

the *game* of *love*

Dating apps use gamification & messaging tactics to form an essential **engagement habit**. Here's how other brands can do the same.





Dating apps are extremely successful at encouraging people to make using their apps a habit.

This level of engagement should be the envy of other industries, so our digital strategists dug into *why* these apps succeed.

We found that dating apps successfully engage users by rewarding desired user behaviors, and by defining the customer journey and customizing content based on users' expectations.

These are just a couple of dating app strategies that can also benefit retail, media, travel, and health apps, to name a few.

In this whitepaper, you'll learn how

dating apps have transformed the online dating experience of a decade ago, which centered on "best matches" through algorithms, into match-making entertainment based on gamification framework.

Gamification has been a hot topic in the mobile space for quite some time. Paired with mobile messaging, gamification garners improved user engagement and loyalty while gathering information to better delight a brand's audiences.

What can other apps learn from dating apps? Turns out, quite a few things.

1 Reward a deepening relationship by giving customers more

"Dating apps such as eHarmony and OK Cupid ask users a series of questions to understand their interests," says Alyssa Meritt, Head of Strategic Consulting at Urban Airship. "They also track what you really click on. The result is that they can serve better matches to users, which encourages greater engagement."

Other apps mimic this feedback-engagement model through a preference center and learning from users' behaviors. But Meritt says dating apps take this one step further. OK Cupid incentivizes responses by unlocking additional matches when users answer more questions.

It's human nature to enjoy positive affirmation, whether through words,



acknowledgement, gifts, or attention. Apps can offer rewards to users who completing activities that reveal their preferences.

Meritt says it's important to ensure that each request for the user's time or information directly results in an enhanced experience. Without an ongoing cadence of discovery and reward, users may lose interest and ultimately delete the app.

Marketers can justify offering high-value



tailored content or perks because the insights from mobile can also be used cross-channel to create an enhanced experience. The benefit to the brand is in total customer lifetime value vs. the cost of acquisition and onboarding for a new customer.

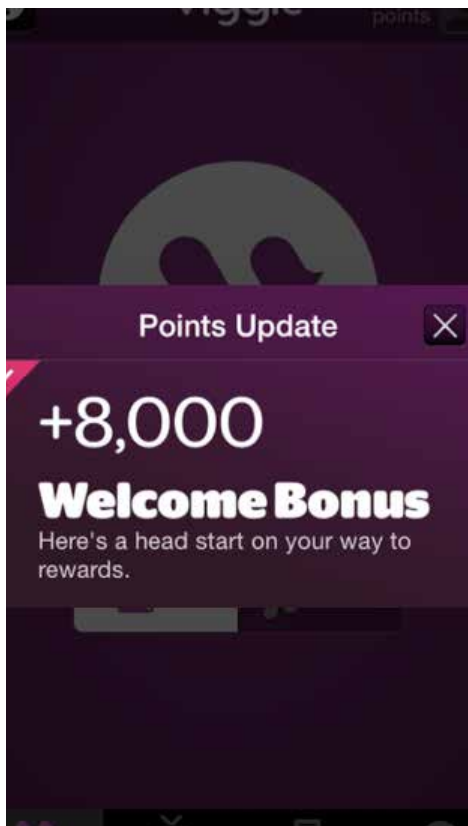
Just as there's a strong case for gradually elevating a relationship, there's also a case

for not moving too fast. Apps that immediately hit users with a request to send push notifications—the first screen experience a user has with an app—are like fast-moving first dates who demand more than the other person is ready to offer.

Brands that exercise restraint (call it chivalry) in their approach gradually warm up customers to opt in by clearly stating their value proposition online, offline, and in the app store. They describe the benefits of the app before they request the privilege of push.

For example, our customer Viggle asks users to set up a profile upon opening the app for the first time. The entertainment app explains the benefit of registering so users understand the value they'll receive.

After a user has created an account, Viggle rewards the user with 8,000 points, which can be accumulated and redeemed for rewards. This positive interaction paves the way for a mutually beneficial relationship.



Viggle rewards users with points for tuning into television shows and music. These points can be redeemed for gifts.

“Apps that immediately hit users with a request to send push notifications are like fast-moving first dates who demand more than the other person is ready to give.”

Apps can also use tagging to re-engage those who haven't registered, or who might have only reached a certain point in customer onboarding. This can take the form of an in-app message or push notification that explains the benefits of completing a user profile or selecting content (apparel, activities, locations, etc.) that the user is interested in learning about.

For example, a user who takes the time to set parameters on the person he or she is willing to date is likely to see better matches. Similarly, a shopper who shares her size or color preferences for clothing will be rewarded with more relevant offers, and perhaps a coupon incentive to purchase, too.

But messages don't need to be limited to financial offers. Affirmation and status rank are powerful motivators on dating sites and on social tools such as LinkedIn, which reveals the relative strength of a profile in terms of popularity or search hits.

Another tactic to encourage users to build profiles revolves around assigning a percentage to the completeness of a profile. This encourages users' curiosity about what tasks they need to tackle to achieve 100%.



2 Gamify the experience by making choice more fun

Apps such as Tinder gamify the dating experience by providing an enormous pool of potential mates and letting the user self-curate by placing age and proximity limitations.

Users can then 'swipe' right to indicate interest. If the receiving party reciprocates, direct messaging is enabled through in-app messages.

Brands outside the dating industry can capitalize on this approach by building fun, breezy self-curation games that reveal which products or content users are most interested in.

This gives users an easy way to browse products, such as swiping to learn more about a piece of clothing or type of music, and gives brands an easy way to learn more about their audience.

A preference center might not reveal users' true interests due to category limitations.

Also, users might not want to take the time to indicate their preferences.

However, by gamifying the feedback process, brands can learn from users' behavior to create segments based on tags and serve up selected content.

For example, if a woman has browsed dresses and clicked on several in the color black, a savvy brand would infer she is likely looking for that perfect little black dress (or LBD) for date night.

The brand would then add this user to the LBD segment and send her a push notification or in-app message when a new selection of LBDs arrives.

Moments of discovery and mobile delight are often fueled by a thoughtful approach to segmentation that makes users smile because the app's notification feels like it's "just for me."



3 Put a name to a face with rich, interactive media

Visual appearances play a strong role in everyday life choices—what we eat, what we wear, who we are attracted to, and more.

Top brands amp up their visual and interactive offerings, pairing curated content with interactive media, such as rich landing pages in the app featuring a picture of that new little black dress with product information and a buy button.

The Victoria's Secret PINK Nation app succeeds in gamifying the retail experience, and supporting the visual browsing experience with interactive media.

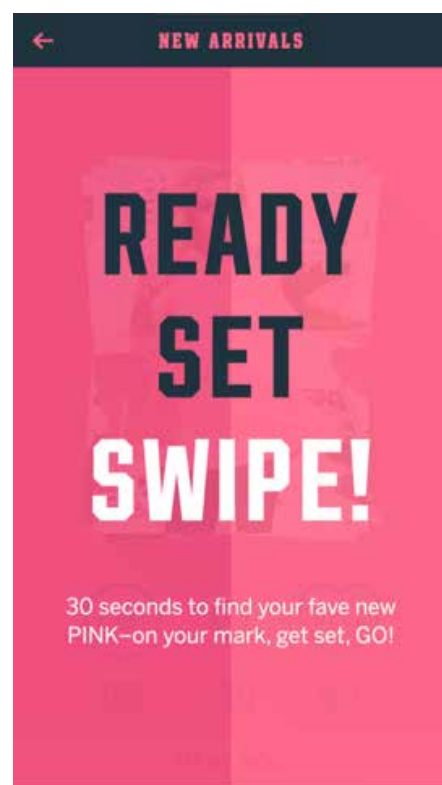
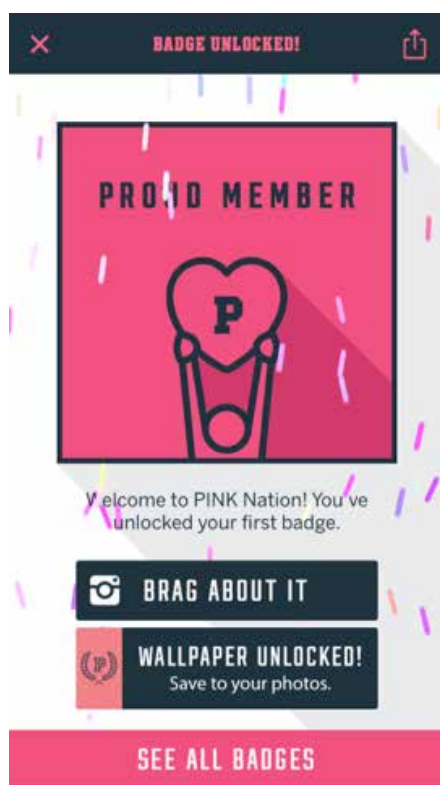
The PINK Nation app uses a mini-game feature called 'want' or 'need' in the app to showcase products. The feature

encourages the user to swipe left or right to identify their interest in different looks. After time's up, PINK Nation shares the breakdown of how many 'wants' vs. 'needs' with clickable product information.

The app also uses playful elements such as a lotto-style scratch card and icons that reveal rewards or offers when traced. It also awards badges to users when they complete certain tasks.

As with dating apps, PINK Nation uses push messages as a way to prompt engagement, crafting the message content so there is a call to action paired with the payoff (such as unlocking a new freebie).

The app's tone of voice is also light and playful, perfect for its audience.



The PINK Nation app does an exceptional job of gamifying the shopping experience. The app awards badges for completing specific actions, making a mini-game out of shopping. It also shares lotto-style cards to “scratch” on a phone screen, revealing surprise deals.



4 Curated content helps drive decisions

While gamification strategies excite users, messaging is key to delivering curated content to generate conversions.

"Brands need to realize there's rich value in having your app on a user's device," Meritt says, "and at the heart of that is the ability to reach consumers with messages, anytime and anywhere."

But Meritt explains that users are most receptive to those messages when the content feels curated. This is consistent with Urban Airship's *Good Push Index* study findings that reveal nearly 300% greater engagement from highly targeted messages, versus undifferentiated broadcast messages.

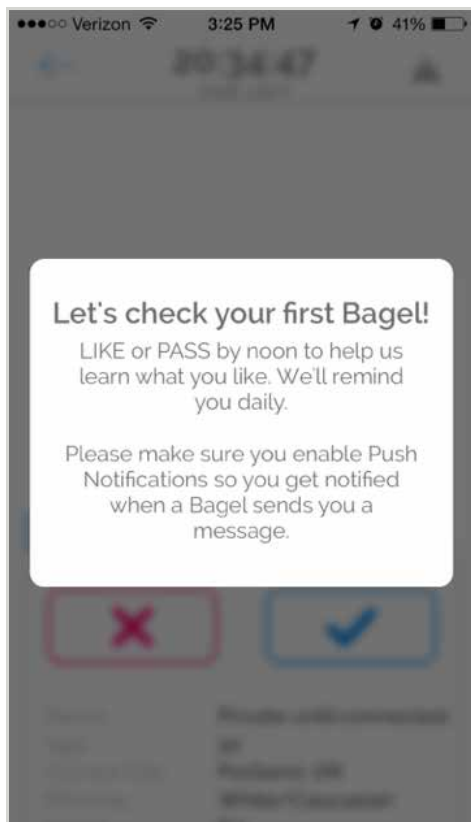
For example, "shopping" for love in a dating app isn't much different from shopping for clothing in a retail app—in both instances, apps have an opportunity to

learn a lot about a user's preferences and behaviors, and through tagging, create rich segmentation profiles that can recommend good matches.

Sales psychology suggests that curation drives buying decisions, because people who are presented with a small number of choices are more likely to make a selection than those who are shown a plethora of options.

"Choosing how deeply to curate content is strategic, and influences a specific kind of user," Meritt says. "It's like a restaurant choosing whether to offer a vast menu or a prix fixe. You have to know your audience and parallel that to your content."

The Coffee Meets Bagel app succeeds in sending hand-picked prospects to its users for a more personal dating experience by integrating with Facebook.



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The free dating app will select one “bagel” for each user every day (who is a friend of a friend), favoring quality picks over quantity of choices.

If both parties indicate interest, they are set up to chat and get to know each other. “The curated suggestion prompts deeper consideration,” Meritt explains. “That decision driver can be used in retail to promote new full-price items, in media to promote featured stories, or in a host of other industries to map the brand’s objective to the user experience.”



BUILD A LASTING RELATIONSHIP BY DESIGNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

Successful apps have a defined strategy that focuses on engaging users throughout their journey with the app.

Urban Airship can help you win your user’s hearts and keep the romance alive with a world-class Strategic Consulting team that has helped hundreds of top brands define their mobile plan and roadmap for success.

Our team has several different packages to help, both with in-person work sessions, on-site educational opportunities, and virtual coaching.

Want more? We’re happy to craft a custom package to ensure your success. Just give us a call: 800.720.2098

ABOUT URBAN AIRSHIP

Urban Airship helps the world’s leading brands build their businesses by engaging customers through the most immediate, intimate and context-aware channel—mobile.

Because 70% of new mobile app users abandon apps after as little as a month, brands must create mobile experiences inside and outside of their app to build long-term relationships.

Urban Airship’s industry-leading, scalable, marketer-driven technology inspires “mobile moments” that personalize content, enable frictionless ticketing and tipping, and help customers discover what matters to them.

We do this with a simple, guiding principle: empowering brands to deliver the experiences customers crave, at precisely the right time and place.