The Developer's Guide to Getting the Most Out of Push

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Why push notifications matter

In the battle for mobile user mindshare and the coveted home screen real estate, there are few tools quite as powerful for a developer as the push notification. With the right strategy and execution, push notifications can help boost user engagement and drive revenue.

Well-targeted push notifications groom users who are:

- Regularly engaged

- Well-informed about everything the app has to offer

- Less likely to churn

- More likely to convert

However, achieving excellence in push is easier said than done.

Send out too few push notifications and they won't move the needle on meaningful metrics. Send out too many and you'll irritate loyal customers. Push the wrong kinds of messages at the wrong times and you'll never get users to re-engage with the app or change their behavior.

Don't risk leaving money on the table or, worse, turning users away with a scattershot approach to push notifications. With proper planning and care, it's possible for developers to get the most out of this important tool throughout a mobile app's lifecycle.

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Setting push goals

Establishing the foundation for push notification success starts first by setting some goals for what you want to achieve through this communication channel. These goals will likely range from very basic communication objectives to more complex business targets.

Basic

| App reminders | Functionality tips |

Advanced

| Early lifecycle management | Behavioral marketing | Reengaging lapsed users |

Keeping these goals in sight will help inform how you as a developer establish your push strategy, build push notification infrastructure and measurement, and design the kind of notification content you need to meet short- and long-term objectives.

The business value of push

"Push notifications are such a core driver of app usage across News that if we don't send at least a handful in a day, the analysts will notice that traffic is down sometimes by as much as 50% and ask what is wrong. Our data shows that up to 50% of daily active users are driven by push, so it's a huge front door."

Rory Brunner
News Editorial Operations, Verizon Media

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The golden rule of push

Throughout the process of setting goals, establishing strategy, and executing on it, be sure to keep the golden rule of push top-of-mind. The golden rule is simple:

Don't bug users with too many notifications!

Barraging users with an endless stream of push notifications over the course of a day or a week can lead to disastrous results. It can lead them to ignore the messages. It can irritate them into turning notifications off. And it can drive them to completely abandon or uninstall your app.

As you start to mix and match the strategies and tactics we'll outline in a moment, it can be easy to forget the golden rule in your early exuberance. It's also easy to lose track of just how many push messages individual users are receiving when they're coming fast and furious from disparate automated notification campaigns.

This is where a mechanism to cap total push notifications will play a crucial role. Deciding on that cap number will depend on your app and user base, but wherever that threshold sits it's important to find a way to hold to it—preferably in an automated manner.

Developing a winning push strategy

Asking for push permissions

First thing's first. Before you can send push notifications you'll need to get your user to agree to receiving them. Strategies differ for Android and iOS platforms because they operate under fundamentally different policies when it comes to push permissions.

Android operates under an opt-out model that automatically enables push functionality on install but provides users with the opportunity to turn notifications off during the enrollment process. Meanwhile, iOS enforces an opt-in model where apps come with push notifications turned off by default. After onboarding the user, the iOS developer has one shot to make the ask for push notifications. If the user refuses then the developer cannot ask again.

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This one-and-done refusal policy means that you'll need to be strategic about how and when to make the ask for push permissions. One way that you can successfully navigate this limitation is by using in-app messages to promote the advantages of push notification and to start feeling out user sentiment. Some developers may build polling or other survey mechanisms into in-app messages, asking the user how they feel about the app at certain intervals. Positive responses can then be used to trigger the ask, increasing the certainty in getting a 'yes' from those users.

Creating excuses for engagement

With push permissions in place, app developers have got a solid channel to boost their signals on so many different fronts. The key is to not only communicate clearly with users but also create excuses for engagement.

Advice from a pro

The best push notifications are the ones with a little surprise and delight. Where the outcome on the other side when you click on it is partially unknown and likely rewarding.

Scott Koenigsberg, SVP Product, Zynga

App functionality and updates:

At the most basic level, prods about tutorials of fundamental app functionality that users may not have yet tapped into, or reminders about functions they previously used but dropped off on are obvious gimmees. Similarly, notices about app updates and new functions provide solid communication touch points.

Timely news:

Timely news also provides many additional opportunities for push engagement, whether that comes from current events relevant to the app, such as alerts of a major storm in a weather app, or even from time-sensitive events manufactured by the developer, like retail promotions or limited time competitions.

Gamification:

Gamifying user behavior within the app provides a sustainable and fun excuse for engagement that will have the most loyal users looking forward to push notifications. Gamification feeds many routes to little notices on achieving level ups, coming close to reaching certain objectives, receiving messages from teammates or opponents, or posting to community leaderboards.

Community connection:

Perhaps one of the best examples of a push notification that almost always gets an open is the alert that you've received a new message or your post has received engagement. Building opportunities for community connections and finding ways to notify users of community-related happenings provides the perfect vehicle for push.

All of the excuses for engagement noted above share a unifying characteristic. Namely, that they all add some level of value to the user. The best push notifications do something positive for the user—they teach, inform, alert, and entertain.

Ultimately, the most successful push notification strategies consistently pull users back into the app, but do it in a way that improves the user experience, rather than simply nagging with naked marketing messages.

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Targeting your app category

While certain kinds of push notifications will be universal across all apps, a lot of push strategy will be highly dependent upon your app category. Successful developers understand that to get positive engagement from push they must be creative about targeting notifications to the motivations of their user base.

Some of the opportunities for push relevant to a few major categories include:

Retail
- Promotional offers
- Coupons
- Exclusive offers
- New products
- Abandoned cart reminders

Gaming
- Level-up badges
- Regular leaderboard notifications
- Promotions

Media
- Breaking news
- Weekly story round-ups

Health & fitness
- Daily habits
- Achievement notices
- Reminders

Finance & investing
- Account alerts
- Personalized ticker notifications

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Designing effective push campaigns

One of the smartest ways to establish a pipeline of consistent, valued push messaging is through the design of effective push campaigns. Some campaigns are simply scheduled campaigns that go out on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

Others are triggered by user behaviors or characteristics. To get started on these campaigns, mobile strategists should map out user journeys for multiple customer segments and behavioral profiles. With those in hand, they should think about how they want to shape segment behavior at certain points within that group's typical user journey. From there, they can come up with a script of push notifications that are instrumented to the biggest inflection points during a user's lifecycle.

Specific events or user behaviors trigger their own push notification or series of notifications to make up one single campaign. Typically, these campaigns directly serve to accomplish one or more of the three advanced goals we touched on before: early lifecycle management, behavioral marketing, and re-engagement of lapsed users.

Example push campaigns to meet advanced business goals

Early lifecycle management	Behavioral marketing	Re-engagement of lapsed users
New user who hasn't completed enrollment gets a reminder to finish the next step at day 3.	A past winner of a gaming app's weekly challenge gets a notification two weeks later, reminding of their previous success and asking if they want to try again.	A previously high engagement user who hasn't checked in within a week gets a message reminding them of a special promotion, built-up points or in-app currency waiting to be used.
Health and fitness app user gets a reminder to view a tutorial on how to use a calorie counting feature if they haven't used it by day 7.	A retail app sends out messages to users who have abandoned items in their cart for longer than 24 hours.	A lapsed sports app user gets a message after 30 days with a bulleted summary of news that they've missed about their favorite team.
Restaurant app user receives a notification with a new-user promo coupon at day 7.	A SaaS user who has paid for a subscription but still hasn't used all features receives notification to try Feature X.	A frequent purchaser on a retail app receives a notice of specials in categories they've browsed in the past after not signing in for two weeks.
A heavy media app user who hasn't chosen preferred news categories gets a reminder to make some picks for a more personalized feed.		

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Tactics and execution

Writing and designing relevant notifications

As your team starts to take flight with push notification strategy, remember that you've got to stick the landing, too. Push success depends not only on finding great excuses to make contact with users, but also writing effective communications that actually hit the mark.

In short, the content of your notifications really matters.

Ideally, the more fun and human you can make them, the more likely you'll connect with the user. But the writing tone should match your brand image. Some brands may find emojis perfectly acceptable, while others need to stay more formal. Either way, push notifications should always be concise, to the point, and clear about next steps for the users.

Typically, messages that resonate tend to share the following characteristics:

- Relevance and timeliness

- Personalization

- A sense of urgency

Never underestimate the power of FOMO—fear of missing out—when writing notifications. The more a user feels like you're doing them a favor by letting them know about an opportunity they might miss, the more likely you are to spur on action.

Using push content as an app feature

Not every push notification needs to change behavior, either. Sometimes pushed messages can act as an extension of the app's functionality. For example, some media companies use their push notices to convey not only great headlines but a summary encapsulation of certain news to give users an on-the-go rundown that adds regular value to their experience and creates loyalty.

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Making push more personal

Make no mistake, personalized push notifications are far more effective than generic ones. In order to ensure that your messages are tailored to specific users, you'll need to put infrastructure in place to segment and target specific user groups. As a developer, you're going to want technology in place that allows you to segment and target users as granularly as possible. This will enable execution on more nuanced personalized campaign strategies down the road.

For example, with the right platform in place, a news organization could tailor its alerts and push frequency to users segmented by how many articles they read per week. A fitness app could start targeting push campaigns for weekly promotions or competitions based on a segment of users who had previously done similar promotions but hadn't participated within the last 30 days. Or a developer of any app could start tracking segments of responsive users who tap on early push notifications to send them future messages that they'd be receptive to.

Tracking push performance

Ultimately, push notification strategies and tactics should evolve based on a range of different metrics. The best organizations instrument push notifications to measure how responsive users are to the messages, how the communications change their behavior, what it does for their engagement, and how it all ties back to revenue.

Tap-through rates can be very important for fine-tuning the targeting of segmentation and testing out notification content choices. But that's not the end-all, be-all metric for push success. Developers should also be tracking how push notifications impact DAU and churn across the entire user base and within important segments.

Dimensions of push personalization

- ✓ App usage levels
- ✓ Install date
- ✓ Previous conversions or lack of conversions
- ✓ Geo-tagged location
- ✓ Time zone
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Sex
- ✓ Language

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Developer dos and don'ts for push notifications

Do use notifications early on to supplement solid onboarding

Make sure you're letting users know the most important features and services within your app by using push notifications to drive early enrollment steps. Consider making a list of the top five to ten activities you want users to engage with during the first seven days of installation and set trigger campaigns around them.

Do have a proper staging environment

Nothing is more embarrassing than having a test alert go out to a set of users, particularly when you've got a general audience 'lever' that sends out messages to all users. Unfortunately, test notifications sent in error tend to have some of the highest open rates, as users wonder what the heck happened.

Do be mindful of what time of day messages are pushed

Consider setting quiet hours on push notifications based on user behavior and target demographics. If you've got a business productivity app, chances are you won't move the needle much with messages that go out at 11:30 at night. Meanwhile, notifications from a gaming app may see more traction in the evening compared to the early morning hours.

Don't make notifications too generic

Nothing kills customer sentiment like a generic push notification that's completely out-of-sync with specific user experience. Do whatever you can to make sure you're not sending loyal subscribers push notifications reminding them to subscribe, or promo reminders to those who've already redeemed the promotion.

Don't leave users hanging with links

When you've sent out push notifications meant to drive behavior or send users to specific places within the app, be sure that the links you use go deep enough into an app. The easier you can make it for the user to connect with the right in-app content, the greater your chances for success. And the better the overall user experience.

Don't forget the golden rule of push notifications

Whatever you do, don't send too many messages to any of your audiences. Set push notification volume caps to keep users engaged and happy.

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How Flurry can help

Flurry Push can help you achieve push notification excellence. Our free service makes it easy to schedule push notifications at specific times or build triggered push notifications based on actions within your app. The platform enables developers to target specific segments and to monitor engagement and user reactions to push notifications.

To learn about how Flurry Push can help you, visit our website at **www.flurry.com/push.**

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