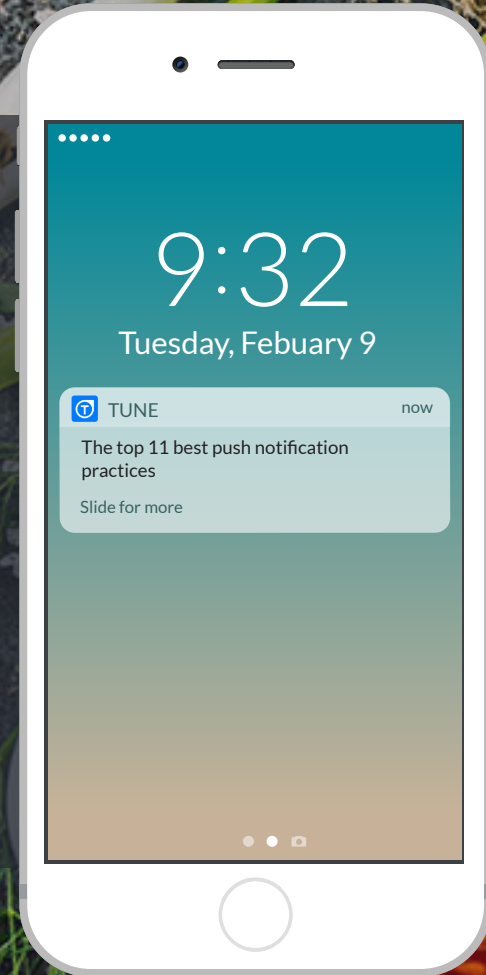


MOBILE MARKETING COOKBOOK:

Whip up the best push notification strategy

TUNE



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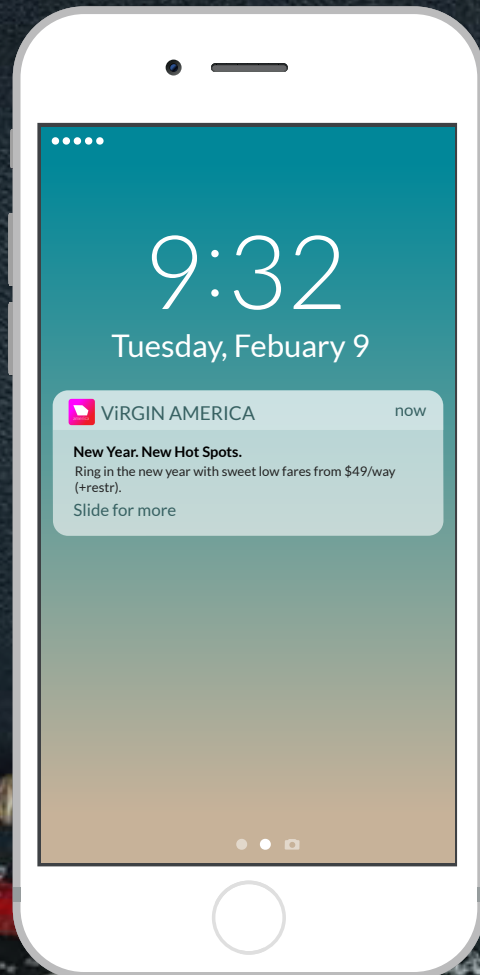
In mobile marketing, only being great at user acquisition isn't really going to work any longer.

To really excel, marketers have to be able to focus on engaging users – we're talking about push notifications. The good news is that there's still a lot of room for improvement when it comes to push notifications. Even some big brands aren't heeding basic push principles and are asking users to accept notifications without telling them why they need them, and not personalizing messages. Marketers who are pulling ahead in push should be given a gold badge of mobile marketing honor because it means they understand their audience. With mobile ad spend topping \$100 billion worldwide in 2016¹, failing to communicate with users can get pricey and competitive.

There isn't one concrete recipe to follow when it comes to push notification strategy, and every company will have to cook up their own unique push notification approach. But when you roll up your sleeves and nail down all the ingredients, the final result is pretty spectacular. Imagine knowing that your push campaigns could get user attention, triple engagement, double retention rates, and improve other key performance indicators you measure against.

Ultimately, creating a push strategy shouldn't be over-complicated. To help you get started, we've collected the most successful push strategies and explained how to implement them.

But first, the ingredients – what are push notifications?



Push notifications are the messages sent to a user on a mobile device when they are outside your app. Think of looking on your phone's lock screen and seeing a message from Instagram that you received a new comment on one of your photos, or a message from Uber that your driver has arrived.

The purpose of push notifications are to be succinct, attention-grabbing, and informative messages that add value to the end user.

The different kinds of push notifications

There are two different kinds of push notifications to be aware of: transactional and engagement-based.

TRANSACTIONAL: These are timely notifications that are specific to the user. They are programmed by your engineering or product teams to automatically fire when a user completes a specific action, like purchasing an item. They are messages such as Amazon saying “your order has shipped” or from the bank that “your bill is now available online.” These messages are automated – think of them as an external system (not a marketer) sending an update to the user.

ENGAGEMENT-BASED: These are messages based on a user’s prior behavior in the app, planned and sent by mobile marketers. A marketer can say, “I want to send a discount to users who have purchased something in my app, but haven’t been active recently.” Other examples include Spotify sending you a message to listen to a specific song that’s similar to ones you already listen to, or the gaming app Clash of Clans promoting free gold or elixir if you go back into the app after months of not playing.

A person's hands are holding a white tablet. The tablet screen displays a teal-to-white gradient background with white text. The background of the image is a kitchen counter with various vegetables like red peppers, yellow peppers, and potatoes.

*The top 11 recipes
for perfecting
push notifications*



RECIPE 1:

Segment...or burn

This may sound a bit drastic, but the downside to not segmenting? Uninstalls. And without installs, your app can no longer make revenue.

Gone are the days when you can send a bland blanket push notification, spam, or blast your users and expect them to stick around. It's not even enough to separate users out by gender. You really have to spend time spicing up campaigns by segmenting users. Users are more likely to convert on an offer or notification when it's targeted to them as compared to a general one.

Here's what you'll need.

📁 Separate users by location

📁 Device characteristics

📁 Previous behaviors

📁 CRM data

1. **LOCATION** data gives you information for where the user is located. This helps you send appropriate offers based on country, state, or city information, and keeps you from sending offers to users who don't qualify for offers based on their location.

2. **BEHAVIORAL SEGMENTATION** allows you to separate users based on what they are doing in the app. For instance, you can categorize users by how often they use the app, how many in-app purchases they have made, how many push notifications they have opened, how long it's been since they opened the app, etc. There are many ways to slice and dice the categories depending on your objectives.

3. **DEVICE CHARACTERISTICS**, such as OS version, OS type, screen size, language, or whether push is enabled, provide information to be able to send an optimal push notification. Other uses include targeting by device and asking users to update their app because there is a bug in the current version. Consider segmenting users who have disabled push notifications, as that gives you the opportunity to target them through a different channel, such as email or social media.

4. **CRM DATA** can provide you with information such as age, engagement rate, which marketing campaigns they have been a part of and how they interacted, geography, and much more. Digging into your CRM platform and data will make segmentation much easier. For instance, if you have a music streaming app like Pandora, you can see how many songs specific users are listening to and which ones they are. Ride sharing services like Uber can segment by user rating. Sports apps like ESPN can get information about users' favorite sports teams.

Once you've segmented, look at retention over the first 30, 60, and 90 days and adjust your strategy accordingly. Maybe you notice that a segment of users drop just before 30 days. Consider sending users a push notification with an offer to sweeten the deal and get proactively get them back into the app before they drop in usage.

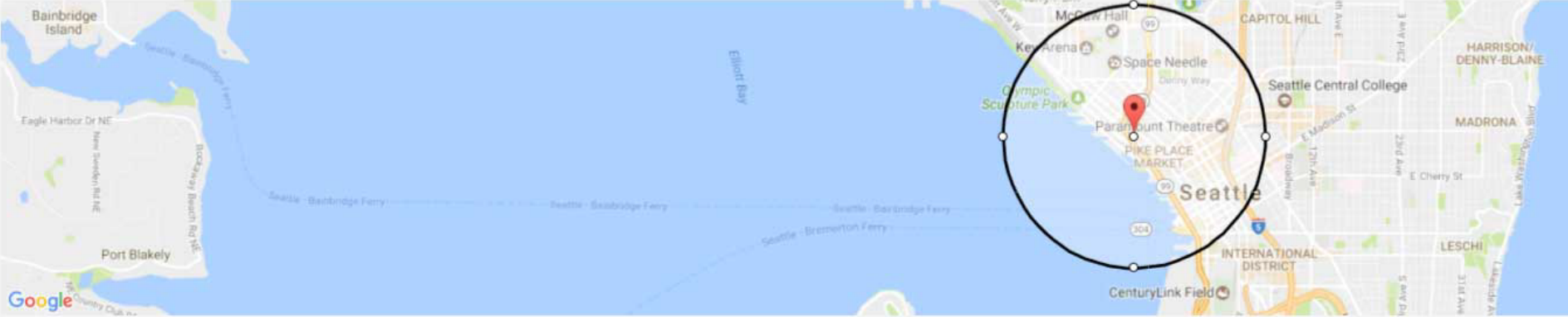
Segmenting for cheesecake lovers under 30 who have an iPhone through In-App Marketing by TUNE.

Rules

Use filters to create a segment of users to engage with.

GPS Location [Toggle Map](#)

2200 Western Ave, Seattle, WA 98121, USA Miles [Search](#)



is_cheesecake_lover YES

Device Type iPhone

Age 23

Event at most 1 time before 02/16/2017

Add Rule

A person's hands are holding a tablet computer. The background shows a kitchen with a stove, a cutting board with green vegetables, and some red tomatoes. The image is partially obscured by a white, scalloped-edged border on the right side.

RECIPE 2:

Set limits for your messaging

An effective push strategy has both transaction and engagement-based messages running full steam. One issue to plan for is over-messaging users.

If you have a dashboard of 20 campaigns planned out, you may be worried to send users more messages in fear of annoying them. To dodge this issue, in your platform, set a designated maximum number of messages a user can receive in a given day, week, and month. That way, if they receive more transactional notifications than you expect, they won't be bombarded with the engagement-based ones marketers have sent out. Having these parameters is like guardrails to make sure your push notification plan doesn't crash and burn by over-engaging or annoying users. There isn't a one-size-fits-all number for how many messages is "too many."

The two biggest things to keep in mind are:

1. **BE REALISTIC:** A healthcare or insurance app does not need to message users every day because people aren't in those apps every day. But a shopping or travel app with many deals and offers and many daily active users could send more push notifications. Sending less frequent but more quality and targeted messages is a strong and smart game plan.

2. **BE CREATIVE:** Find the optimal time to send to users. We don't mean between 5-8 p.m. when everyone is home after work (everyone knows that one). Think in the bigger context of your average user's life. For example, if you run push for a sports ticketing app and want to sell tickets to the next Seahawks game, the optimal time to message users about it isn't when they are in their app after work one random day. Segment users who have shown their interest in the Seahawks by their previous behavior in the app, such as looking at those tickets. Send those users a message about the game about a week before. Serve the message during the day to get the wheels turning and thinking about the game, and message the user again during happy hour about how few tickets are left to create urgency to purchase.

Note that there are exceptions to setting limits. Sometimes, you may have campaigns that you do not want to limit. If you have priority messages you want to go out, it's important to have a system that can accommodate a variety of rules and configurations and is as flexible as your campaigns.

RECIPE 3:

Hand-pick from content marketing books

Just like push notifications for mobile, content marketing is a relatively new concept in the marketing world.

Content marketing is about writing pieces that are easy to understand, add value to the customer, are authentic, engaging, and have a call-to-action.

They do not take a hard-sell approach when speaking to customers. Instead, content marketing is about building up trust long before customers become your customers, so that when they eventually begin evaluating solutions or brands, yours immediately stands out on top.

These same tactics are helpful when applied to push notifications. Here are how to add some flavor to regular push notifications.

Example 1: A shopping app targeting a user who has recently purchased a pair of jeans.

POOR MESSAGE: Jeans are now buy one get one free. Stock up on more now!

WHY IT DOESN'T WORK: The user's most recent purchase was jeans, and they didn't get one pair for free. That message isn't adding value to the customer and could give them buyers' remorse along with mistrust that the app doesn't follow what the user is up to. It's not uncommon to hear of push notifications or targeted ads being sent to users on discounts for an item they recently purchased. This reflects poor or non-existent targeting. Cue uninstall.

BETTER MESSAGE: How are those new jeans? Slide to buy a jacket to finish the look.

WHY IT WORKS: In this message, the user sees that the company is aware of his/her actions, in a non-creepy way. By prompting them to purchase a jacket to go along with the jeans, the message is easy to understand, and when they open the notification, they will be sent directly to the jackets page in the app.

Example 2: A fitness app targeting users who have not recently been back in the app during the holiday season

POOR MESSAGE: It's the holidays! Work off the excess turkey and desserts.

WHY IT DOESN'T WORK: This could be argued as being authentic or motivational, but shaming someone into using your app isn't the emotion you want users to associate with your app. Instead, focus on the benefit of using the app to the users, not the drawback if they don't.

WHAT TO SEND INSTEAD: The holidays are busy — here's a quick, 10-minute workout you can do anywhere, anytime.

WHY IT WORKS: It empathizes with the user's daily life and schedule. The holidays are filled with travel and time spent with family. By acknowledging those humanistic characteristics, the user is more likely to open the notification or save it for when they are in a time-bind and wishing for a quick workout.

Example 3: A travel app promoting winter sales.

POOR MESSAGE: Holiday deals are here!

WHY IT DOESN'T WORK: This message is nonspecific and doesn't have a call-to-action. If the user opens the app, they are not guaranteed that the sale will be from their home airport or to a destination they'd like to go to.

GREAT MESSAGE: Holiday deals are here! Finish buying that trip to Hawaii with a 30% discount applied right now.

WHY IT WORKS: This message is clearly based on previous actions – the user was looking up flights to Hawaii and abandoned the cart before purchasing. The user understands that if the action of purchasing the tickets is completed, a 30% discount will be automatically applied, taking out the guess work of a discount code.

A woman with long brown hair is holding a white tablet computer. She is in a kitchen, with a bowl of fruit (apples, oranges, and lemons) visible in the foreground. The image has a decorative, scalloped edge on the right side.

RECIPE 4:

Make personalization easy

Instead of constantly guessing what users want, make life a little easier for yourself by asking them.

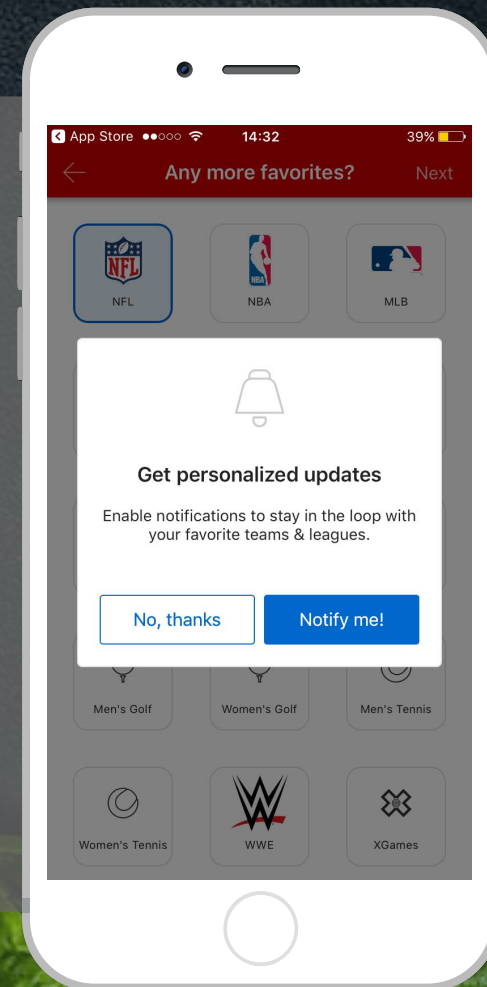
They downloaded your app because they are interested in the product or service; help them help you make their experience as tailored as possible. Think about how you can collect valuable data from the user without annoying them. This will mean getting creative with your asks. Plan to A/B test the best locations and times to collect data points. Start with information from the onboarding flow. If you master that, you will trim the fat and have a rich profile of user information before they even start using your app. Laying down this foundation will give way to using advanced optimization techniques.

Facebook allows users to hand-pick what they are notified about, whether it's a new message, friend request, comment, or other. Pinterest asks users to select categories that they want to see more of and that's what will be in their feed and push notifications.

ESPN does a great job asking for info to personalize. In the image on the right, you can see that the app tells you: that by personalizing your teams and enabling push notifications, the user will stay in the loop with their favorite teams and leagues. Hardcore sports fans are known for their dedication and loyalty, and this message prompts users to stay up-to-date on the teams they hold dearest.

🔥🔥🔥 BEWARE! 🔥🔥🔥

There is a fine line between personalization and invasion of privacy. Users may not be aware of the full tracking capabilities of the apps on their phones, and that last thing you want is a user who's freaked out by information an app knows without them sharing it. For example, if a user is in a mall and receives a push notification that says, "You've already visited Barnes & Nobles, Nordstrom, and American Apparel, come visit us next!" they could get very creeped out that their phone is doing behind-the-scenes tracking. Make sure to keep the messages personalized and within the scope of information the user wants to share.





RECIPE 5:

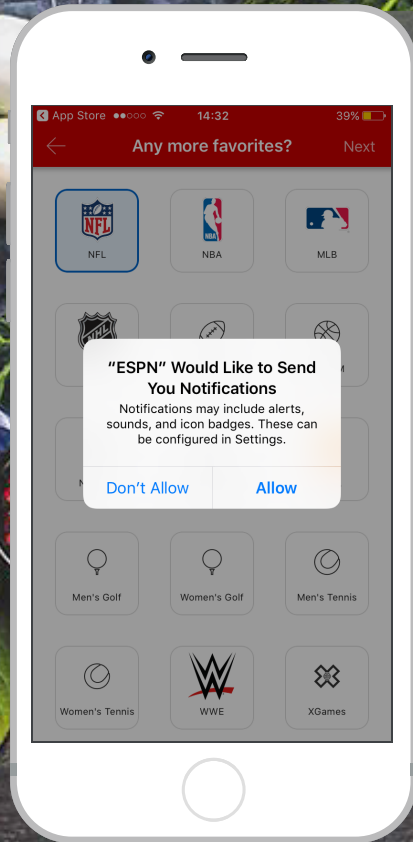
Prepping for permission

The adage “don’t ask permission, ask forgiveness” doesn’t apply to push notifications.

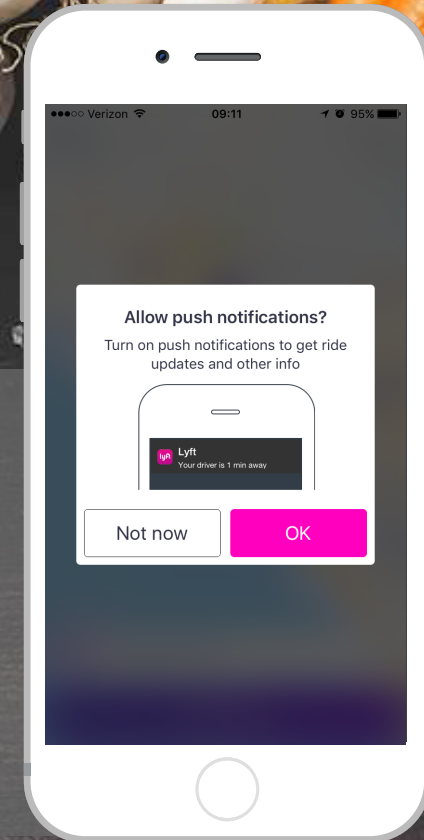
For iOS devices, once the user denies push notifications, there’s no outlet or time to ask for forgiveness from the user. Having the user enable push notifications is a one-shot situation.

To ask permission, also known as “prime for push notifications,” means giving the user background and context for why they should allow push notifications. If a user questions why an app needs to send them messages, the marketer has failed.

Instead of immediately prompting the user to allow or not allow push notifications, set up a buffer to lower the rate of opt-outs. First, provide them with an in-app message that asks them “do you want to turn on push notifications?” with context and background given. If they say no, dissolve the message and no further action is needed. If they say yes, that is when you take the shot and fire the push notification prompt, as seen on the next page.



By showing the in-app message first, you are testing whether the user sees the value in receiving push notifications. If they do not, you can save the prompt for another time after they have spent more time in the app and built up trust.



Make sure you are transparent and honest about your intentions to keep user loyalty. If you have a GPS app and ask for push notifications based on their location, do not assume the user knows you need their location to better direct them. Perhaps they think you want it to sell to third-party vendors. Transparency will get you far with push notifications.



RECIPE 6:

Use location

It's obvious that different parts of the country, different states, and populations in different cities have varying preferences and stances.

Think back to the 2016 U.S. presidential election — different parts of the country responded in opposite manners to the same message. A high percentage of millennials — about 84% — act on location-based notifications¹.

Figure out locations where your product or offer benefits users most and target to them. Don't write "good morning" if it might not be morning where the user is located. If you're running an in-store promotion for a store based in London, set the location to users in London, or within 10-15 miles. Do research and see how far people commute into the city on average and send push notifications during the times the most people will be nearest the store.

Be knowledgeable of cultural differences as well. If users in a certain location don't work on Fridays, like in Tel Aviv, sending them a push notification to grab dinner with coworkers after a long week on a Friday wouldn't sit well with the user base.

The push notification you see here is crafted for those who live in Seattle. The message is about a raincoat sale, and becomes a relevant reminder when it's sent on a rainy day.





RECIPE 7:

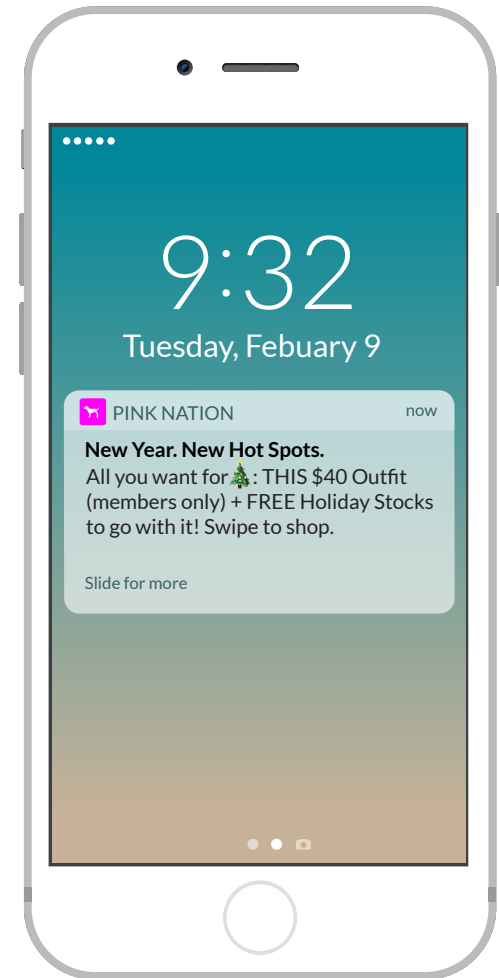
Fold in emojis 🍱 🍲

Emojis are a staple of everyday text conversations and are acceptable to use in a variety of communication forms.

In 2015, half of Instagram comments and captions included emojis². Infusing emojis into push notifications helps messages stick out, convey emotion, and mirrors the way users, especially millennials and Generation Z³ (the post-millennial generation), communicate with one another.

iOS 10 can also support rich images and gifs. This is old news for Android, and now Apple users can receive even more interactive push notifications.

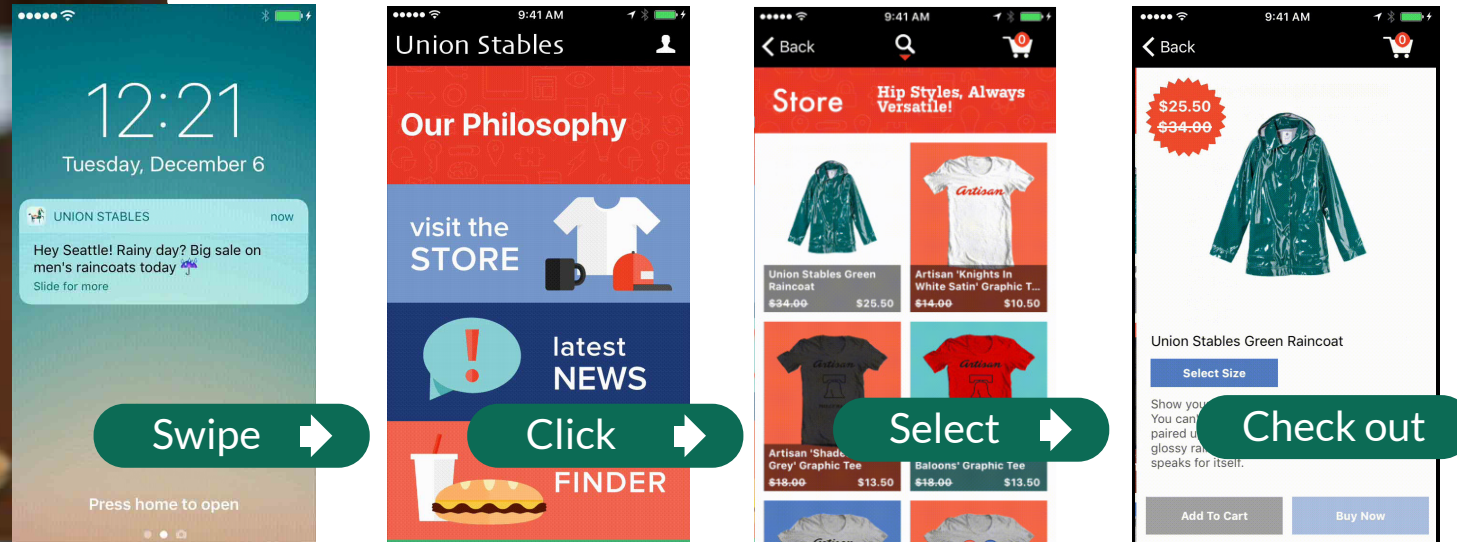
Not sure which emojis to use? The most popular emoji is the winky eye with the tongue sticking out, followed by the folded hands⁴.



RECIPE 8:

Create post-open engagement experiences

Post-open experiences are the actions that are taken after a user swipes to open a push notification. The point of sending a push notification is to inform the user of something they need to know in that moment, and nudge them to take the next action: interacting with the notification and going into your app, like this:



Imagine you get a push notification from Uber saying that you've been rewarded \$50 in credits. Pretty sweet, right? But when you open the notification, it takes you to the app home screen. It's unclear whether the discount was applied and there's no code to enter in sight. Not such a great user experience.

Now envision that instead of taking you to the home page, upon opening the notification you are sent directly to the page within the app that proved that your discount code was applied. In addition, there was a tailored message thanking you for your customer loyalty for using Uber for 3 years and 117 rides.

The less the user has to think about their actions when they get a push notification, the better their experience. After several intuitive experiences, user trust builds and so does the positive association with the app brand. The next time they see a relevant push notification, they are more likely to interact with it. Creativity plays a part here as well; developers have the opportunity to invent experiences. If opening the app from a push notification is old school, deep linking is modern, and custom actions like post-open engagement is next level and where the conversion happens.

Here are more examples of whipping up an interactive post-open experience:

Retail or travel, like Nordstrom or Expedia: applying a discount code for the user (like in the previous example about Uber).

Streaming, like Netflix: promoting a new episode of a favorite show and taking them directly to that video or episode.

Sports, like ESPN: promoting breaking team news and sending the user directly to that article.

Travel, like Virgin America or Alaska Airlines: Notifying the traveler that their gate has changed and when users open the app, they are shown their updated mobile boarding pass.

Food, like Epicurious: Promoting a simple recipe for dinner and directing users to the instructions.

Personal scheduling, like Google Now: Reminding you about your car servicing appointment and pulling up directions to get there.

Music streaming, like Spotify: Promoting an artist's album and taking the user straight to it for easy listening.

Buy and sell, like OfferUp: Notifying the user that someone is interested in their item and taking them to the listing.

A hand holding a silver tablet computer. The background shows a kitchen table with a white teapot, a wooden cutting board, and fresh vegetables like tomatoes and cucumbers. The image has a decorative scalloped edge on the right side.

RECIPE 9:

The secret combination: marketers and developers

Every department within a business has pressing needs. Marketers can have a bottleneck in their process if they can't get into mobile app product backlogs.

Product engineers can feel pressure to release features before they are ready. The product and marketing teams may have a split in priorities, but the most effective way to work is for marketers to have products teams that work with them, not against them. Developers play a large role in marketers' success. If marketers are not aligned with their developers, their marketing and overall business will be at a loss. Marketers figure out what experience suits the user best, but that only happens after a thought-out development plan.

Implementing a marketing automation platform has a lot more to do with people than with technology. What it boils down to: if people, processes, and technology finally meet, marketing automation can bring your marketing results to a whole new level.



RECIPE 10:

Perfect the method – Test, learn, test, learn...

Remember the first time you went to Chipotle and had a burrito? Maybe it was good, maybe it was even close to great.

Now think about if you had to eat that same burrito every time you went in. Not so appealing any longer. Chances are the burrito you get today isn't the burrito you ordered on the first day. Perhaps you now ask for double meat, a little more salsa, and less sour cream. Those tweaks and burrito optimizations are what took your burrito from good to perfect.

It's similar to push campaigns. Say you ran a campaign and it had a 5% conversion rate. The industry standard is around 2–3%, which means you've perfected the recipe. You're ready for the Michelin star of push notifications, right? Not necessarily. What if a few tweaks could get you a 10% conversion rate? Making tweaks and testing messaging, metadata, creative, timing and the actions in the campaign is imperative to maximizing the campaign.



RECIPE 11:

The finishing touch – Analyze your data

You're putting in a lot of time to plan and execute your campaigns. Take the time to analyze how your campaigns performed in order to optimize future campaigns.

But slicing and dicing data doesn't have to be overwhelming. Decide how often you look at metrics, and analyze for that time period. If you look at results every week, see how your campaign is doing week over week. If you look one a month, look at month-over-month performance. Look at the broader picture as well. See if there are any trends over longer periods of time. Think about why trends are appearing and loop in the rest of your team to help with broader analysis.

The most important takeaway is to make sure your campaigns are resonating with your users and your key performance indicators are going up and to the right.



CONCLUSION

Stick out. Be different. Succeed.

Users could be getting countless push notifications every day. If someone looks at their list of 50 notifications, make sure yours is the one that's funny, has emojis, is specific to them, has caps, and offers a juicy deal.

Implementing some, or all, of these techniques will put you ahead of the crowd, a group that even includes big brands and advertisers. Remember, while industry jargon calls them "users," we are marketing to humans, just like you. Maintaining a personal and friendly mindset when creating push messages will yield the results you're looking for.

If you don't have a platform to support all these best practices, [try In-App Marketing by TUNE for free today](#). We also have a [full suite of mobile marketing products](#) (if you're looking for that sort of thing).

FOOTNOTES:

1. <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Mobile-Ad-Spend-Top-100-Billion-Worldwide-2016-51-of-Digital-Market/1012299>
2. <http://www.econtentmag.com/Articles/News/News-Item/84-percent-of-Millennials-Act-on-Push-Notifications-for-Location-Based-Apps-107131.htm>
3. <http://www.iemoji.com/popular/emoji>
4. <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Who-Needs-Words-You-Have-Emojis/1012466>
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/jan/26/rise-emoji-brand-marketing>