

# The Ultimate Guide to User Onboarding for Mobile



APPTIMIZE

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# User Onboarding

When users first install an app, what do they notice?

## What users see

- How they feel about the app
- What they're able to do with it in the first few minutes or seconds



## What users don't see

- How much time and effort your team spent building the perfect solution
- How your app will change their lives for the better
- How much excitement and joy it will bring once they're invested



**If you don't excite them, inject value, and create hooks to re-engage them, they're going to drop off, uninstall, and get on with their lives.**

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"If you don't nail onboarding, your developers may as well have been drinking beers instead of building those features that no one saw."

**NANCY HUA,  
CEO OF APPTIMIZE**

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# The Problem Isn't Acquisition, It's Activation

In 2012, Viddy was coveted in the press as “Instagram for video.”

With over a \$300 million valuation, the media attention and Facebook campaign caused downloads to soar.

They also had the most powerful and feature-filled product on the market.

Yet today, few users would even recognize the name.

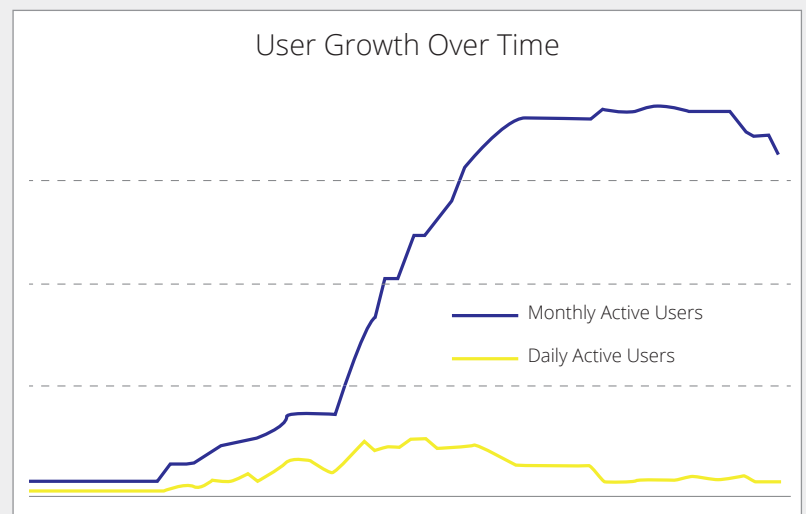


## So what happened?

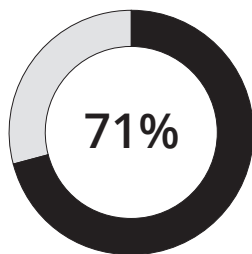
### Users simply weren't retaining.

While the MAU count drastically increased, the number of users engaging on the app on a daily basis barely saw a blip. Users just didn't get why they should use the app.

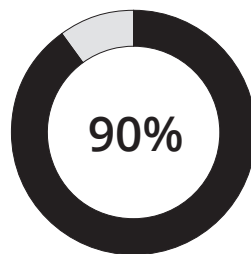
### They didn't get onboarded effectively.



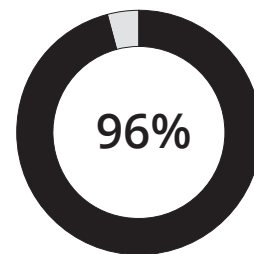
## The average app loses



of its users after **only 1 day**



of its users after **30 days**



of its users after **90 days**

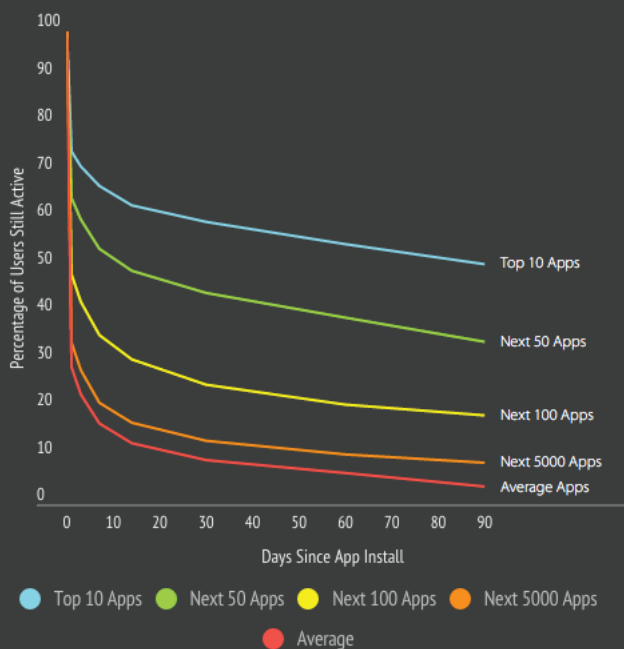
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“The best way to bend the retention curve is to target the first few days of usage, and in particular the first visit. That way, users set up themselves up for success.”

**ANDREW CHEN**  
SUPPLY GROWTH AT UBER

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## RETENTION CURVES FOR ANDROID APPS



Data from Andrew Chen & Ankit Jain (Quettra)

While the **average app loses 71%** of its users after one day of use, the top apps do much better.

**Top 50 apps** only lose **35%** of their users after one day.

**Top 10 apps: 25%.**

Having a great product and marketing strategy alone aren't enough to grow and sustain a mobile app.

**The key is activating new users.**

# What Is User Onboarding?

## Onboarding:

the process of setting first-time users up to be successful with your product.

For mobile apps, that means the experience from the first time they open their app, up until they become an engaged, invested, and successful user.

- **Every single user will encounter the onboarding experience.** While not all of your users will see the amazing features you've built, all of them will at least go through onboarding.
- **It affects the highest volume segment of users.** With 71% of your users dropping off in just one day, making improvements to that first experience affects the most users possible.
- **Mobile users are much more easily disengaged than their web counterparts.** Unlike web, mobile users are often engaging in environments filled with distractions. They're constantly on the go, so ensuring that they can complete their tasks with as little friction as possible is a must.

## We onboard users by:

1. Finding the core actions (Aha! Moment) that lead to retention
2. Increasing User Ability
3. Increasing User Motivation
4. Creating tests

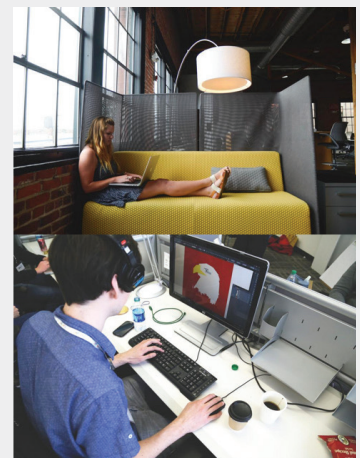
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"My thought on mobile v.s. Web has always been akin to 'poetry v.s. Prose.' It has to be a really compressed, elegant experience... Ideally the web experience can be held to the same high regard, but it seems like there's a little more room for error."

**SAMUEL HULICK,  
CREATOR OF  
USERONBOARD**

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## Mobile v.s. Web



# Finding Your App's Aha! Moment

## Aha! Moment:

"A set of actions that separates customers who find value in your product from those who don't"

BENN STANCIL, MODE ANALYTICS

For many growth teams, the Aha! Moment is their north star, highlighting the actions that users need to take to dramatically increase the chances of retaining.

## Aha! Moments are:

- Highly common action(s) among users that retain
- Uncommon among users who don't
- Vital for increasing retention

Once you have an Aha! Moment, you can formulate a testing strategy to drive user behavior to complete these actions. If done correctly, these new users will be much more likely to retain than users who don't.

RETAINED

AHA!

TOOK ACTION

## AHA! MOMENT OF NOTABLE COMPANIES



### Slack

2000 messages sent between a team

- Stewart Butterfield, Co-founder



### Dropbox

One file in one Dropbox folder on one device

- ChenLi Wang, Growth Team



### Zynga

User returns 1 day after signing up

- Nabeel Hyatt, Former GM



### Twitter

X users followed, Y% followed back

- Josh Elman, Former Growth Lead



### Facebook

User connects with 7 friends within 10 days

- Chamath Palihapitiya Former Growth Lead



### LinkedIn

X connections in Y days

- Elliot Schmukler, Growth Team

# Drive Users to the Aha! Moment

The goal is to drive users to take the Aha! Moment actions. To do this, let's take a look at what drives user behaviors.

## Stanford Psychologist BJ Fogg's Behavioral Model

There are 3 elements that must be present for an action to occur:

$$\text{Behaviour} = \text{Motivation} \times \text{Ability} \times \text{Trigger}$$

### B = Behavior

The desired action that you wish to occur

### M = Motivation

Demonstrating value to users

### A = Ability

Make a behavior simpler to complete

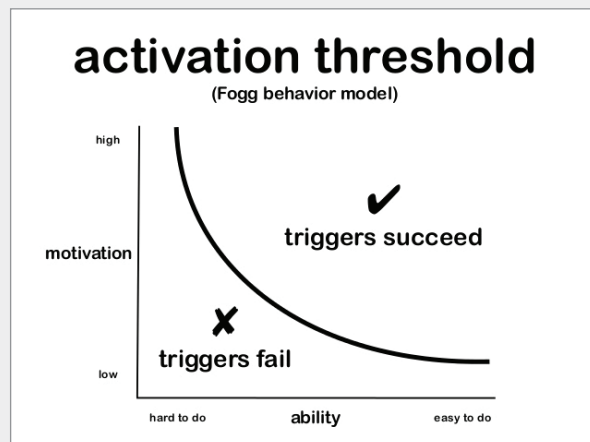
### T = Trigger

Cues for users to take a specific action

## The main idea is this:

- A user must have sufficient motivation and ability to complete an action
- If these are present, then a trigger (cue to take an action) will produce the desired behavior
- Else a trigger will fail

That means, to increase the likelihood of a user taking a specific action, we have to **increase motivation and ability, and provide a trigger at the right moment.**





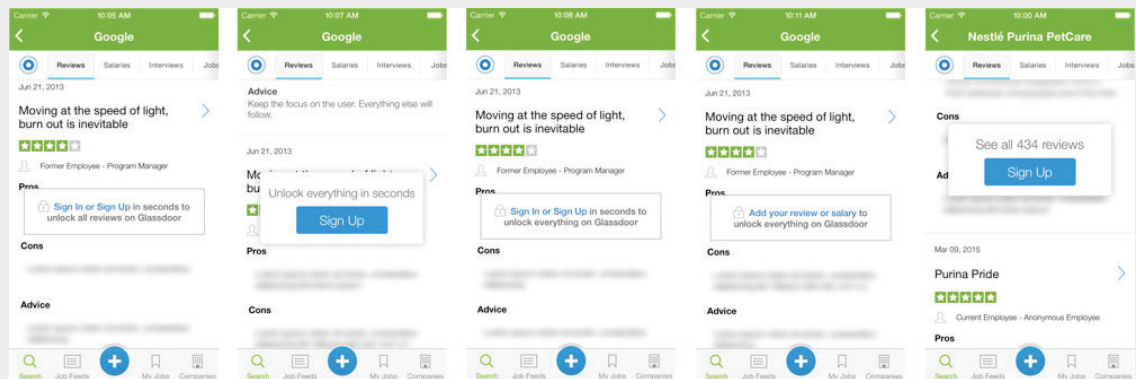
# Increasing Motivation

In order for users to complete a desired action, they need to have enough motivation to complete the action.

## Methods of Increasing Motivation:

### WRITE POWERFUL COPY

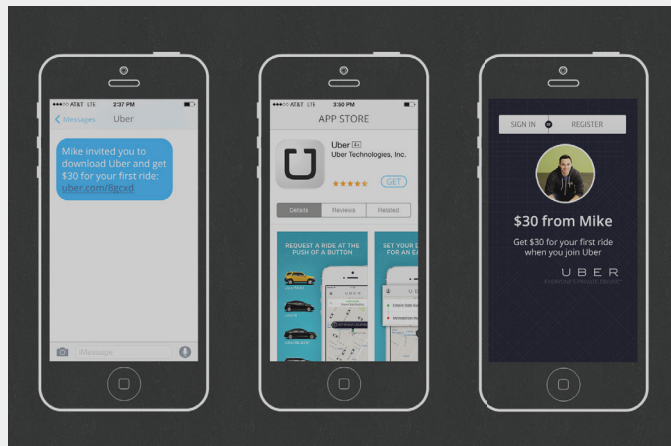
You can harness the power of writing by identifying key pain points or desires, then demonstrating how your app solves them.



*In our case study, Glassdoor shares their experiments on in-app CTAs*

### HARNESS SOCIAL PROOF

84% of consumers say that they either completely or somewhat trust recommendations from family, colleagues, and friends about products—significantly higher than any other source.



### PRODUCT DEMOS

Sometimes all it takes is a demo of how easy and cool your product is, before they invest by inputting their personal information or otherwise. You can use videos, tutorials, or even a full fledged in-app demo.

### SHARE USE CASES

Even if you have a really wonderful product, it's likely that not all your users will know how to harness its full capabilities. Providing a wide swath of use cases will help them determine the concrete benefits of what they can do. Lookout is an example of a company that does this incredibly smoothly.

## SURPRISE AND DELIGHT USERS

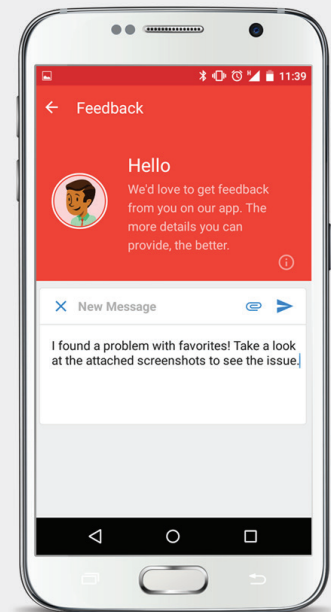
An unorthodox method of increasing user motivation is to unexpectedly delight users with rewards. In a study by Kiip and IPG Media labs, researchers found that moment-based rewards are 14x more effective at increasing purchase intent, which we can reasonably assume increases conversion intent as well.

## TRANSLATE QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK INTO FEATURES

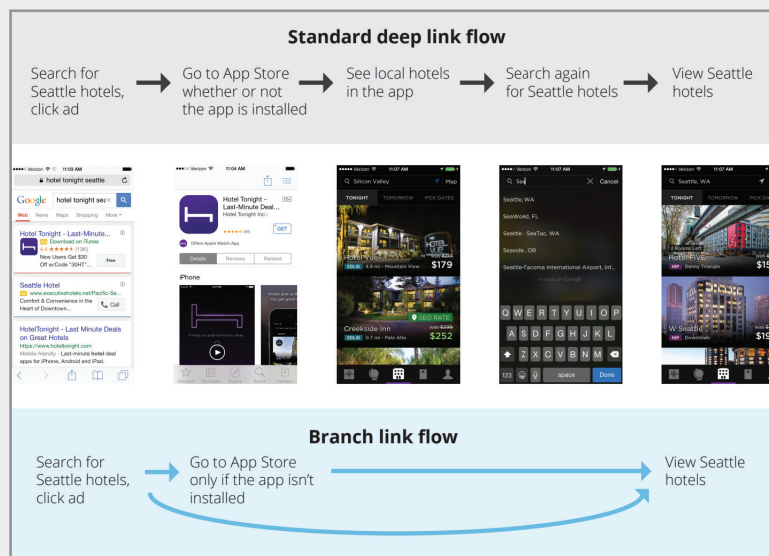
When your users talk, listen and give them what they want. Utilizing tools like Apptentive can give you a direct channel of communication with your users to gain deeper insights on their interests.

## DRIVING NEW USERS STRAIGHT TO THE RIGHT VALUE

As we've seen with our Branch + Gametime case study, driving users straight to the value is a powerful way to increase motivation. Utilizing deep links can ensure that they get maximum value as soon as humanly possible.



Apptentive

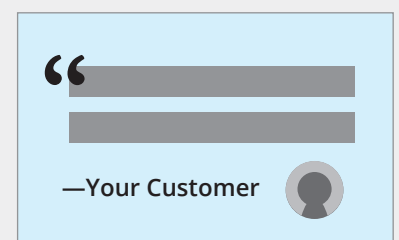


## REINFORCE YOUR VALUE EARLY AND OFTEN

Even something as simple as a tagline can have profound effects on your userbase. Nike's "just do it," slogan evokes more emotion than just shoes and clothing. In the same way, companies like Waze are reinforcing their existence whenever possible. Rather than "get from point A to B quickly," they focus on the bigger picture of "Outsmarting traffic, together."

## UTILIZE CUSTOMER TESTIMONIALS

84% of consumers say that they either completely or somewhat trust recommendations from family, colleagues and friends about products. This means that harnessing that trust is a powerful way to build motivation and ease their concerns.



# Maximizing Ability

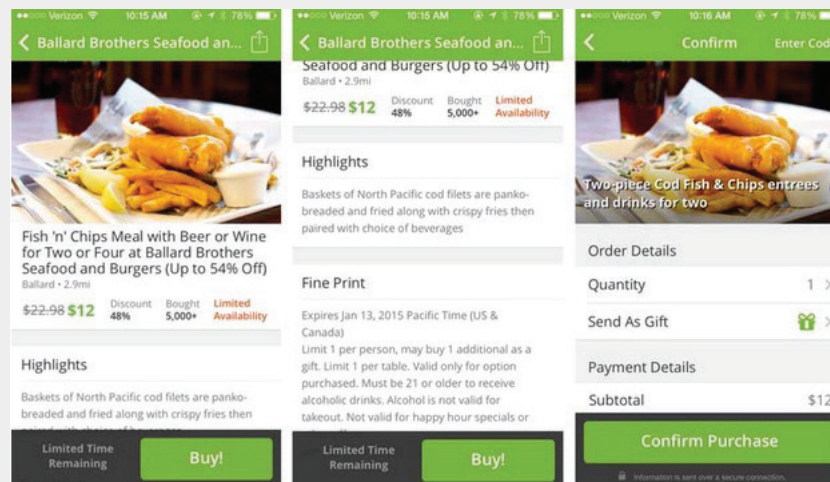
The second part of this equation is increasing user ability or making it as easy as possible to complete the desired action.

Think of it like conversion rate optimization (CRO), but focused on key actions rather than conversions.

## Methods to Increase Ability:

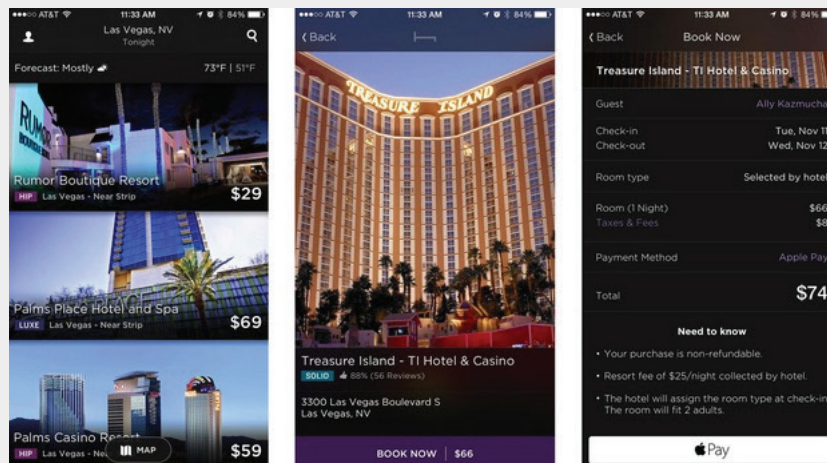
### OPTIMIZE CTAS

Make them clear and easy to find. That way, users don't have to go searching for the actions you want them to complete. Groupon provides a fantastic example of this, providing a persistent CTA that's always visible to the user.



### REMOVE EXTRANEIOUS STEPS

Another simple way of increasing ability is to remove extra steps required for a user to complete your core actions.



Utilizing tools such as Apple Pay can increase conversions by 15%

## SIMPLIFY NECESSARY STEPS

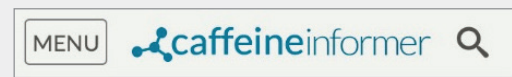
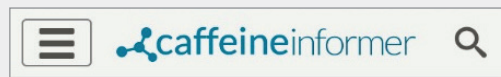
On mobile, we're forced to deal with the clunkiness of mobile keyboards and controls. While collecting personal and financial information is often critical to moving forward, it places a huge burden on users who are forced to tediously enter information on a keyboard clearly made for leprechauns.

## Mobile Users Who Quit Because Registration Took Too Long



## DECREASE THE COGNITIVE LOAD

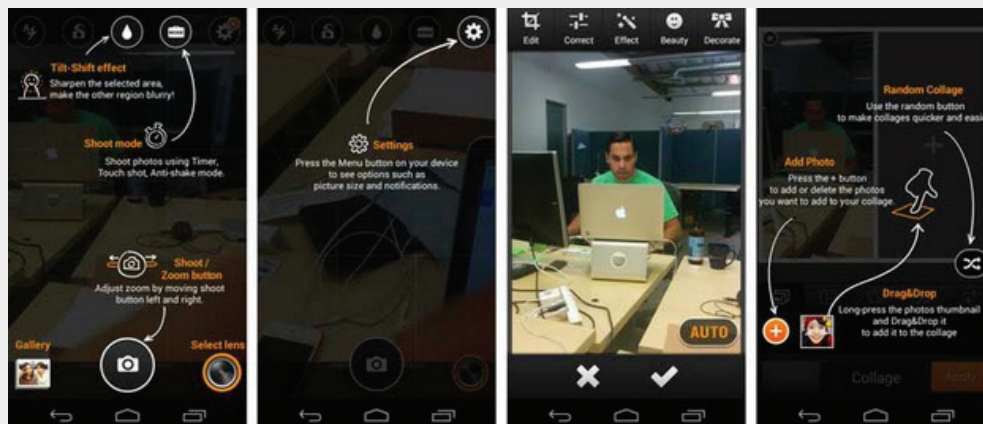
Are you making users confused and expend mental energy?  
Or is it easy to understand and follow?



*Saying "Menu" vs using a Hamburger menu decreases the user's cognitive load*

## AVOID DECISION FATIGUE

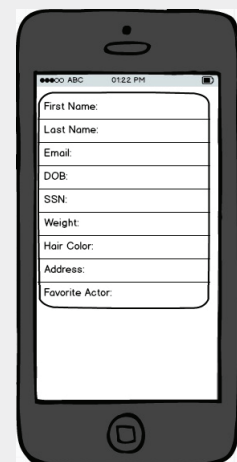
Decision fatigue is the tendency of individuals to make poorer decisions than they normally do after being subjected to repeated decision making. Move your Aha! Moment actions earlier in the funnel before users become affected by decision fatigue.



*Decision fatigue is often caused by having too many choices for next steps*

## DON'T ASK FOR NON-ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

"Whenever asking for information from a user, I filter every decision through the lens of 'can this credibly be represented as being to the user's benefit in providing this?'" says Samuel Hulick. Otherwise, just leave it out.





## REFINE YOUR HOMESCREEN LAYOUT

Because there's less context (due to less available information on the screen), users must move around the screen more.

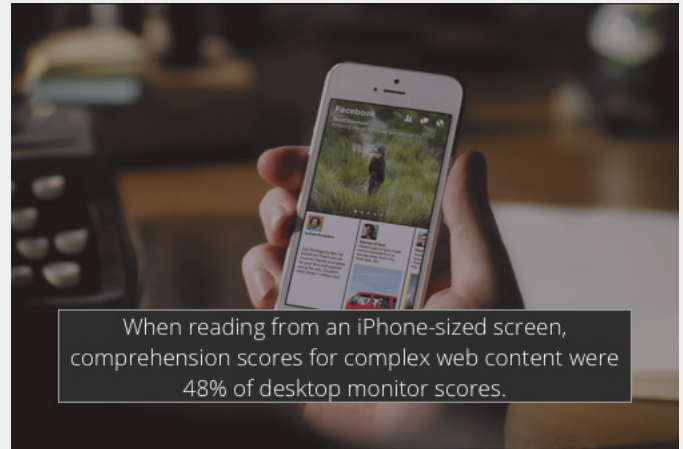
## CREATE LOGICAL DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP POINTS

If you have a particularly long onboarding flow, try breaking it up into sections.

## PRIORITIZE RESPONSIVENESS

78% of users expect mobile apps to be as fast or faster than mobile websites. So if you can't deliver on that, what's the point of keeping your app?

"Mobile users are in a hurry and get visibly angry at verbose sites that waste their time," says Jakob Nielsen.



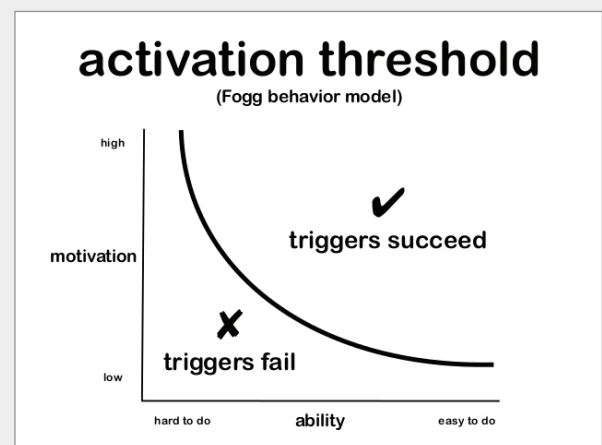
# Triggers

The last component of driving user behaviors is to create triggers.

## Triggers:

cues or reminders that prompt users to take a specified action.

Remember, triggers are only effective if users already have sufficient motivation and ability to complete the action.



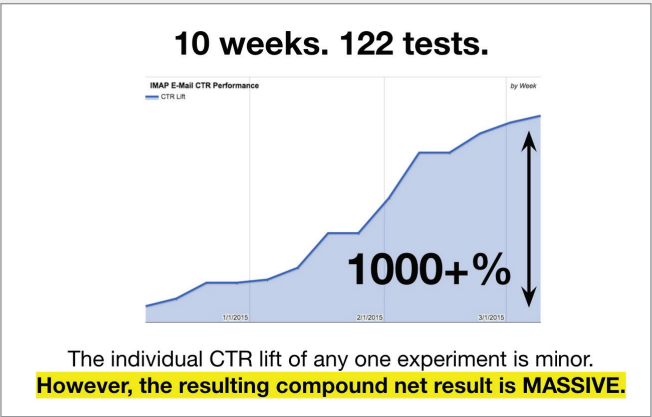
# Creating an Agile Iteration Strategy

As we mentioned before, blindly following best practices is a surefire way to a mediocre product. That's why creating an iterative testing strategy is so vital.

A/B testing helps support this methodology by allowing you to cheaply validate any changes or new features in your app, before deploying to your entire userbase.

This allows you to make **iterative improvements that compound for massive growth**, similar to what we've seen at Yahoo! Mail.

Even the effects of small, simple tests can really add up.



“What works for us does not necessarily work for you. The one thing you should not do is assume you know something.”

**SERGEI SOROKIN,  
PRODUCT MANAGER  
AT YAHOO! GROWTH**

## Action Steps

So now that you've gotten a strong foundation for what user onboarding is (and how to apply it to mobile apps), it's time to take action. You want to first figure out what your app's Aha! Moment is, then create experiments to drive users toward that moment.

1	2	3
Use behavioral cohorting to find your app's Aha! Moment	Use the guide to create 2-5 tests that you think will help drive core actions	Set up an experiment to test on a small percentage of your users
4	5	6
Track the differences between the two groups	Push out the winning variant instantly to all users	Keep on going