

A large, faint, light blue watermark of the Kahuna logo is visible in the background on the left side of the slide.

DEFINITIVE GUIDE

PUSH 101: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CRAFTING PERFECT PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Kahuna is a mobile marketing automation company dedicated to fostering customer delight and driving user engagement and revenue.

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Why should I read this guide?

Push notifications are the building blocks of any great mobile marketing strategy, but sending the perfect push isn't as simple as it may seem.

If you are a mobile marketer or product manager looking to learn more about using push notifications effectively, you've come to the right place. Push 101 is a beginner's guide to crafting great push notifications. Let this be your compass to master the basics and discover what push notifications can do for you and your app.

PART 1:

THE ANATOMY OF A PUSH NOTIFICATION

PART 1: THE ANATOMY OF A PUSH NOTIFICATION

Let's start with the basics

What is a push notification?

Definition of a push notification: a type of message sent from an application to a device, most commonly used by mobile apps to deliver pertinent information to their mobile users. Push notifications appear as alert-style messages on the home screen of a user's device. The user does not need to have the app open or running to receive a notification from that app. Push notifications are available through all operating systems: iOS, Android, and more.

It is important to understand that push notifications are more than just another mobile messaging channel. Push notifications provide mobile apps with a unique opportunity to engage and communicate with their users, when used correctly.

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How should mobile apps use push notifications?

Mobile apps should use push notifications to enhance the product experience and drive user engagement and revenue. To do this, push notifications need to convey information that users need or want to receive. There are two types of push notifications that every mobile app should be sending: transactional and engagement.

Apps use transactional push notifications to deliver information that users need to receive at a specific time. For example, travel apps should use transactional push notifications to send a message about a flight update or gate change, while financial services apps should use transactional push notifications to send a message about a bank account update or fraudulent charge alert.

Apps should use engagement push notifications to deliver information that drives users to complete key virtuous actions—for example, making a purchase, sharing on social, completing an onboarding event, and more. When crafted correctly, this type of push notification can have significant impact on long-term user retention, engagement, and lifetime value. The important thing to consider is every user is different, and users should only receive engagement push notifications that are uniquely personalized and relevant to them.

PART 1: THE ANATOMY OF A PUSH NOTIFICATION

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What are all of the components of a push notification?

The image below highlights the key features of a push notification sent through iOS:



1. Title: Indicates who is sending the push notification.

2. Icon: Also indicates who is sending the push notification.

3. Text: Displays what the push notification is saying. The iOS banner display shows only the first 60 characters and the Android banner display shows only the first 45 characters. Make sure the content of the notification is concise and compelling.

Swipe: Allows the user to take action immediately after they swipe. Swiping on a push notification directs the user into the app, in some cases into a specific or unique page in the app.

PART 1: THE ANATOMY OF A PUSH NOTIFICATION

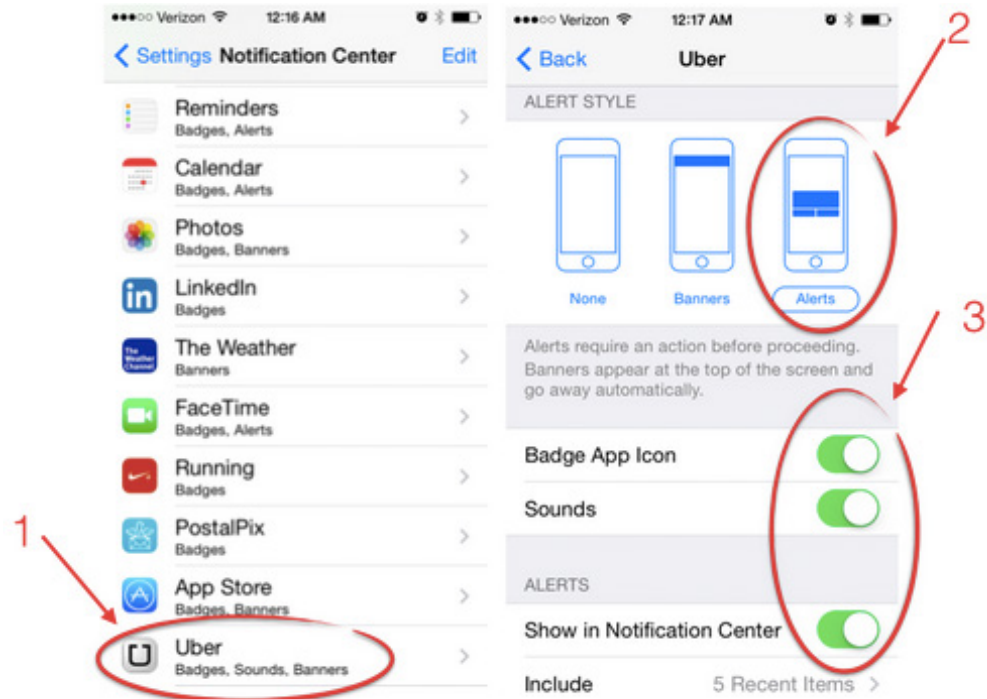
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How are push notifications controlled? How do users enable or disable them?

Push notifications sent through iOS are controlled from the notification center in the Settings section of the device. iOS users have a great deal of control when it comes to enabling or disabling push notifications, as they can be turned off or on by the user at any time. Additionally, before iOS apps can send push notifications to a specific user, they must ask and receive permission from that user. [Read more about the best practices for ensuring users opt in to receive your push notifications.](#)

Steps 1, 2, and 3 show how an iOS user can easily adjust their push notification settings:



PART 1: THE ANATOMY OF A PUSH NOTIFICATION

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Push notifications sent through Android are also controlled from the notification center in the Settings section of the device. One key difference is that Android apps are not required to ask for permission before sending push notifications. In this case, the onus is on the user to opt out of receiving notifications from a specific app by adjusting their notification preferences.

How can apps adjust the push notifications they send? What levers can be pulled?

Push notifications have become the primary tool for driving mobile engagement, and winning apps have learned to take advantage of the many levers they can pull to create and send push notifications that delight. These levers include:

- User segmentation: which users should receive the push notification?
- Content, copy and personalization: what should the push notification say? How can it be effectively personalized?
- Timing: when should each user receive the push notification?
- After the push: what happens after the notification is received?

Later in the series, we will break down the best practices for each of these key areas.

PART 2:

TARGETING THE RIGHT USERS

PART 2: TARGETING THE RIGHT USERS

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Let's start with the basics

Push notifications offer apps and brands the rare opportunity to establish 1:1 relationships with their mobile users. As such, it is important to develop a smart strategy that protects the user experience and preserves their trust. Your notifications must be tailored to the users receiving them, and the ability to target specific individuals and types of individuals is critical to achieving this. Read on to learn more about creating the right user segments and an aligned push notification strategy.

What is user segmentation?

Definition of user segmentation: a method of dividing users into smaller groups based on factors such as demographic information and user behavior. This allows you to communicate with users in a hyper-targeted manner.

Why is user segmentation important?

Segmenting your users before you message them ensures that they receive information that is relevant and valuable to them. The old fashioned “spray and pray” approach to marketing is especially dangerous when applied to push notifications and often catalyzes users to disengage with the app.

PART 2: TARGETING THE RIGHT USERS

Achieving your goals with segmentation

How can segmentation increase user engagement?

Group users by actions they have or have not taken and develop a messaging strategy designed to drive users to perform these key actions.

How can segmentation increase user retention?

Group users by level of engagement with your app and implement a messaging strategy that keeps them connected or inspires them to reconnect with your app.

How can segmentation increase user conversions and purchases?

Group users by whether they have purchased or not, or purchased one time or more, and message these users differently to inspire a first or repeat purchase.

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PART 2: TARGETING THE RIGHT USERS

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Effective user segmentation

There are many ways to segment your users, ranging from the most basic forms of segmentation to more advanced user groupings. The best practice for mobile brands is to implement **behavior-based user segmentation**. This allows for communication with users in a hyper-targeted way.

The basics of behavior-based user segmentation:

Ask and answer these questions to create simple, yet powerful, segments of users.

- **What are the key actions that I am driving users to complete?**

Identifying the key user behaviors you are hoping to encourage will allow you to create small segments (micro-segments) of users who have not yet completed these actions. You can then send a push notification to a specific user segment, encouraging them to take the action they have not yet completed.

Example Segment: Users who have not signed up.

Example Message: "Register now for exclusive access to daily deals."

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- **What behaviors do my top users exhibit?**

What behavioral commonalities do your power users share? Once you pinpoint these behaviors, you can then group users depending on whether they have or have not exhibited these behaviors.

Example Segment: App identifies 3+ purchases as the threshold for a power user. App creates a segment of users who have purchased less than 3 times.

Example Message: “You’re almost a power user! Take 10% off your next purchase and achieve VIP status.”

- **When do my users drop off?**

User churn is a critical issue facing all mobile brands. To address this, you must identify the points in the engagement funnel at which users fall off. Use these points to create different groupings of users.

Example Segment: New users who have not returned to your app in 7 days.

Example Message: “Did you know live video updates are available in the app?”

PART 2: TARGETING THE RIGHT USERS

Anything else I need to know about user segmentation and push notifications?

Deducing the virtuous actions you would like your mobile users to complete will allow you to develop a custom segmentation strategy and communicate with your users in a tailored way. A sophisticated push notification system enables you to easily create an unlimited number of user segments, so you can master the basics and expand from there. For more information, check out the [Top 8 Push Notification Campaigns By User Segment](#).

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PART 3:

CONTENT IS KING

PART 3: CONTENT IS KING

Let's start with the basics

Mobile has proven itself to be an opportunity and a challenge for many of the same reasons. The ubiquity of mobile phones and tablets allows brands to connect with consumers in a uniquely personal way, but as a result, mobile messages are held to a much higher standard. Not all messages are created equal, and when it comes to push notifications, only the best ones resonate. So how do you craft a winning notification? Content that inspires and delights is a critical component.

What makes great content? Why is this important?

Great message content represents valuable information that drives positive user action and inspires delight.

Push notifications have the ability to catalyze immediate action, but users will only take action if the message itself is both relevant and compelling.

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PART 3: CONTENT IS KING

How is great content created?

When it comes to content, every push notification should be optimized in these three ways:

- What to say (subject matter)
- How to say it (copy)
- How to make it stick (personalization)

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Crafting great content

Figuring out what to say:

Users have a limited tolerance for receiving push notifications, and mobile apps need to make every message count. Since you can only send a limited number of notifications before users react negatively to over-messaging, the fundamentals of what is being said in each notification is especially important. Not sure what to say? Use these simple steps to determine what to include in your message:

- **Set a goal:** Push notifications should always be crafted with a specific reason in mind. Ask and answer the question, “What is the end goal of this push notification?” before you begin creating the message. Some example goals would be “inspire purchasing,” “catalyze social sharing,” or “complete key onboarding actions.”
- **Define the value proposition:** Once you know what you want the push notification to accomplish, construct a message that will prompt the user to fulfill the goal. Ask and answer the question, “What would inspire the user to complete this action?” and highlight this value proposition in the message. For example, users might be inspired to make a purchase if they receive a promotion code or learn that a favorite item is back in stock.

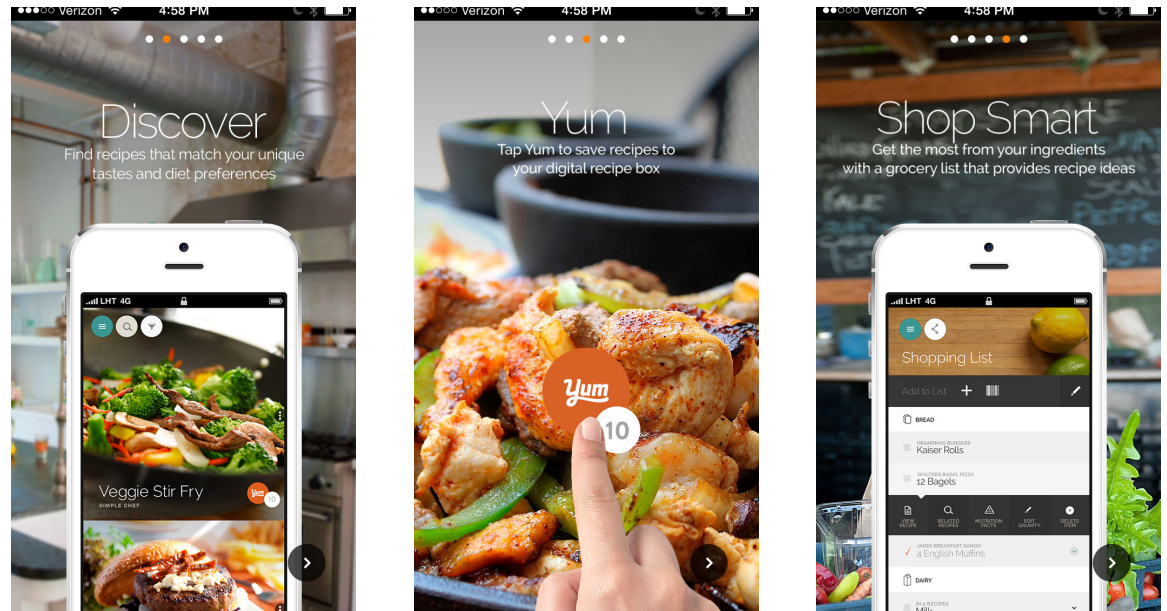
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Case study

When it comes to push notifications, Yummly has it down to a science. Yummly is a leading web and mobile recipe service with over 15 million monthly active users. Yummly works with Kahuna to onboard their mobile users, using push notifications to ensure users take the key onboarding actions that catalyze a sticky product experience and strong future engagement.



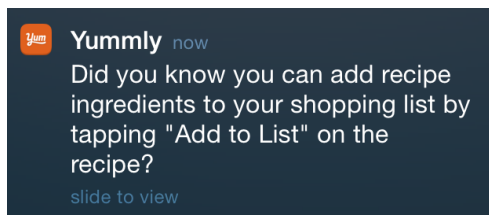
In order to become a long-term, valuable customer, there are three things that every Yummly user must do once they download the mobile app. These actions are: “Add dietary preferences,” “favorite five recipes,” and “add a recipe to the shopping list”. The Yummly onboarding flow is represented in the images above.

PART 3: CONTENT IS KING

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Case study (continued)



Here you can see how Yummly focuses the content of their push notifications to inspire these key onboarding actions.

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Making it sing

Great copy is a “must-have” when it comes to push notifications. The mobile experience is inherently intimate, and a push notification will elicit a visceral reaction from the user receiving it. The reaction can be extremely positive or extremely negative, and message copy often pushes the response one way or the other. Let the “4Cs” serve as your compass when writing great copy.

Great copy for push notifications must be:

- **Clear:** There is no room for ambiguity in a message as brief as a push notification. Make sure users understand what is being said, what they should do, and why they should do it.
- **Compelling:** Mobile enables the user to “act now,” and the message copy should be compelling enough to inspire this mentality in the user receiving the push notification.
- **Concise:** Push notifications display only 40-65 characters on the device home screen, meaning it is important to make every character count. Brief, pithy messages perform much better than drawn out prose.
- **Clever:** It is difficult to overstate the importance of this final aspect, as clever copy is the best way to make your push notifications stand out from the crowd. Win over your audience and preserve your brand voice using creative rhetoric.

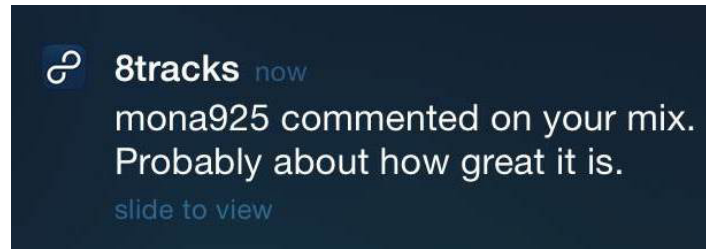
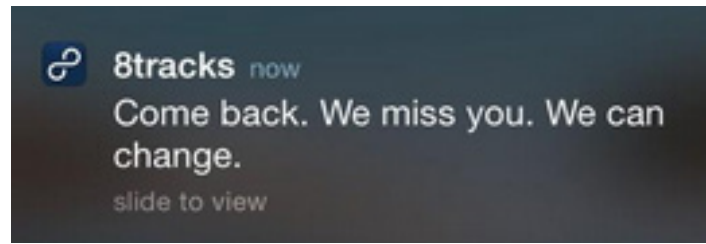
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Case study

Ads-free music service 8tracks has made a name for itself by crafting some of the best push notifications in the business.



These cleverly written push notifications elicit tremendous user engagement and generate countless organic app downloads as users continue to share their delight across social media.

PART 3: CONTENT IS KING

Making it stick

Mobile is personal, and push notifications must be personalized to the users receiving them.

You know things are going well when: A user sees the push notification and thinks, "This message was meant for me."

Alternatively, disaster strikes when: A user sees the push notification and thinks, "This message was probably sent to 50,000 other people."

The best way to accomplish message personalization at scale is to include at least one phrase in the message that is custom to the user receiving the notification. For those of you who are familiar with email merge fields or old fashioned mail merges, this is the same concept, only applied to push notifications.

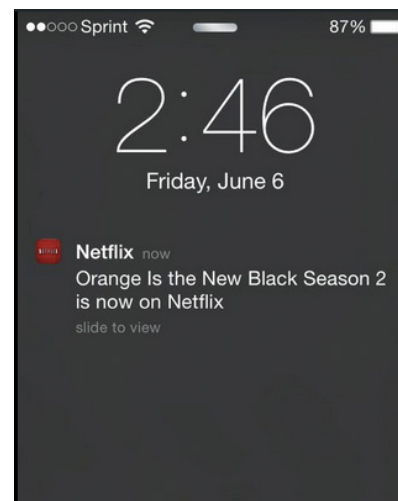
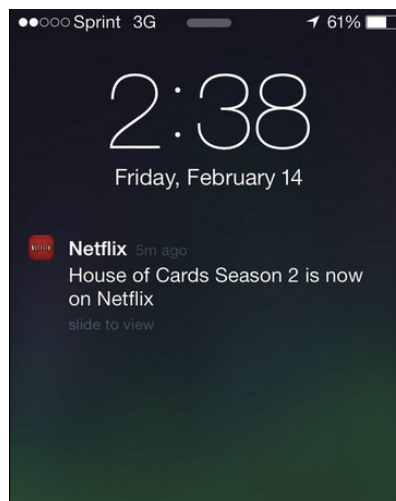
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PART 3: CONTENT IS KING

Case study

Netflix does a great job of personalizing their push notifications. Here's how they do it:



As you can see, Netflix uses push notifications to let users know when their favorite shows are available. Rather than sending every user a notification every time a new series is released, they only send one notification to each user. Each user receives a perfectly personalized message about the specific series that they have been watching.

Message personalization is critical to generating great content, but it requires that your push notification system understand your users across platforms and devices, and in real time. For more information on using data to personalize your mobile marketing, check out this webinar: [“Treating Your Mobile Users Like People: Using Data To Understand Your Always-Connected Customers.”](#)

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PART 3: CONTENT IS KING

Taking it to the next level

How do you make great content even better? Test it out! Now that you know all about crafting a great message, consider taking a more advanced approach using [A-to-E message testing](#). Testing is a critical piece of a sophisticated strategy, as even the slightest change in word choice can make a significant difference in the effectiveness of a message. And the winning version may surprise you. Later in the guide, we'll show you some real results of A-to-E tests and which push notifications won out.

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PART 4:

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

PART 4: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

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Let's start with the basics

Why is message timing important?

Just because you can access your mobile users immediately and at all times, doesn't mean you should. The horror stories about waking up to a mistimed push notification abound, and users are not forgiving. In today's mobile-first world, it is the brand's responsibility to communicate important information without causing unwarranted disruption to the user. Making sure that your push notifications arrive at the right time is a critical component of modern marketing.

What time is the right time?

A successful push notification strategy approaches message timing from the perspective of the end user. When would the user appreciate receiving the information conveyed in the push notification?

Great timing should consider both user preference and the urgency of the message. Read on to learn how to deliver push notifications that minimize disruption and maximize delight.

PART 4: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

How does the type of push notification affect timing strategy?

There are two types of push notifications—transactional and engagement. Transactional push notifications convey information that a user expects to receive, such as a receipt or calendar reminder. These push notifications typically include time-sensitive information, and the context of the notification dictates the time at which it must arrive.

Engagement push notifications are marketing messages. When done right, these notifications deliver valuable content and keep users engaged with your app. Considering every user keeps a different schedule, the only solution is to send this type of push notification at the time when each user is most likely to engage with your app.

Read on for a deeper dive into making sure every push notification arrives at just the right time.

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PART 4: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

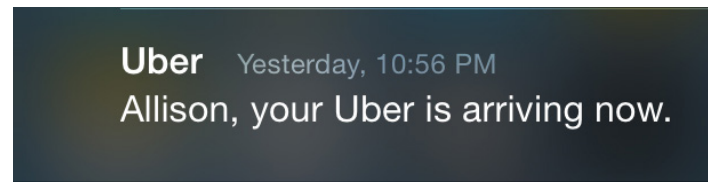
Timing best practices

Best practices for transactional notifications

Transactional push notifications are the building blocks of the user's app experience. They build trust between you and your users as they deliver essential information exactly when the user needs to receive it. The timing of this type of push notification is dictated by an external event—a taxi arrival or flight update, for example.

Example

This is one of Uber's most sent push notifications.



The transactional nature of the push notification makes it obvious that the message must arrive at a specific time and not a moment too late.

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PART 4: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

How can I be sure that my transactional messages will arrive on time?

Take a hard look at the delivery speed of your push notification system. This tells you the number of messages that can be delivered per minute. When hundreds of thousands of Uber cars are arriving per minute, can Uber ensure that every message goes out without delay? Depending on the size of your user base, this can be a significant challenge that is often overlooked.

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PART 4: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Best practices for engagement notifications

When it comes to engagement push notifications, the strategy around message timing is equally important. If your marketing goal is engagement or revenue, your customers must want to receive your notifications. As a result, every engagement notification needs to arrive at the preferred time for each user.

It can be tempting to think about sending these types of messages all at once, or scheduling these messages to arrive at a specific time per time zone. Now, think harder. 8 AM is Dave's yoga class, 9 AM is Leah's standing office meeting and 7 PM could be when Raheem is putting his son to bed. A push notification sent at a bad time is one of the best ways to ruin the user experience and potentially lose a user forever.

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PART 4: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

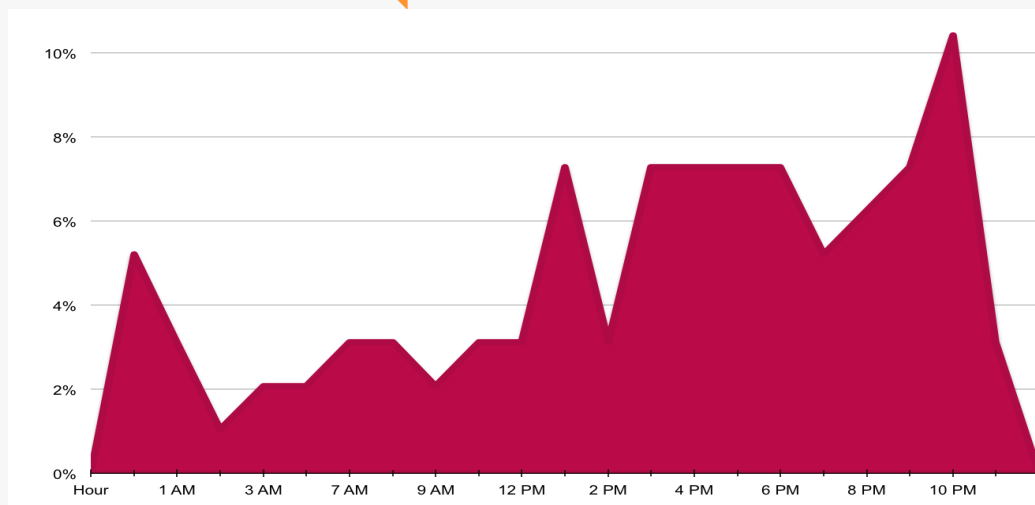
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Example:

This graph reveals the optimal message send time for an app with tens of millions of monthly active users.

Best time to send a push notification



As you can see, 10pm is the time at which the most number of users are engaged with the app. But perhaps even more interesting, there is no clear winning time. At 10pm, nearly 90% of users are not using the app or interested in receiving a push notification.

The important takeaway is that every user is different. Users keep different schedules and have varying patterns of usage. The only solution is to ensure that every push notification arrives at the unique time of day when each user prefers to engage with your app.

PART 4: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

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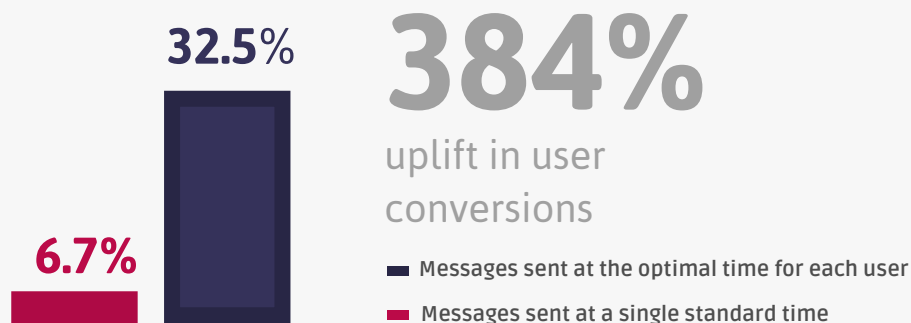
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How difficult is this to implement? Does personalized message delivery really make a difference?

Sending a message at a specific time for each user requires that your push notification system have a way to understand your users' behavior and usage patterns. This may sound complicated, but there are easy ways to automate personalized message delivery. [Learn more about how Kahuna can do this for you with Send Optimally™.](#)

384% uplift using Send Optimally™

Mobile conversions



The results of this strategy are undeniable. Kahuna's analysis across millions of messages has shown that messages that arrive at the preferred time of day for each user perform, on average, 384% better than messages that arrive all at one time.

PART 4: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Anything else I need to know about message timing?

There's always more to know, and now that you've mastered the basics, consider tackling more advanced concepts. For example, consider optimizing your time delays. If a user does one action (adds to cart) but not another (completes a purchase), how long should you wait to send them a push notification? Read more about this functionality on the [Kahuna blog](#).

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PART 5:

AFTER THE PUSH

PART 5: AFTER THE PUSH

Let's start with the basics

So you just sent a push notification—congratulations! It can be tempting to assume that your work is done, but alas, while the push notification has been sent to the user, the user's experience with the push has only just begun. It is important to make sure the entire experience delights the user and catalyzes the desired outcome. It isn't over until it's over.

What happens to the user after they click through?

Push notifications have the ability to fast-track the user from passion to purchase and to catalyze instantaneous action. Every push notification should provide relevant and timely information, but it is equally important that personalization continues after the user engages with or clicks through the notification.

One great way to accomplish this is by utilizing dynamic deep linking. If your app is configured for deep linking, this feature will enable you to extend the curated user experience and facilitate the desired user action.

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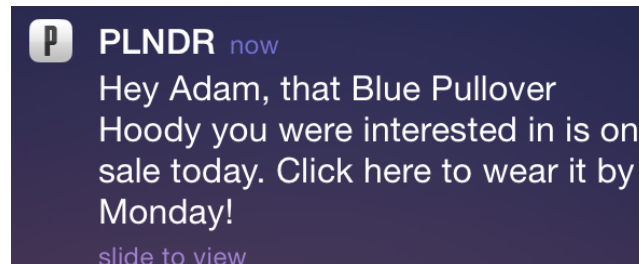
Deep linking and dynamic deep linking in action:

Deep linking provides the ability to bring users directly into a specific static location within the app. If your app is configured for deep linking, leveraging this technology will facilitate a seamless user experience, directing users further down the conversion funnel.

Dynamic deep linking takes this one important step further. Rather than directing all users to the same page, dynamic deep linking allows you to send a user a specific page, unique to that individual user.

Example

E-commerce app PLNDR uses push notifications to remind users about items left in their digital shopping carts. As you can see, each user receives a personalized notification referencing the specific item in their personal cart.



Through dynamic deep linking, each user can be directed to their specific shopping cart page within the app. This enables a one-click to purchase experience, rather than requiring users to log-in or take additional steps to return to their mobile carts.

PART 5: AFTER THE PUSH

What if my app hasn't implemented deep linking?

If deep linking has not been implemented, users will be sent directly to the app's home page. This does not render your push notification ineffective or obsolete, as you can include a distinct call to action that will instruct the user where to go in the app.

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PART 5: AFTER THE PUSH

Tracking & Evaluating the Effectiveness of Push Notifications

How do I evaluate the effectiveness of push notifications?

Now that you have architected a cohesive post-push experience for your users, how do you know if the notification is a success? The basic formula for evaluating the effectiveness of a push notification is as follows:

1. Did the push notification drive users to take the desired action?
2. Did the push notification enhance and enrich the user's app experience?

Both aspects are equally important when evaluating the success of the push notification. Next, we'll discuss what metrics to focus on and which to cast aside.

Which metrics should I track to validate this?

Goal achievement: A critical part of push marketing is knowing how to measure its efficacy. The most important benchmark for evaluating Question 1—"Did the push notification drive users to take the desired action?"—is goal achievement. The specific goal being measured should be defined well before sending the push notification, as different notifications will be driving toward different goals. Examples of "goal achievement" metrics include: social shares, purchases, revenue, sign-ins, cart additions, and more. Basic response tracking like open rates and click-throughs are not sufficient to gauge the effectiveness of the push notification.

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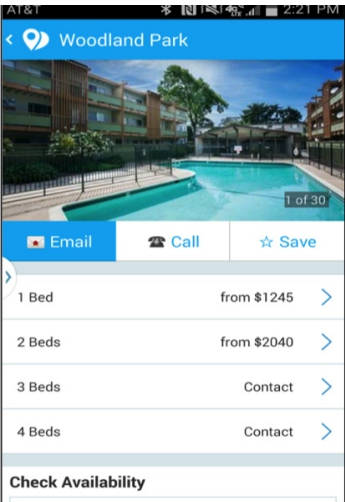
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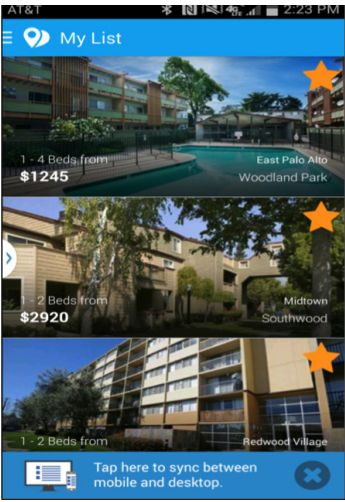
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Case study

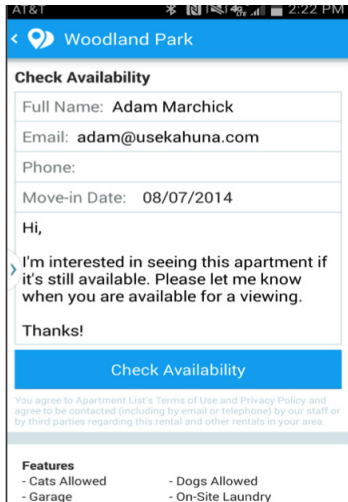
Apartment List, a leading web and mobile apartment-hunting service, uses sophisticated goal tracking to ensure their notifications effectively inspire their mobile apartment-seekers.



Find



Organize



Contact

In order to become a long-term, valuable customer, there are three things that every Apartment List user must do once they download the mobile app. These actions are: “find a listing,” “organize listing searches,” and “contact a listing”. The Apartment List onboarding flow is represented in the images above.

PART 5: AFTER THE PUSH

Find



apartment list now

New listings added every day -
view them before they're gone!

[slide to view](#)

Organize



apartment list 2m ago

Add listings to My List to organize
your search in one place!

Contact



apartment list 1m ago

Pro tip: Contact your favorite
listings within the first week to
achieve the best results!

Here you can see how Apartment List focuses the content of their push notifications to inspire these key onboarding actions. Each of these push notifications is evaluated based on the specific goal it is prompting the user to complete. These goals correspond to the three onboarding actions—"find a listing", "organize listing searches," and "contact a listing."

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PART 5: AFTER THE PUSH

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Which metrics should I track to validate this (continued)?

User engagement: An important metric for evaluating Question 2—“Did the push notification enhance and enrich the user’s app experience?”—is the number of users who re-engaged with your app after receiving the push notification. Every push you send should prompt users to re-engage at the next level, turning monthly users into weekly users, weekly users into daily users, and daily users into rabid users and brand advocates.

App uninstalls & push opt-outs: Another important metric for evaluating Question 2—“Did the push notification enhance and enrich the user’s app experience?”—is the number of app uninstalls or push opt-outs that have been generated as a result of the notification. There can be a tendency to track only positive metrics, and this is a big mistake. Tracking the potentially negative ramifications of a push notification is the best way to know how users really feel about the push. When you are measuring this number in real time, it’s easy to adjust or cancel any detrimental push notification campaigns before it’s too late.

Anything else I should know about best practices for tracking and reporting?

Push notifications are one of the most effective forms of customer marketing and should be evaluated with the rigor applied to traditional online marketing. Set the right goals and make sure you have reporting capabilities that reveal honest and actionable results. Your push notification system should take care of this for you. To learn more about Kahuna’s robust campaign reporting, [please visit our website](#).

CONCLUSION

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Key takeaways and final recap

Push notifications that add real value to your users' lives are critical to ensuring your app comes out on top in the exciting future of mobile. Make sure you understand these key takeaways as you embark on the road to sending great push notifications:

- Mobile apps use push notifications to enhance the product experience and drive user engagement and revenue.
- Segmenting users before you message them ensures that they receive information that is relevant and valuable to them.
- Push notifications have the ability to catalyze immediate action, but users will only take action if the message itself is relevant and compelling.
- A successful push notification strategy approaches message timing from the perspective of the end user.
- A critical part of push marketing is knowing how to measure its efficacy by tracking the right metrics.

Making sure your push notifications delight your users is a high-stakes game. People are solidifying their preferences for their go-to apps, and your mobile communications must be strategic and personalized to win their allegiance.

CONCLUSION

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About Kahuna

Kahuna is a mobile marketing automation company dedicated to fostering user delight and driving engagement and revenue through mobile. We help companies understand and intelligently communicate with customers wherever they are: email, mobile web and apps, and social networks. We believe there is magic in delivering the right message to the right customer at just the right time.

Kahuna is trusted by Yahoo, Fox, Hotel Tonight, and hundreds of others. The company was founded in 2012 and is funded by Sequoia Capital.

Want to learn more about Kahuna?

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