

Alert! You Need Notifications

Master Notifications To Begin Your Digital Experience Evolution

by Julie A. Ask

April 5, 2018

Why Read This Report

Notifications may just be text, images, and beeps today, but as channels proliferate, and instant content delivery becomes more sophisticated and interactive, the strategy and technology you use to send notifications will become your digital experience orchestration hub. This report shows digital business professionals how to take the first steps toward future digital experiences by crafting a moments strategy that starts with notifications.

Key Takeaways

Notifications Illustrate Future Experiences — Today

In the future, leading firms will create experiences by orchestrating and assembling information or services for consumers dynamically, based on real-time context. Notifications do this with text today.

Without Notifications, Enterprises Underserve Customers

Mobile apps and websites fail consumers in two ways. They place too much cognitive load on consumers, and they're overkill for most interactions. Notifications are the cure.

Craft A Micro Moments Strategy, And Automate Execution With Strategic Partners

Brands have billions of interactions with consumers each day in their customers' moments. Simple programming will fail most enterprises due to complexity. They will need solution partners.

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Related Research Documents

[The Forrester Wave™: Mobile Engagement Automation, Q3 2017](#)

[Micro Moments Are The Next Frontier For Mobile](#)

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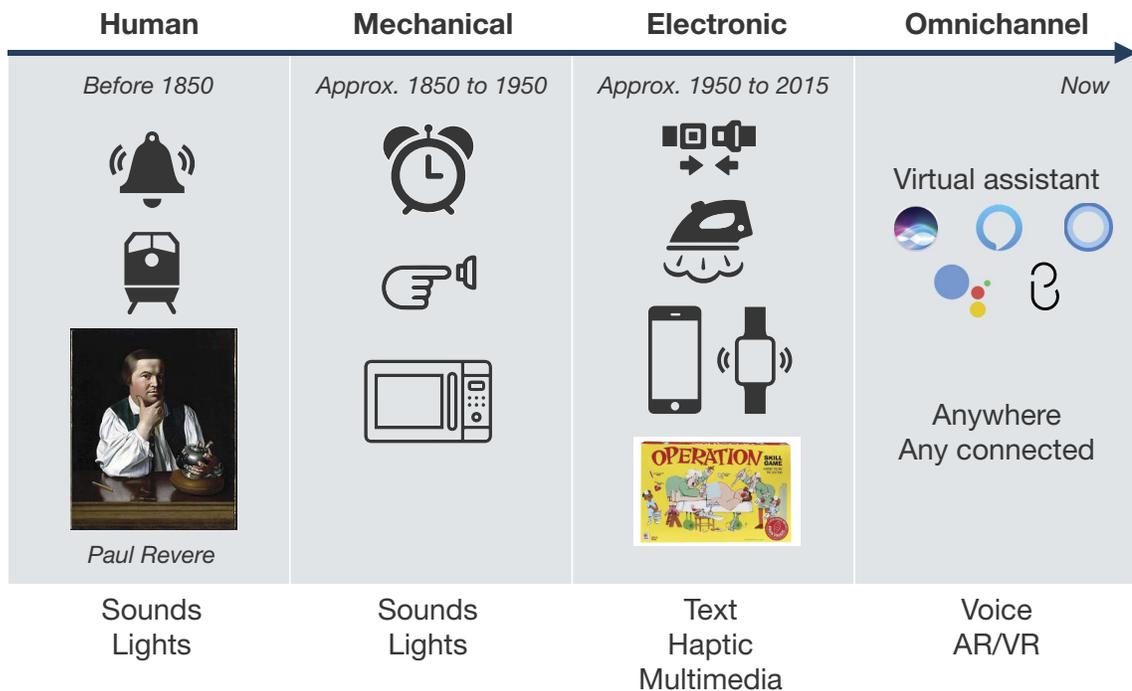
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Lead The Evolution Of Your Digital Experiences With Notifications

Notifications aren't new, but their ubiquity is. Alerts and notifications are as old as gadgets themselves (see Figure 1). They're everywhere: They exist on most electronic, mechanical, or connected devices with moving parts. Doorbells and elevators chime. Kitchen timers and alarm clocks buzz. Every driver understands the sound his car makes when he turns it off with the lights on. More modern examples include prescription reminders or news alerts on smartphones.

Digital and mobile experiences are evolving, and mobile is leading customer expectations (see Figure 2). Forrester believes that future digital or mobile experiences will assemble content or services dynamically, based on real-time context, and push them out to consumers in the appropriate channel, location, and device. Foundational mobile technologies and capabilities will be the core of **future digital experiences**. Today, notifications rightsize experiences and push them out proactively when a customer needs them in their moments (see Figure 3).¹ Mastering notifications will help digital business professionals start their journey toward modernizing all digital experiences.

FIGURE 1 Notifications Are Not New But Continue To Evolve



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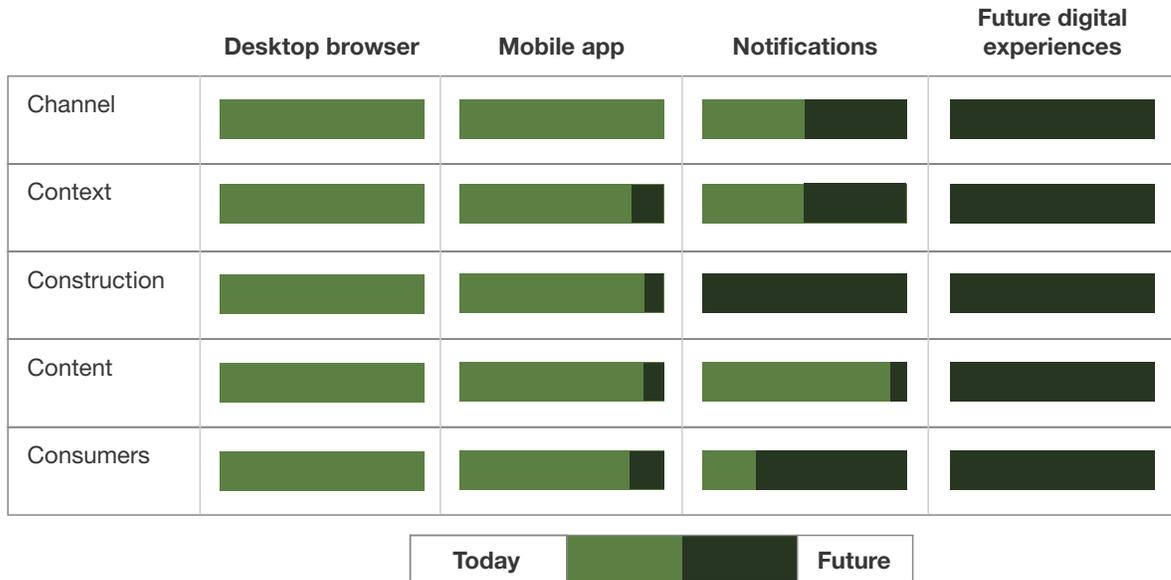
FIGURE 2 Digital And Mobile Experiences Will Evolve Along Five Dimensions

Dimension	Today	Future	Description
Channel	Single	Any	Channels will continue to fragment. The number of available connected devices will grow. Mediums will evolve beyond touchscreens to include text, voice, haptic, etc.
Context	Static/provided	Dynamic/insights	Personalization of experiences will rely increasingly on dynamic context and insights.
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Kitchen sink” • Web or apps • Pull 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Dynamic assembly” • Fragments • Push 	Modern experiences will lift the cognitive load from consumers. Rather than driving consumers to self-service, brands will push out experiences assembled dynamically based on real-time context or insights.
Content	Personalized copy	Service modules	Relevance and personalization will evolve to images and app fragments on service modules.
Consumers	Many	Moment	Brands will shift from targeting consumers with blast communication and static experiences (pull) to serving individuals proactively in their moments (push).

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FIGURE 3 Notifications Have More Attributes Of Future Experiences Than Desktop Or Mobile Apps Today



Modern Notifications Have The Attributes Of Future Digital Experiences – Today

Consumers have moments. Enterprises can serve customers in their moments through notifications. Forrester defines a notification as:

A small digital package, such as a text, audio, visual, or haptic signal or message, based on real-time context, that delivers relevant information, content, or services to consumers in their moments, allowing them to act immediately – either online or offline – or simply get peace of mind.

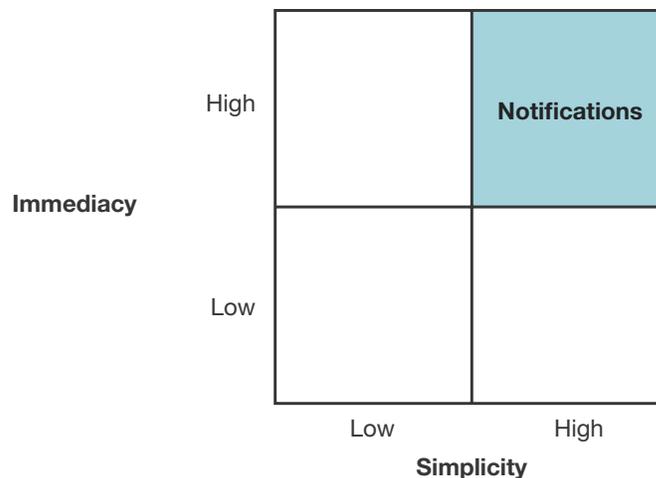
Notifications have the potential to reduce the cognitive load on consumers by pushing out just the information they need, in the moment they need it, in the right channel. As Walgreens’ Benjamin Weiss said, “We’re trying to take those 10- to 15-second app tasks and – by putting them into interactive notifications – make them 3- to 5-second tasks.” Enterprises that excel at using notifications use context to infer a customer’s intent and serve him proactively. Modern notifications:

- › **Are rightsized interactions.** Consumers have more than 200 moments on their smartphones alone each day. Three-quarters of these are what Forrester refers to as micro moments – a consumer needs only a glance to get the information they need to take action, if necessary. Apps and websites are overkill for the vast majority of the interactions that brands have with consumers. Modern notifications sit at the intersection of immediacy and simplicity (see Figure 4).

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- › **Depend on context and insights to assemble content dynamically.** Context helps digital business pros assemble audiences and trigger messages at just the right time. Immediacy matters, but if you interrupt a consumer, it'd better be necessary or requested. Context (like location) works today. Future notifications will demand insights. A basic notification from an airline today would inform a passenger that her flight is delayed. A more sophisticated notification will offer guidance on rebooking flights or delaying departure to the airport.
- › **Are push or proactive.** Mobile engagement automation solutions, like Braze, Leanplum, or Urban Airship, help digital business professionals proactively push notifications today by assembling audiences, content, and triggers based on context.² These tools map digital customer journeys, identify key moments, and create rules to push notifications out to consumers, automating execution.
- › **Carry a variety of payloads.** Historically, notifications have been audio signals (e.g., *you are not wearing your seat belt*) or print via the mail (e.g., *you are in default on your loan*). Today, mobile messages carry text, images, videos, interactive experiences, sounds, and more. In the future, they will carry app fragments (see Figure 5).
- › **Arrive in many packages — both digital and physical.** Notifications arrive in many formats — some dictated by consumer or enterprise choice and others by government or internal legal requirements. Banks must notify consumers of mortgage foreclosures in writing. Depending on consumer choice, media outlets push out notifications via email, SMS, MMS, push notifications, or even third-party platforms.

FIGURE 4 Modern Notifications Sit At The Intersection Of Immediacy And Simplicity

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FIGURE 5 Notifications Can Carry A Variety Of Payloads Depending On The Device Type

Notification type by platform/device

	Smartphone	Tablet	Computer	Smart speaker	Car	TV	Clothing/wearable	Connected appliance
Text (short)	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	○
Text (long)	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	○
Haptic	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	○
Sounds	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
Visual/lights	○	○	○	●	●	●	○	●
Voice	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
Photo	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	○
Video	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	○

Enterprises Are Notification Newbies

Digital business pros have traditionally thought of mobile messaging as email shrunk onto a small screen. Early uses of SMS involved blast campaigns to drive acquisition via coupons and promotions. Enterprises lacked the analytics and tools they needed to serve existing customers based on the combination of preferences, activity, and real-time context in their *moments*. The moments paradigm of giving customers just what they need, when they need it, is nascent. Few enterprises have a strategy. Tools exist today, but enterprises stick to what they know — email and acquisition campaigns. As a result, digital business professionals:

- › **Lean on what fits existing paradigms — mobile apps and websites.** Enterprises continue to rely on owning moments with consumers on their own mobile apps or websites, despite mounting evidence that consumers use relatively few apps (see Figure 6). It’s easier for airlines, for example, to post flight-time and gate changes on their own apps or websites than to figure out how often and where to send updates to passengers. Plan for *all* scenarios, rather than *the* scenario that fits existing assets and skills.

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- › **Rely on simple text messages when consumer-friendly rich media is more effective.** Digital business professionals use SMS and push notifications more often than rich media (see Figure 7). This burdens consumers. Text messages often demand that a consumer use a website or app — or place a phone call — to take action. In fact, 51% of consumers who received a notification took action within an app, and 22% did so offline.³ Use text messages to deliver a simple message, such as a reminder. Rich media alternatives with interactive buttons, photos, and videos are often self-contained and don't demand a second step.
- › **Underutilize in-app messaging to facilitate education and drive results.** In-app messaging can serve both as a storage locker for personal messages (e.g., *your mortgage has been paid*) and as just-in-time guidance on app usage (see Figure 8). Brands like Starbucks push reward notifications to app inboxes. Banks use in-app notifications to prompt users to download new versions as current ones expire. LinkedIn promotes new features to drive engagement.
- › **Are just ramping use of rich media messaging.** Use of rich media in notifications still pales in comparison to text: Adoption of rich media formats by enterprises is less than half of text adoption (see Figure 9). Rich media might include images, video, GIFs, or even emoji. Historically, enterprises have avoided rich media due to the high costs of MMS, but according to a Leanplum analysis, push notifications with emoji have nearly double the open rate of those without.⁴
- › **Are slow to migrate the use of notifications beyond smartphones.** Digital business professionals are starting to extend notifications beyond SMS and the smartphone home screen to desktops and to third-party platforms like Facebook Messenger (see Figure 10). These two destinations represent early-stage extensions. Notifications will eventually reach anywhere within a consumer's ecosystem — cars, connected appliances, and even public digital spaces, just as Tom Cruise experienced in *Minority Report*.

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FIGURE 6 Enterprises Are More Likely To Use Mobile Apps Or Websites Than Messaging To Engage Consumers

Technologies/channels used regularly by firms



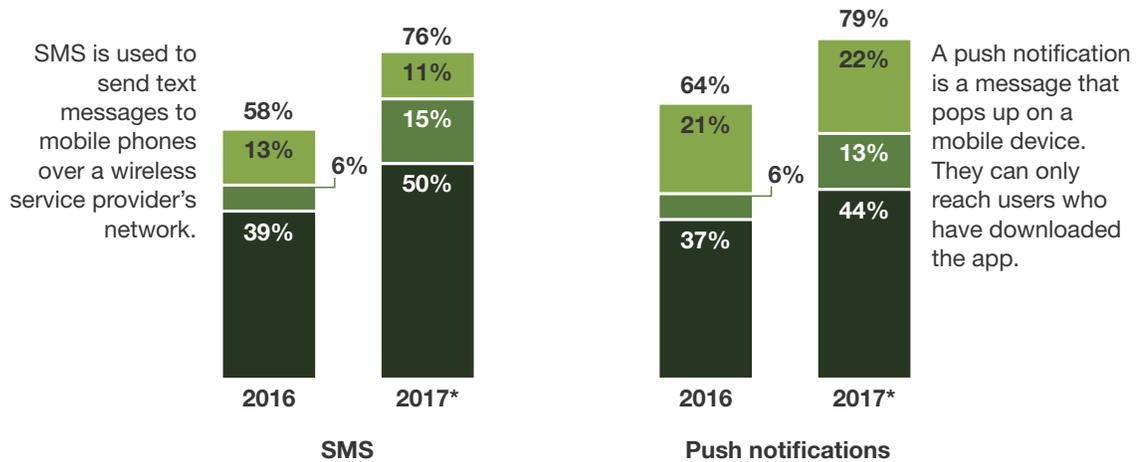
Base: 122 digital business executives

Source: Forrester’s H2 2017 Global Mobile Executive Online Survey

FIGURE 7 Digital Business Professionals Favor Text Messaging And Push Notifications

Text messaging

- Use
- Pilot
- Planning to pilot



Base: 94 digital business executives

*Base: 122 digital business executives

Source: Forrester’s H2 Global Mobile Executive Online Surveys, 2016 and 2017

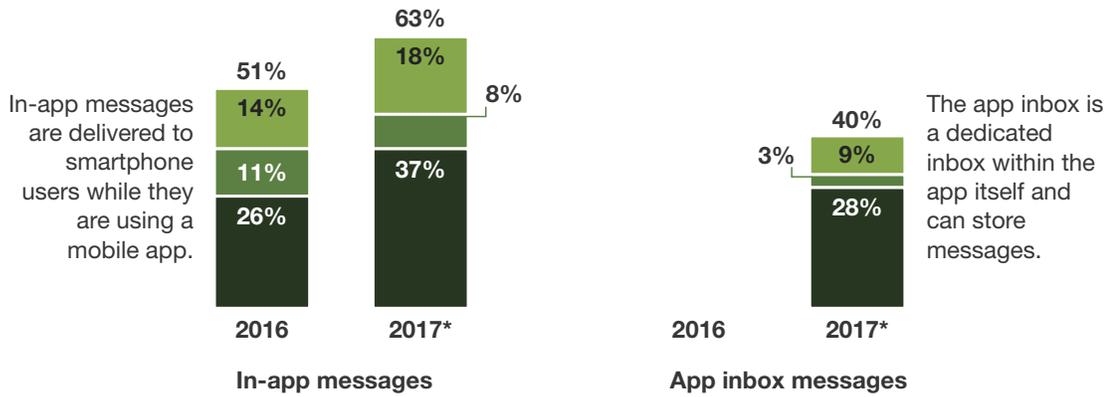
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FIGURE 8 In-App Messaging Use Increased From 2016 To 2017

In-app messaging

- Use
- Pilot
- Planning to pilot



Base: 94 digital business executives

*Base: 122 digital business executives

Source: Forrester's H2 Global Mobile Executive Online Surveys, 2016 and 2017

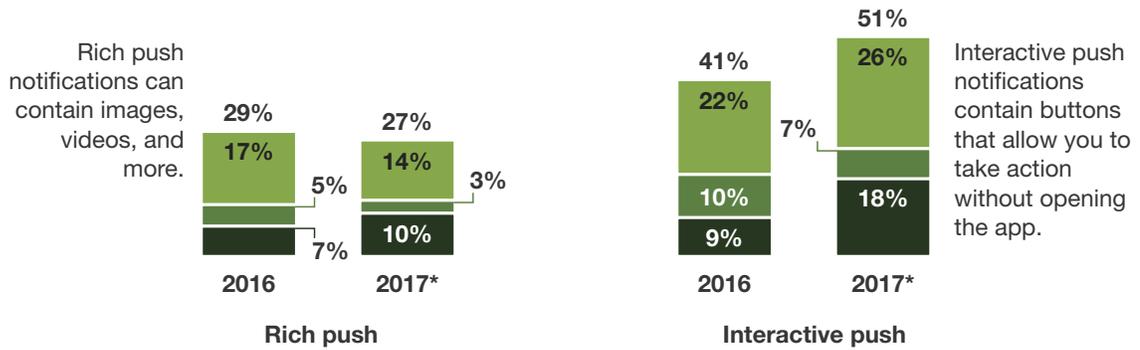
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FIGURE 9 Rich Media Push Notifications Are Used Far Less Than Traditional Push Notifications

Rich media push

- Use
- Pilot
- Planning to pilot



Base: 94 digital business executives

*Base: 122 digital business executives

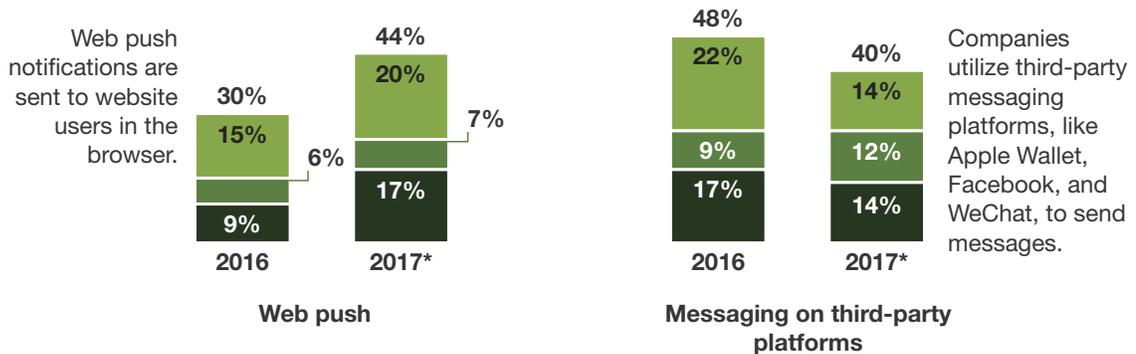
Source: Forrester's H2 Global Mobile Executive Online Surveys, 2016 and 2017

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FIGURE 10 Digital Business Pros Are Beginning To Use Other Channels To Deliver Messages To Consumers**Other channels**

- Use
- Pilot
- Planning to pilot



Base: 94 digital business executives

*Base: 122 digital business executives

Source: Forrester's H2 Global Mobile Executive Online Surveys, 2016 and 2017

Recommendations**Create A Moments Strategy Rooted In Notifications — Today**

Building mobile apps challenged conventional thinking around digital experiences. Websites are the proverbial kitchen sink, in that they do all things for all people. Mobile apps evolve design by narrowing the focus to the needs and motivations that a brand's best or most frequent customers have on the go. Delivering notifications demands that digital business professionals take quantum leaps forward in using context to anticipate what consumers need and then deliver just that content in the right channel. Use a methodical approach to identify how, where, and when to use notifications, and:

- › **Use journey maps to identify moments to improve customer experience.** Notifications can enhance, improve, or even transform customer experiences through process re-engineering. Map out your most important customer journeys, and identify the pain points. These are your moments. Evaluate each pain point or moment to consider which ones you can alleviate through immediacy of information or services or simplicity — or both. Prioritize notifications where immediacy and simplicity intersect.

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- › **Prioritize your defining moments.** Alleviating pain points is a first step, but brands will win customers in their defining moments. Defining moments set the tone for consumers in their engagement with brands. How brands handle “peak” and “end” moments is highly correlated with customer satisfaction and joy, according to authors Dan Heath and Chip Heath.⁵ More likely than not, these moments will be digital. For many companies, they will be moments of truth when customers need help, like flight cancellations, special occasions, or shipping mix-ups.
- › **Identify your data and contextual information gaps.** Anticipating the needs, motivation, or intent of your customers demands context at a minimum, if not insights. You also need to know who your customers are. As you identify your moments, articulate the context that you have, want, or will need — both to build profiles of your customers and trigger notifications. Inventory what you have, and create a plan to bridge the gap. For example, if you need location, ask your customers for permission, and tell them about the benefit of sharing, whether it is more relevant information or timely alerts.
- › **Automate delivery through a partner — you will struggle beyond simple, static rules.** There are more than 30 billion micro moments in the US alone each day on smartphones, let alone all digital devices. Start by using communication-as-a-service platforms to send notifications based on static rules such as payment due dates or claims status. As you move beyond batch notifications to one-off notifications triggered by real-time context, the complexity will explode. Vendors in the space that Forrester refers to as mobile engagement automation can help.⁶
- › **Iterate to test and learn quickly using customer-centric KPIs.** We understand a lot about notification best practices for straightforward use cases such as driving customer acquisition, appointment reminders, and breaking news. The number and breadth of use cases — and the combinations of channels, content, and contextual triggers — are seemingly unlimited. As you trial notifications, use multivariate testing against customer-centric key performance indicators (KPIs). Open rates may be the right metric if your business model is advertising. For customer service, app opens may represent a failure to anticipate and push out responses to customer needs proactively.⁷ For commerce, KPIs may be in-app or in-store purchases.

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Supplemental Material

Survey Methodology

Forrester's H2 2016 Global Mobile Executive Online Survey was fielded to global executives who either own or have extensive knowledge of their mobile strategies and services. For quality assurance, we screened respondents to ensure they met minimum standards of being senior executives who either own or have extensive knowledge of their mobile strategies and services. Forrester fielded the survey from Q2 to Q3 2016. Respondent incentives included a summary of the survey results. Exact sample sizes are provided in this report on a question-by-question basis. This survey used a self-selected group of respondents and is therefore not random. This data is not guaranteed to be representative of the population, and, unless otherwise noted, statistical data is intended to be used for descriptive and not inferential purposes. While nonrandom, the survey is still a valuable tool for understanding where users are today and where the industry is headed.

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Forrester's H2 2017 Global Mobile Executive Online Survey was fielded to 148 Forrester contacts with knowledge of mobile initiatives. However, only a portion of survey results are illustrated in this document — responses from respondents who identified themselves as marketers who are either directly involved with their companies' mobile initiatives or indirectly but aware or very aware of these initiatives. For quality assurance, we screened respondents to ensure they met minimum standards in terms of knowledge and insight into their companies' mobile initiatives.

Forrester fielded the survey from September to December 2017. Respondent incentives included a summary of the survey results and the opportunity to participate in future research. Exact sample sizes are provided in this report on a question-by-question basis.

This survey used a self-selected group of respondents and is therefore not random. This data is not guaranteed to be representative of the population, and, unless otherwise noted, statistical data is intended to be used for descriptive and not inferential purposes. While nonrandom, the survey is still a valuable tool for understanding where users are today and where the industry is headed.

Companies Interviewed For This Report

We would like to thank the individuals from the following companies who generously gave their time during the research for this report.

Braze (formerly Appboy)	Publishers Clearing House
The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America	Swrve
The Hershey Company	Urban Airship
Leanplum	Walgreens
MetLife	

Endnotes

¹ Moments and micro moments occur throughout a consumer's journey. Mass adoption of smartphones made moments the core mode of consumer engagement. Subsequent consumer adoption of connected devices such as smartwatches, cars, virtual assistants, and more extended this paradigm beyond phones. Brands will deliver these moments via touch, text, and voice across a number of channels. While a broad variety of moments are opportunities to impact customer experience, brands win by treating "peak" and "end" moments as "defining moments" that are highly correlated with customer satisfaction and joy.

² See the Forrester report "[The Forrester Wave™: Mobile Engagement Automation, Q3 2017.](#)"

³ See the Forrester report "[Mobile Messaging Fails Customers Today.](#)"

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⁴ Source: “Winning App Love (& Revenue) With Emojis,” Leanplum and App Annie (http://go.leanplum.com/rs/959-TQV-890/images/Leanplum_and_App_Annie_Winning_App_Love_and_Revenue_With_Emojis.pdf?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiWTJabU5UWXhaVE5qTnpFNSIsInQiOiJwckNDaHFLSkxadURQVGpvcUV6MIB6ZVozTFBZQXVOSFpsWDIPZzhVeXZaQ29GaktZM1Y3NU1Kb0VPYU5tdVUwWFpFd2w1V3hhb0hUT-01HdCt1OTM3NE12clQyS0Y3a1JkczVOQmROU1ltK0llald4eGVsUFZabUdCWE9GckVBcyJ9).

⁵ For more on the importance of moments, please check the following. Source: Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *The Power Of Moments*, Simon & Schuster, 2017.

⁶ See the Forrester report “[The Forrester Wave™: Mobile Engagement Automation, Q3 2017](#)” and see the Forrester report “[Vendor Landscape: Mobile Engagement Automation Solutions](#).”

⁷ See the Forrester report “[Life360 Wins In Family Mobile Moments](#).”

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