

COLUMNS

Getting mobile onboarding right to avoid app abandonment

July 1, 2015



Kelsey Ricard is growth lead for Taplytics

By **Kelsey Ricard**

Developing a mobile application is a tough job.

Companies slave for months making sure their product is perfect, and then work even harder trying to get people hooked. Just getting an app noticed by users amidst a sea of 3 million apps is a major accomplishment.

But just because consumers have discovered and installed an app does not mean that they will use it.

A large majority of customers will abandon an app within the first minute. That is why mobile onboarding the process of walking a user through a few screens to orient them with an app and its features is crucial in deciding whether a user becomes active or calls it quits.

The first impression made during onboarding can last a lifetime.

There are plenty of mobile onboarding strategies, but three in particular that can make or break whether a user sticks around.

Likewise, there are some apps doing it right and some falling flat.

1. Timing the credit card request

Mobile commerce is becoming extremely popular with both retail and services businesses.

One of the biggest challenges for these types of apps is deciding when to collect credit card information. Too soon and users can be turned off, or too late and engagement opportunities can be missed.

An app called MassageNow is a good use-case. It promises that users can "book same day massage appointments at a fraction of the cost." That all sounds great until it is downloaded.

When the app is first launched, it appears well designed and the account set-up process is simple and straightforward.

The problem with its onboarding process is that, by only the third screen, it starts asking for credit card information.

Most people want to see what the service is offering and how the app actually works before they offer up that kind of confidential information. Why not instead request this information when the user is committed and ready to book? Is it crucial to obtain this information right at login?

On the flip side, Etsy knows how to get a user drawn in before asking for information.

When someone first downloads the Etsy app, she is given two options:

when someone first downloads the Etsy app, she is given two options.

1. Sign up for an account
2. Start searching the store and take a look at trending items

Users are only asked to sign up for an account once they are ready to make a purchase.

Etsy is getting its users hooked and wanting to buy something before it forces them to give up their payment information.

2. Rightsizing tutorial information

Another prevalent onboarding practice is providing a tutorial to teach users how to navigate through an app. This strategy can be extremely powerful when done well.

An app called Nintype is an example of an app that may be going too far in its quest to educate users.

Nintype is an advanced iPhone keyboard that receives positive App Store reviews, and is likely powerful and easy to use. However, the tutorial it has put together is information overload.

A more successful approach is to teach users enough to get them started and, if it makes sense, add follow-up tutorials on advanced features after they are given time to master the basics.

The Mailbox app is an example of a tutorial done right. It teaches users everything they need to know to properly use their mail platform without going into exhaustive detail. It is also interactive and lets users try out the gestures as they are being taught, which helps the information "stick."

3. Easing up on permission requests

The last frequent onboarding mistake is asking users for permission both too early and for access to too many items.

When someone opens a new app, the last thing she wants to see is multiple pop-ups in a row asking for permission to a laundry list of items.

App X would like to send you push notifications

App X would like to access your locations

App X would like access your contacts

App X would like to access your camera

For some apps, gaining these permissions is critical to maximizing the functionality and overall user experience. If that is the case, at least during onboarding, try to keep the questions to a minimum.

If this permission is critical, find the right time to ask it and tell users why the access is necessary and valuable. That way, they understand how it benefits them.

Cluster, a private group photo-sharing service, is exemplary in its approach to permissions. Rather than asking for access to contacts as soon as the app is opened, it holds off and asks when it is going to benefit the user.

Upon download, Cluster provides a short tutorial explaining what the app does and how. It then guides the user through the process of creating first photo-sharing group.

When it comes time to invite friends to the group, Cluster presents users with an option to "show results from iPhone contacts."

Once they click that button, Cluster asks permission to access contacts. It even goes one step further and explains in the popup window why it would like to access the contacts it allows users to easily add contact to their newly created photo group.

FINDING THE BEST mobile onboarding experience takes time, and it is almost certain that a company's first onboarding flow will have its flaws.

By studying which apps are doing it right and how, and being willing to change your process until you get the process dialed in, users will stick around to discover what you have worked so hard to create.

Kelsey Ricard is growth lead for Taplytics, a San Francisco-based mobile optimization provider. Reach her at kelsey@taplytics.com.

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

American Marketer is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.