



**Branch** Whitepaper

# Turning App Installs into Users: The Guide to Mobile App Onboarding

## ◀ What you'll learn

Why is Onboarding Crucial?

Mobile App Onboarding 101

7 Test Ideas You Can Try

# Why is Onboarding Crucial?

Onboarding is the process of creating a successful and loyal user by explaining the core value and the basic actions behind your product. Mobile onboarding is imperative, and necessary, for any mobile app. With customer acquisition costs and cost-per-install prices continually rising, there are only so many users that mobile brands can realistically acquire. In fact, CPI's have risen to over \$2 per iOS install.

But just because a person has downloaded an app, it doesn't mean they are a user; let alone a revenue generating customer. The onboarding experience that is presented to a user will determine their future habits when using your app.

It's important to know that one in four users abandon an app after a single use. Effective onboarding flows can fix this discrepancy and create valuable, engaged users for any brand. "Companies must learn not only what compels users to click, but also what makes them tick," wrote Nir Eyal in his book "Hooked."

The process of generating a hook for any product includes 4 main stages:

**TRIGGER** The "spark" that captures the user. Triggers can be Internal (for example when a person is bored or frustrated) or External (when a friend shares with you a specific content).

**ACTION** Influenced by the ease of performing it and the psychological motivation to do it.

**VARIABLE REWARD** The hook's ability to create a craving. Variability increases excitement and dopamine release. It's the same effect triggered by slot machines.

**INVESTMENT** Occurs when the user puts something into the product of service such as time, data, effort, social capital, or money. For example, when a user spend hours to customize the settings and preferences.

In order to hook these users, brands must focus on optimizing and refining their onboarding process. By using data, testing, and results, brands can measure how their onboarding flow is resonating with the average user. Because after all, brands only have one chance to engage the average consumer, who only has an average attention span of 8 seconds.

# Mobile App Onboarding 101

When it comes to best practices for mobile app onboarding, there are a few standards the top brands follow. But before we get to the best practices, it's essential to know which mistakes are most common among onboarding a user to a mobile app:

- Assuming everyone needs an onboarding tutorial
- Asking too much or irrelevant information upfront
- Not providing a clear value proposition to sign up
- "Abandoning" your user after registration
- Not focusing on the first crucial in-app action
- Using an identical flow for iOS and Android

All of these mistakes can stymie growth and create drop-offs for new app downloads. Most importantly, they prevent users from reaching the "Aha" moment that each marketer tries to convey to their audience. It's impossible to talk about onboarding without dissecting the "Aha" moment, and how to best communicate the overall value of a product. It can also be described as "a set of actions that separates customers who find value in your product from those who don't."

Some of the most popular apps were able to clearly distinguish what actions separate loyal users from those who churn after one use:

**Slack:** 2000 messages sent between a team

**Zynga:** User returns 1 day after signing up

**Facebook:** User connects with 10 friends within 7 days

**Dropbox:** One file in one Dropbox folder on one device

These brands use data to find out their "Aha" moment, embed steps to ensure that value is communicated into their onboarding flow, (mobile or desktop) and test how each part resonates with their audience. After the user opens the app for the first time, every element on the screen is used to guide the person to that specific set of actions as quickly as possible. That's why, for instance, Facebook immediately prompts new users with "friend recommendations" that can be added to their network.

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# 7 Test Ideas You Can Try

Testing is a key for any successful cross-functional marketing department, and testing during onboarding especially, can be one of the most crucial steps for any brand trying to improve their mobile app metrics. These 7 tests from Apptimize can walk brands through the process of perfecting their mobile onboarding flow, allowing them to optimize the user journey.

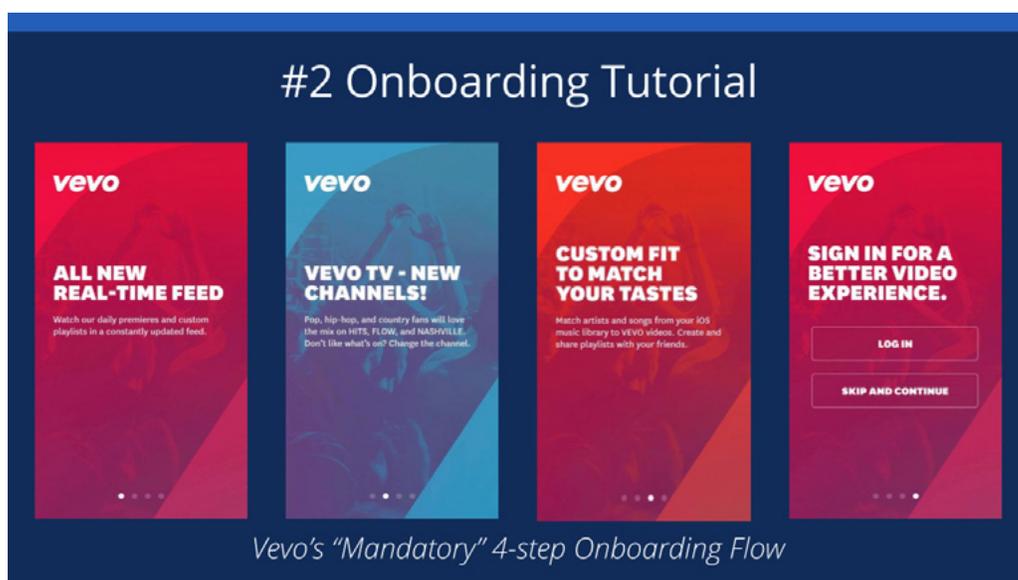
## 1. Hero Image and Value Proposition

While many of these may seem obvious, they are key for brands enticing users to pull the trigger on engaging with an app. These four tests can help improve the value prop of an app:

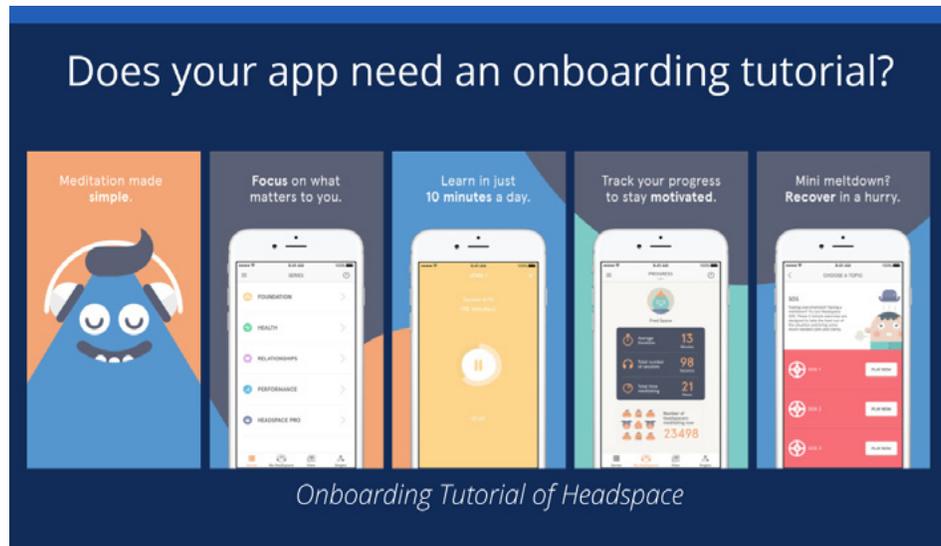
- Best performing image are usually “teasers” of the app. Including screenshots.
- Try different variants based on filters like location, engagement, etc.
- Test different value propositions like offers, location based services, etc.
- Test each element separately.

## 2. Onboarding Tutorial

Depending on the type of app or company, an app tutorial can sometimes be a valuable flow for educating users that have just downloaded your app. But not always. For example, Vevo had a hypothesis that removing their tutorial would increase app logins and signups. They reduced the steps it took to get into the app from 4 to 2, all while simultaneously increasing their logins by 9.69% and completed sign ups by 5.85%. They simplified their process and reduced the friction they were experiencing.



Headspace, however, sees success with a longer tutorial because of the complexity of their meditation app. They have a 5 step process and explanations that help their users succeed later when using the app:



### 3. Registration

It's important to remember these questions about registration for mobile app onboarding:

- [What information is needed?](#)
- [What should be the flow?](#)
- [How many steps?](#)
- [What information can be collected later?](#)
- [Where can I test for bottlenecks?](#)

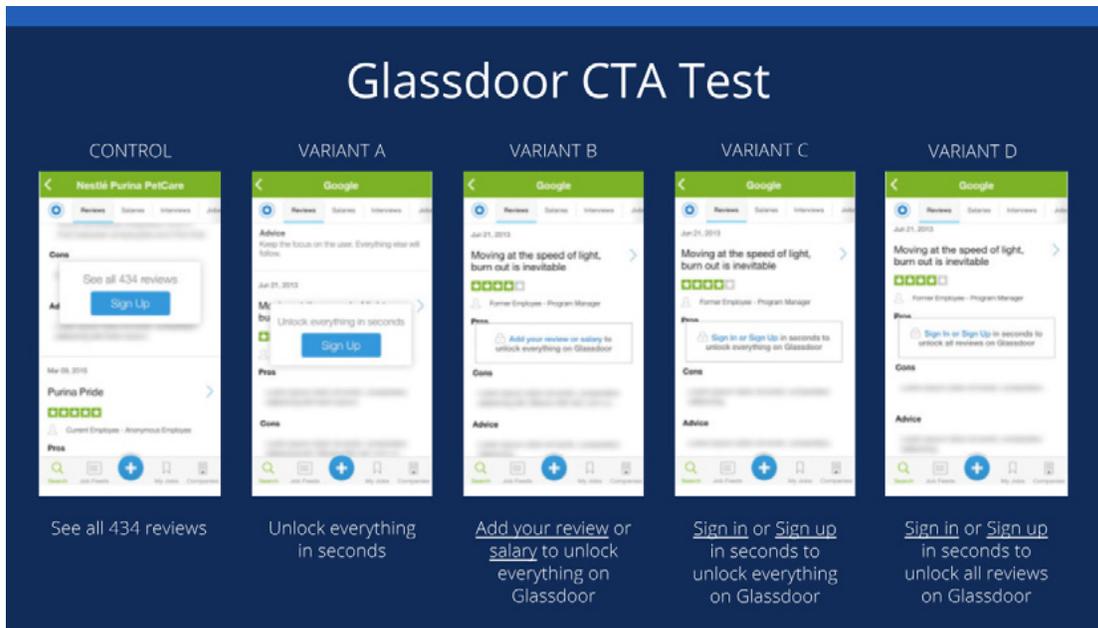
This can be brand or industry specific, but always remember to reference user personas and data to know what works best in regards to registration.

### 4. Call-to-Action(s)

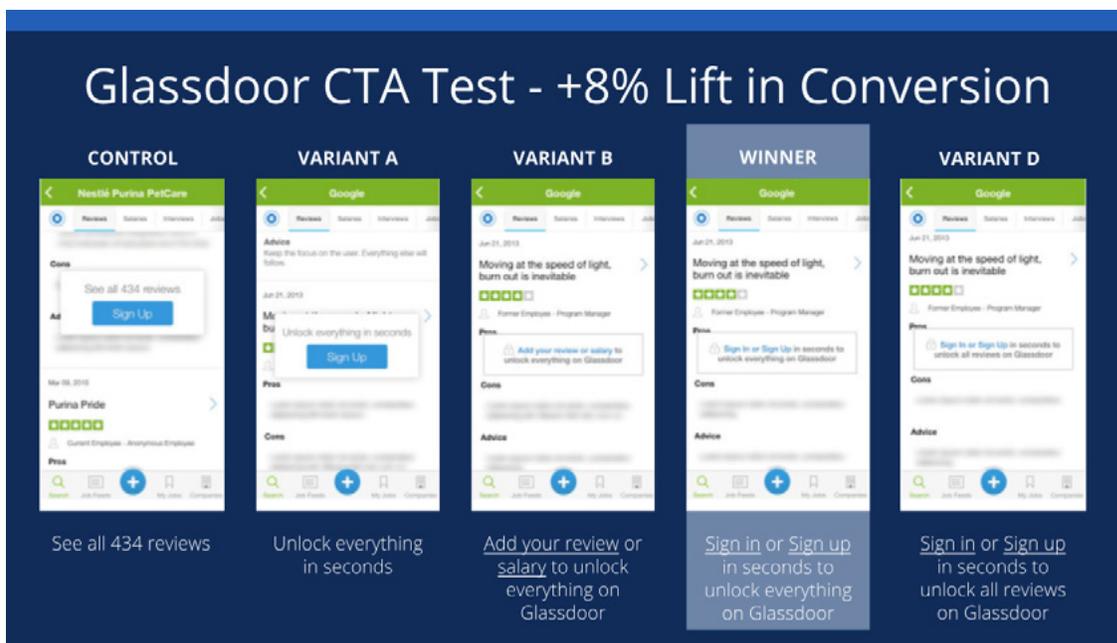
CTA's are the gold standard for digital marketing testing. Different copy, colors, and placements can invoke action, or, inaction. Here are some best practices for testing CTA's:

- [Test button, copy, location.](#)
- [Keep it clear and short](#)
- [Start with simple tests and narrow down the options \(e.g. button color/size\)](#)

Glassdoor ran a test on their CTA's to optimize their CTA's during their onboarding flow. Here are the 5 options they started with:



But ultimately, one option stood out from the rest:



## 5. Login Options

Adding a social login as a variant during onboarding will likely increase conversion rates for sign-up and make onboarding seamless. For example, letgo, the top reseller marketplace app in the world was able to improve their onboarding numbers by adding an option to login via Facebook or Google.

## 6. Social Proof

Many apps experiment with showing social proof for how valuable their app is during onboarding. Whether that's peer validation or 3rd party reviews, it's important for brands to test out the concept of social proof. Here are some options to consider testing when considering adding social proof to a flow:

- [Similar users](#)
- [Experts](#)
- [Celebrities](#)
- [Friends](#)
- [Crowds \(e.g. "10M+ downloads"\)](#)

## 7. First Action(s) After Registration

The first action after a registration flow is one of the most crucial steps brands can take to improving engagement and retention. For instance, if adding friends to a social network isn't included in the onboarding flow, it should be the first action users are presented with after they have completed the flow. Other tests? Creating a playlist for a music app immediately after they've setup their account with your app.

This all goes back to the "aha" moment that was mentioned earlier. These first actions can hook users, allowing brands to segment their loyal and inactive users.

## Conclusion

Onboarding isn't a new concept for mobile apps, but it's one that can define your engagement, retention and conversion metrics. Remembering to test and iterate different tactics will allow brands to find their exact "aha" moment when users finally understand the value of your product.

If users aren't getting into your app because of friction during onboarding, costs will rise and revenues will fall. The average cost of an install in 2017 is \$3.15, which means apps must make at least \$3.15 from their users to break even on an install. Successful onboarding flows can greatly reduce that risk.