighty offers online support for people facing health challenges, as well as those caring for them. As soon as they've joined, new members are immediately welcomed into the community via an invitation to make an introduction. Right away, they're made to feel like a part of the group, affirming they have found an online home.

Real Life Example

When customers join Enfamil's Family Beginnings program they need to provide some personal details, but for a very good reason.

Enfamil tailors their messages to the customer's situation and sends information relevant to whether they are expecting a baby, feeding a newborn or caring for a toddler.

IN DEVELOPMENT   PRE-DOWNLOAD   FIRST EXPERIENCE   ONBOARDING   **RETENTION**

Wrap Up

Tight on time? See the summary below for this guide's main takeaways.

DO

- Clarify the focus of your solution as early as possible.

- Run your concept by your intended audience - also as early as possible!

- Highlight your solution's main benefit.

- Consider a preview video.

- Offer a free preliminary experience or supplemental content.

- Use progressive disclosure to tell your audience what they need to know, when they need to know it.

- Instantly welcome new users with rewards or results.

DON'T

- Prioritize pushing features over the true needs of your customer.

- Clutter registration processes with too many questions. Users get discouraged quickly.

- Hinder the customer's initial experience with complex tutorials.

- Communicate needlessly. Messages should always have a purpose.

- Get lazy about releases. Some users do read the notes!

- Push customers away with overzealous ads or notifications.

- Build an app unless it's really the best solution for your audience.

Inevitably, despite your best efforts,

some user attrition is bound to occur, no matter how well-designed the solution. But a strong first impression undoubtedly contributes to committed customer engagement.

The considerations presented here can assist you in

building impactful, purposeful apps with longevity.

Get in touch today.

Talk to Us

We're always happy to discuss our ideas further! Get in touch to learn more about how our builders mindset can help you create the most engaging digital solutions for your business.

About Appnovation

We are a global full service digital partner that builds purposeful digital solutions that deliver real impact today and serve as strong foundations for future growth.

Anton Morrison
Vice President, Experience Design
antonm@appnovation.com

Steve Peretz
Group Director, Health Experience & Product Strategy
steve.peretz@appnovation.com

appnovation