



The Secrets Of 5-Star Retail Apps



32 MOBILE APP FEATURES TOP
RETAILERS ARE USING TO DRIVE
ENGAGEMENT, REVENUE, & LOYALTY



What The Top Retail Apps Have In Common

The most engaging retail apps are designed to drive long-term loyalty, brand affinity, and contribute to a better shopping experience—both through mobile and in-store experiences.

In this playbook, the Taplytics Enterprise Services (TLES) Team is sharing how three of the top-rated retail apps have been built to:

- Drive user discovery, engagement, and opt-ins
- Ease the sign-up and checkout processes
- Personalize the user experience
- Enhance in-store shopping
- Solidify their brand values through messaging and design

We're also sharing best practices for optimizing your mobile app that we've learned from working with brands like Crate & Barrel, Chick-fil-A, and Ticketmaster.

Let the teardowns begin!

— Your Friends @ TLES

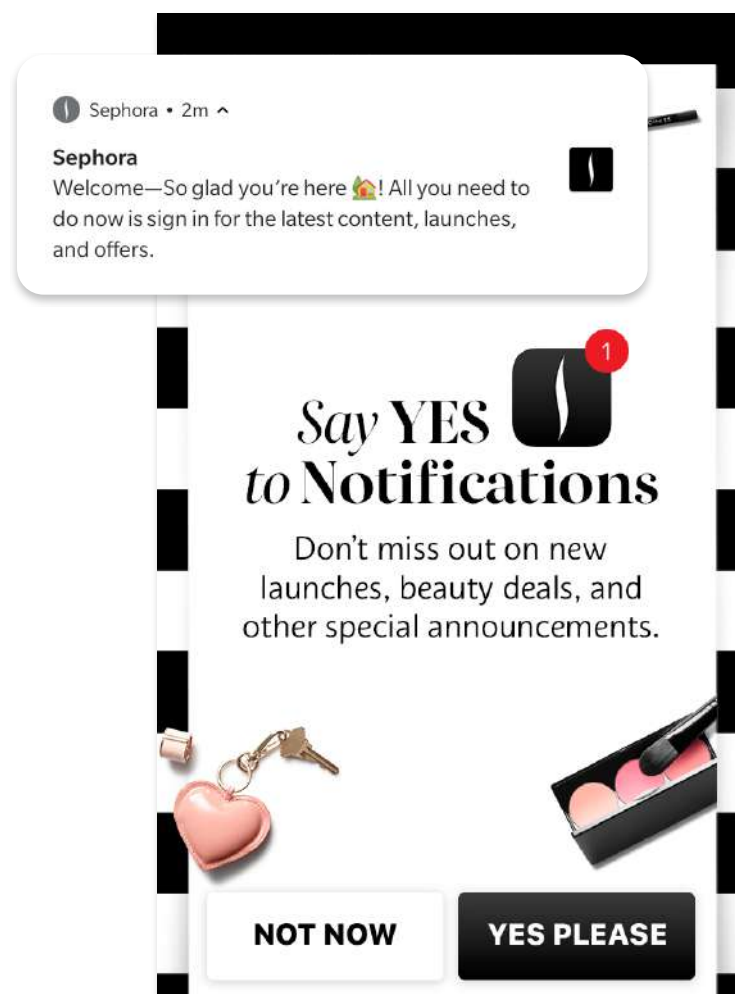


App Onboarding & Activation

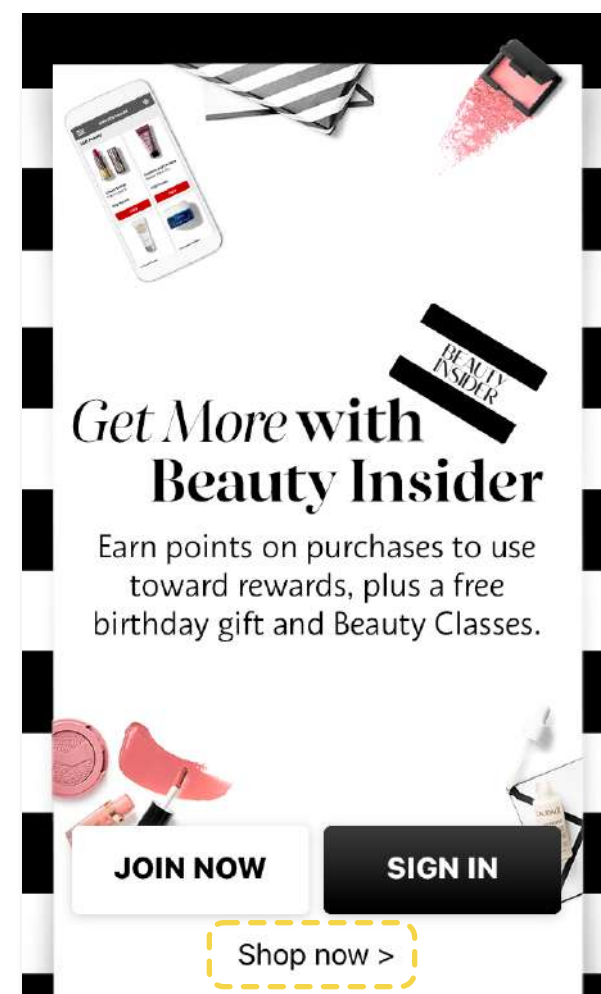
Sephora's app has a traditional onboarding flow—meaning there are several screens users must follow before they get into the app. These pages explain the app's key benefits and encourage users to opt into push notifications.

Here are some of the key elements that make their first-time user experience so great:

- 1 Skippable account creation:** App users do not have to create an account to start browsing products. Allowing users to skip traditional sign-ups can prevent drop-offs that may occur from the friction of account creation. Note: Sephora collects push notification opt-in *before* the account creation step. This way, they can re-engage users who haven't made a purchase or created an account with relevant messages later.

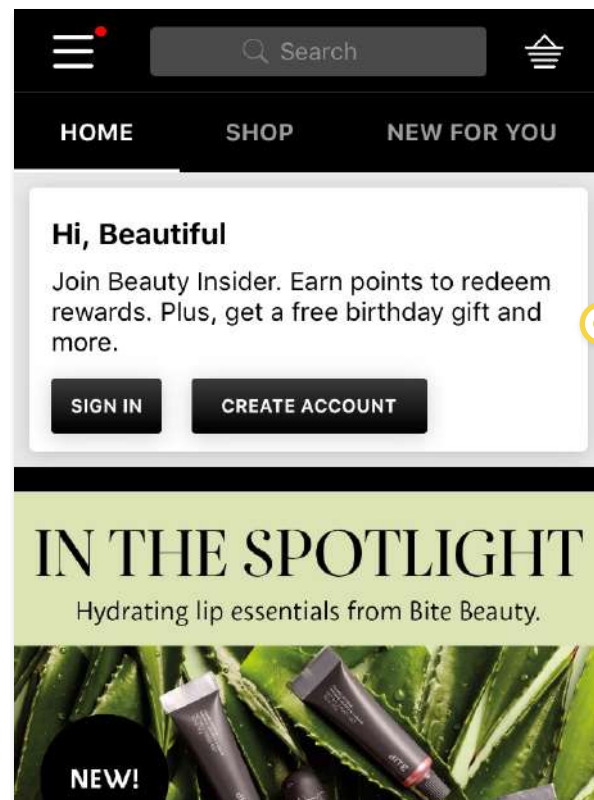


If users opt into push notifications, they'll receive messages if they haven't used the app.



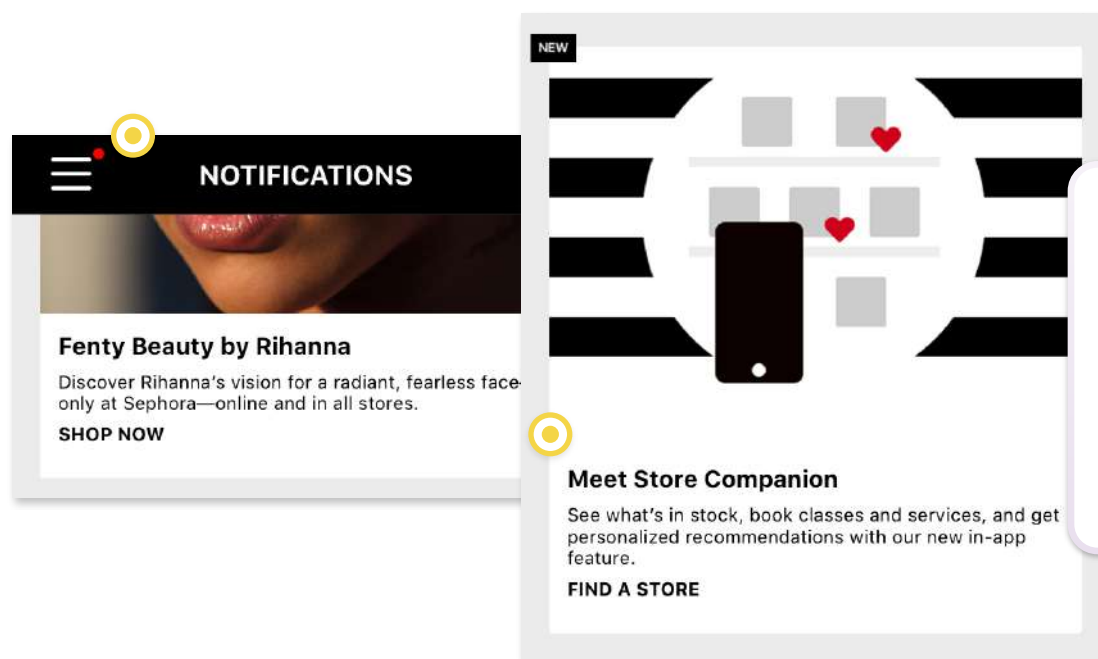
Users can skip signing up for a Beauty Insider account in favor of trying out the app first.

- 2 **Soft sign-up requests embedded into the app:** Prompts encouraging users to sign up for an account occur in other places in the app, like on the home screen, the community section, and during the purchase process. These messages reiterate the value of creating a Beauty Insider account without disrupting the user's first experience of the app.

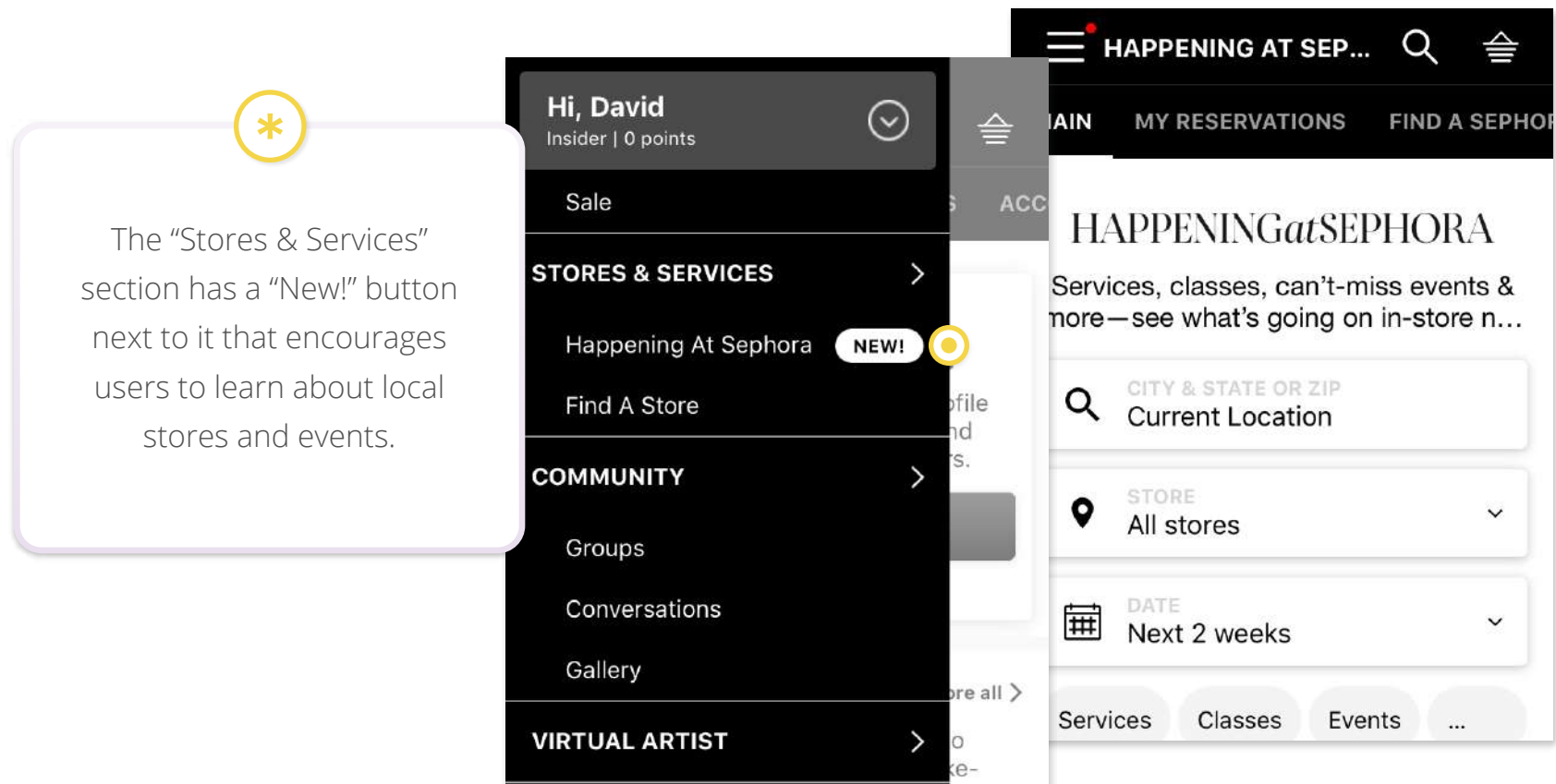


A homepage prompt encourages users to sign in or create an account using value-based messaging.

- 3 **Subtle feature education and discovery:** Sephora introduces new users to location-based features through its navigation. First, users are driven to look in their inbox (where a message about finding their nearest store is waiting for them) via a red dot. There's also a "New!" button on the "Stores & Services" menu item to encourage users to learn about nearby stores and events. These design elements reduce the need for a longer onboarding while naturally guiding users towards actions that will enhance their app experience.



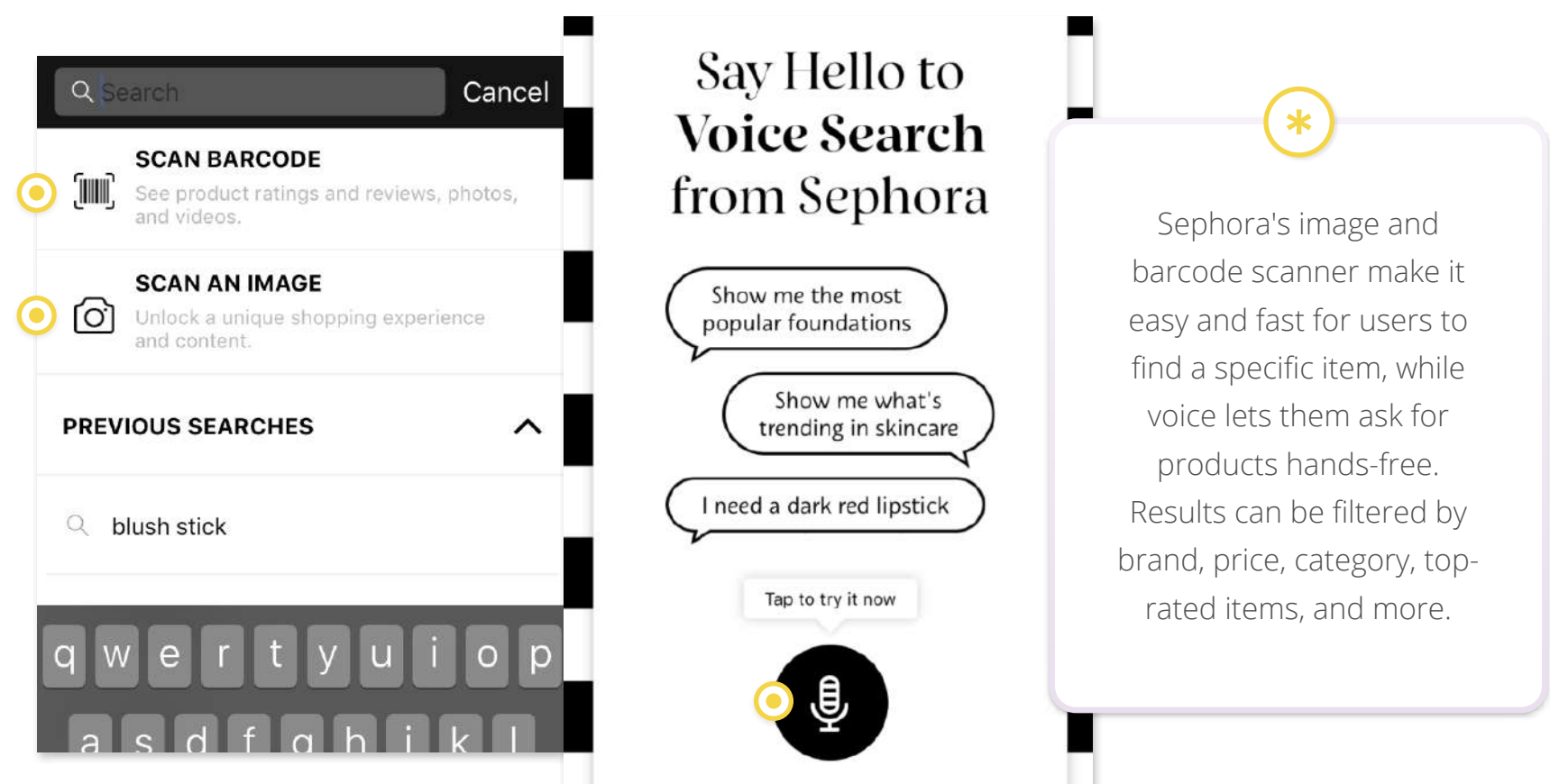
A red dot in the app navigation leads new users to their Inbox. A custom message is waiting for them about finding a nearby store.



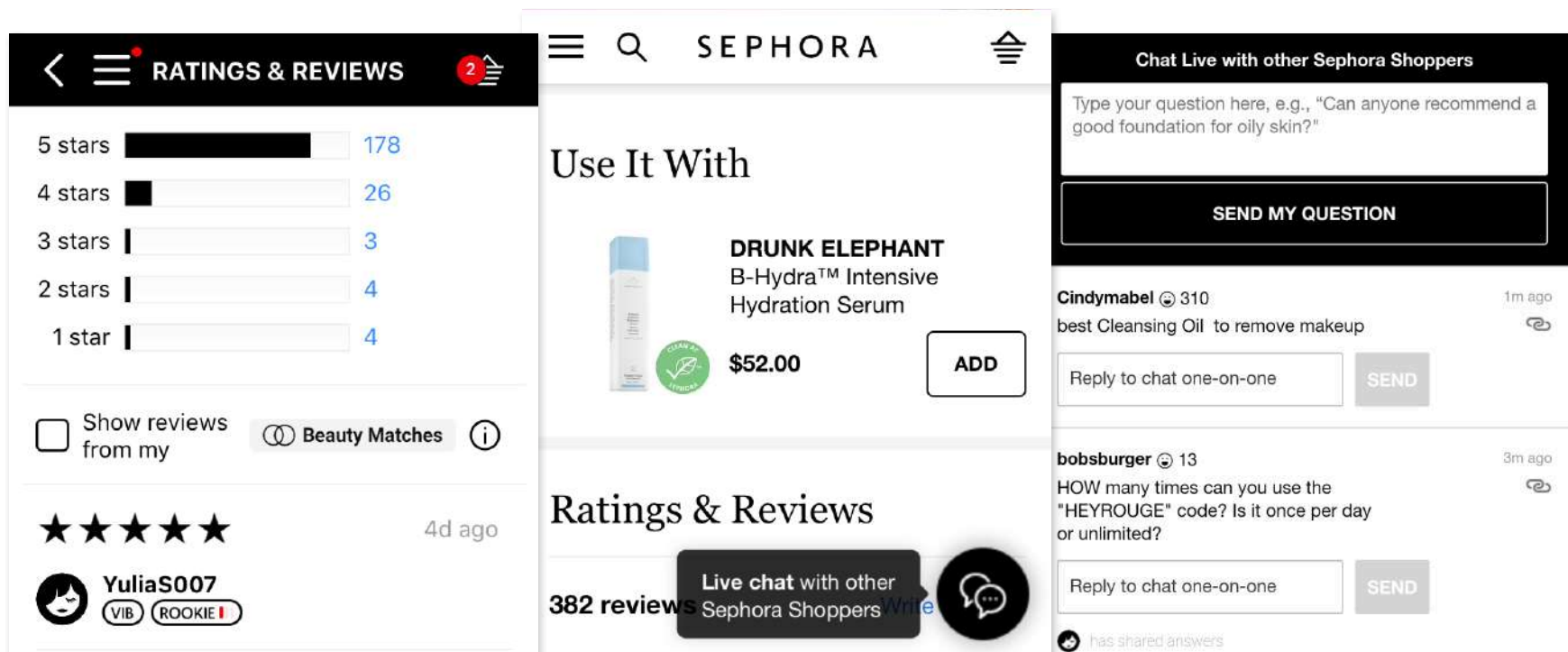
Path To Purchase

The Sephora app has several features that make it easier for users to find specific products or discover ones that will be relevant to them. These tools are key for driving sales and preventing users from being overwhelmed, or not feeling confident about making a mobile purchase—which is possible given the volume of Sephora's SKUs.

- 1 **Search capabilities:** Sephora offers a plethora of search and recommendation features, including image and barcode scanning, voice search, and related product suggestions throughout the app—all of which make finding the right products more likely.

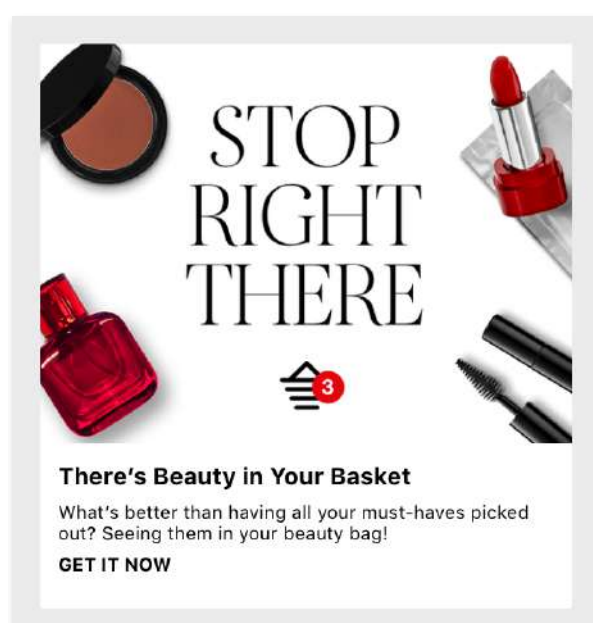


- 2 **Social proof and support:** Sephora's products generally have lots of reviews. Reviews can even be filtered by users' traits (skin type, hair color, and other preferences) to find reviews from customers just like them. This helps customers better assess if a product will be a fit for them or not. Users can also chat with community members and ask questions about a product—which can increase their confidence and encourage a purchase.



Sephora includes detailed reviews, images and the option to chat with other users so customers can use the wisdom of the crowd to feel confident making purchases.

- 3 **Addressing cart abandonment through the app inbox:** Sephora reminds users they have items in their basket by inserting a custom message into their inbox. While they also use push notifications to do this, Sephora is smart to use multiple methods for reducing cart abandonment vs. relying solely on push notifications—which will fatigue users over time and make the channel less effective.

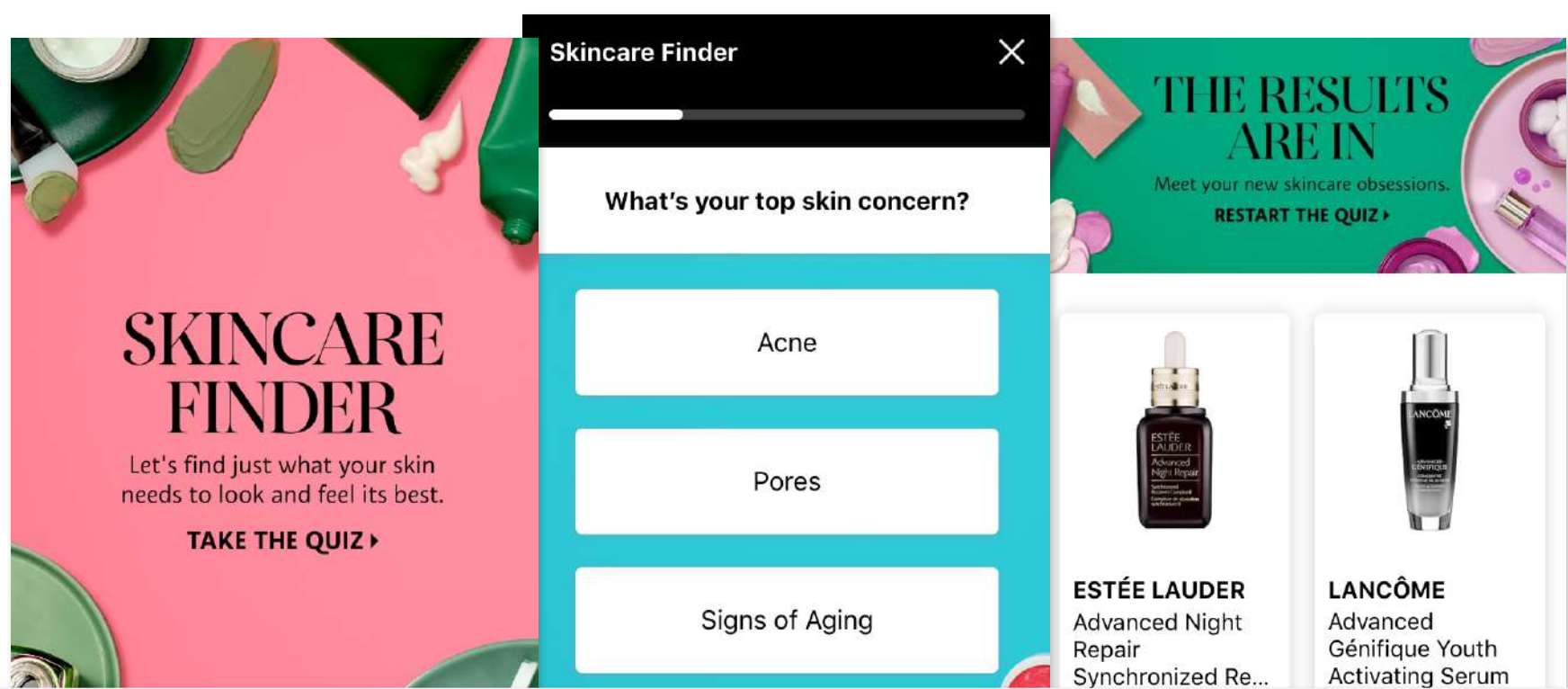


Sephora embeds messages into users' personal inboxes to remind them they have items in their basket.

Personalization

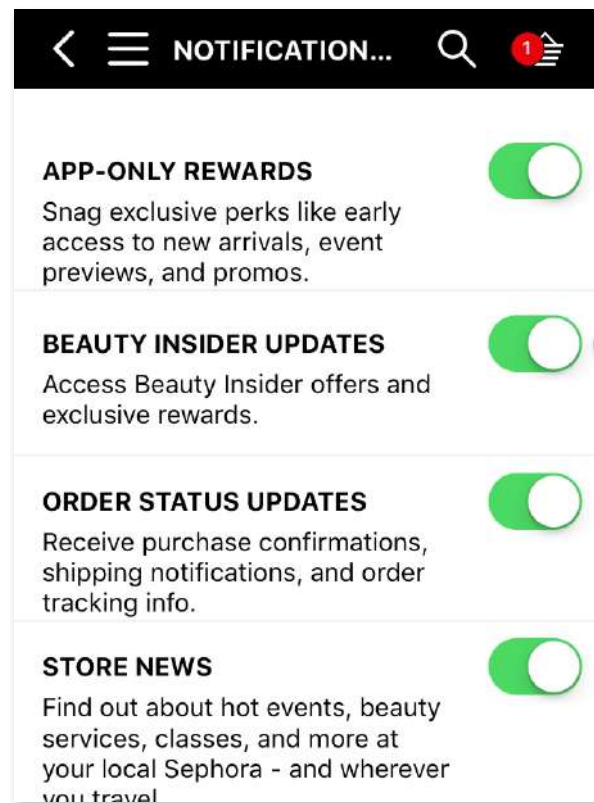
Sephora consistently shows users personalized offers via their website, email campaigns, mobile app, and more. However, their app has some specific features that help users find relevant products more efficiently.

- 1 **Personalized product lists:** Sephora embeds a list of recommended products (based on a user's past purchases and preferences) in various spots in their app. It also creates curated lists of products based off of quizzes users can take about their needs—which is a great way to blend discoverability and personalization to drive purchases.



By answering quiz questions, users can get a curated list of products tailored to their concerns, age, and more.

- 2 **Putting personalization in users' hands:** Sephora allows users to customize their mobile experience through things like notification preferences, making a list of favorite products, and creating a customized profile. These features put personalization in the hands of the user, which makes them feel more invested in the app and increases the likelihood of long-term retention.



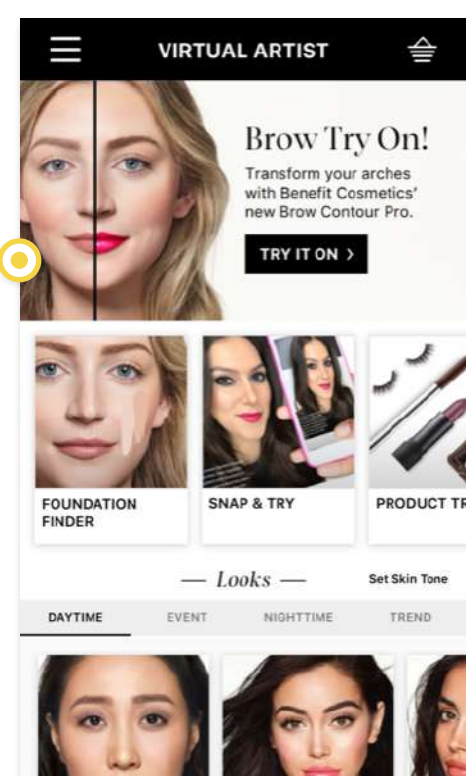
Users can also set their notification preferences—giving them the power to personalize their mobile experience.

Connecting The Digital & In-Store Experiences

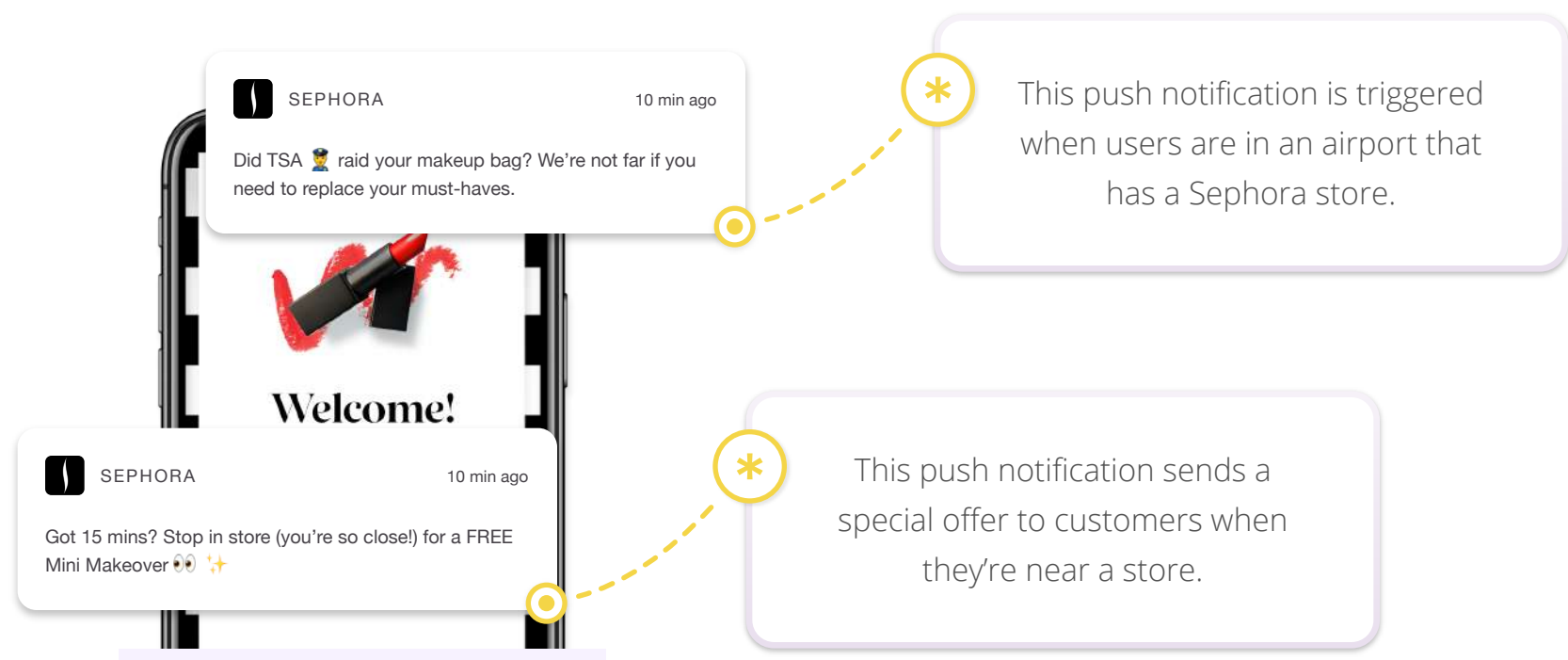
Sephora ties web browsing data, in-store purchases, and app behavior together to inform the content and campaigns they send users—whether those are for in-store experiences or in-app purchases.

- 1 **Augmented reality sampling:** Sephora's Virtual Artists tool lets users see how products will look on them from the comfort of their home (which mimics the in-store sampling experience). If users like an item, they can see if it's available in a nearby store or purchase directly through the app.

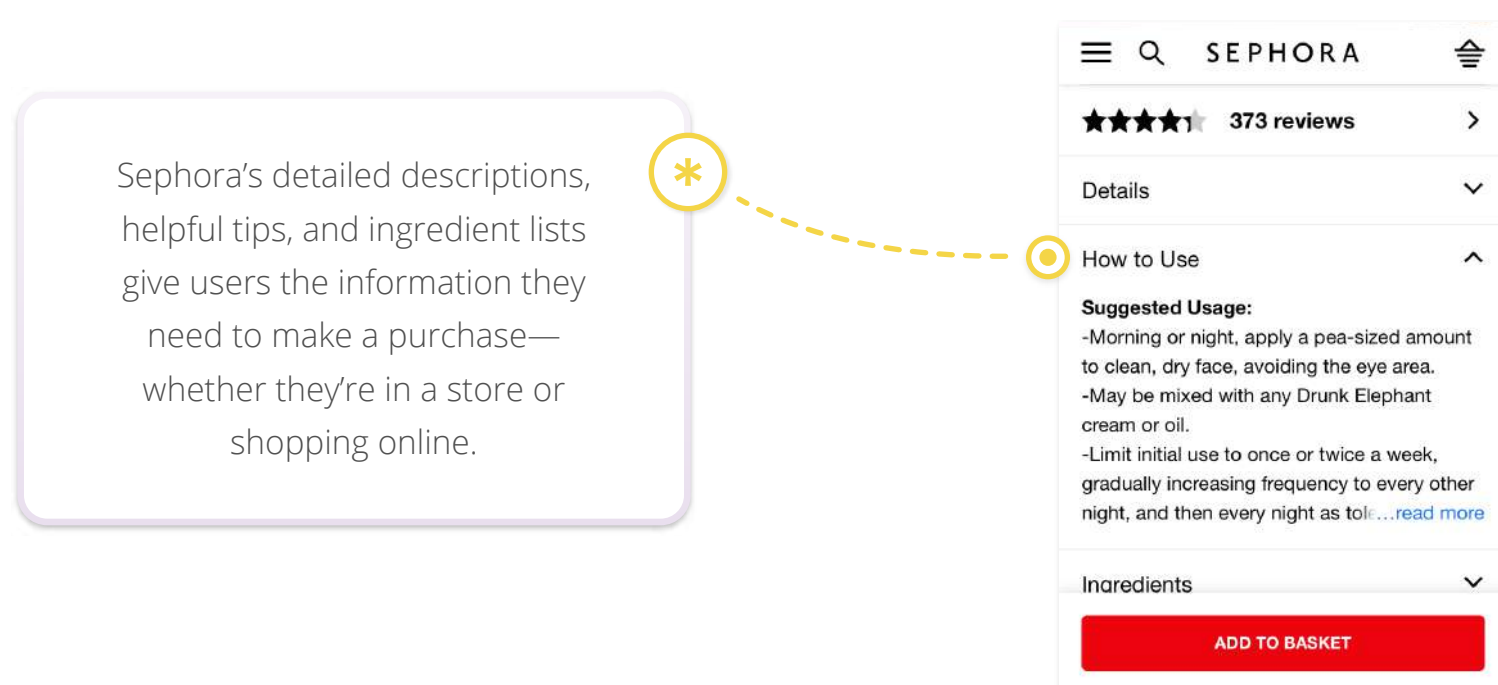
Sephora's Virtual Artists lets users try on products live using their mobile phone camera.



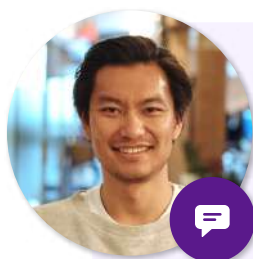
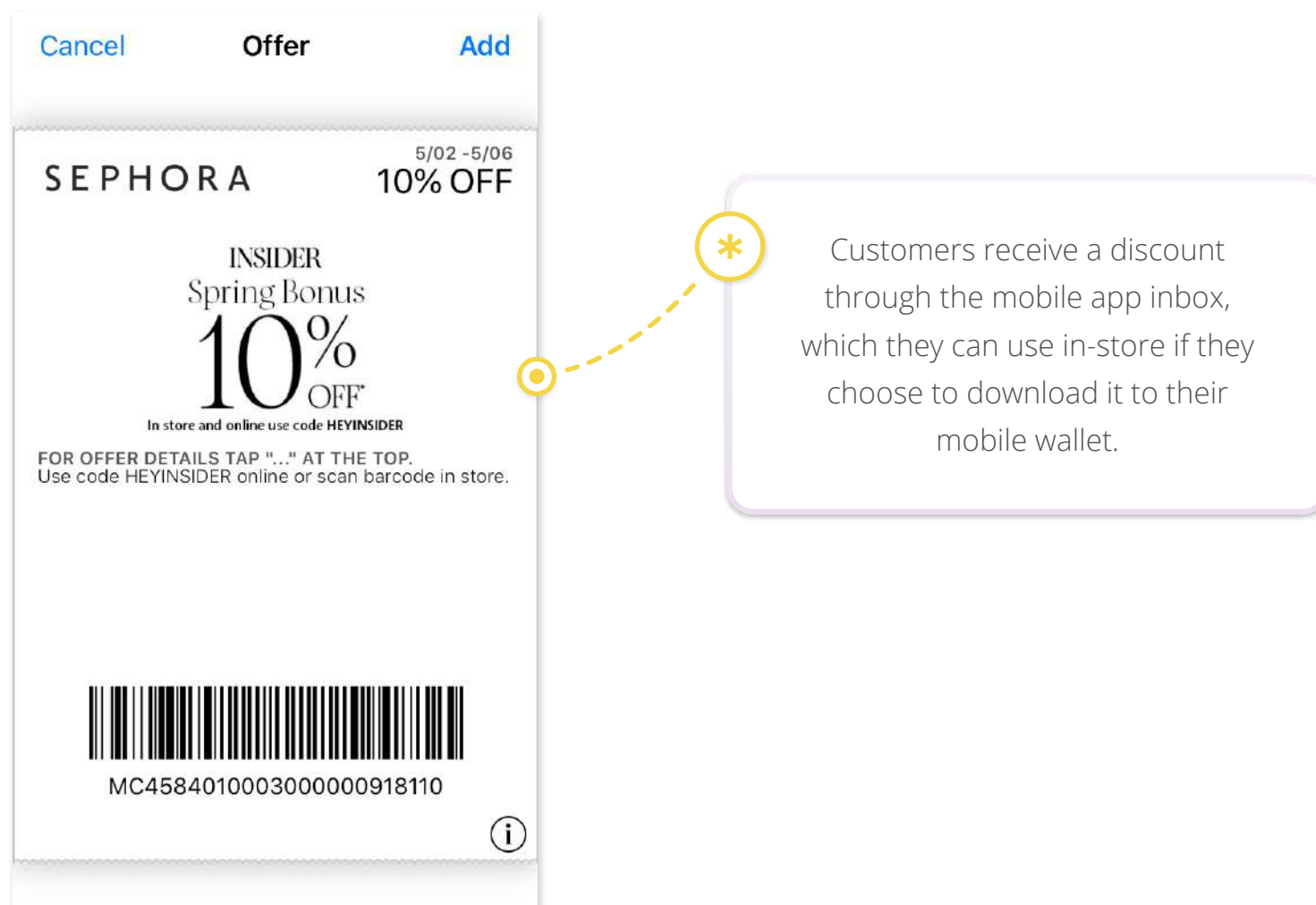
- 2 **Personalized messaging to drive store traffic:** Sephora sends users push notifications when they're near a store. These geo-location prompts encourage store visits—which can influence purchases.



- 3 **In-store research:** When users are in a Sephora store, they can use the app to see special offers or if items in their virtual shopping basket are available in-store. They can also scan items to learn more about them, which is why Sephora includes tons of product details, how-to tips, videos, and more in their product listings in the app. Giving shoppers more information helps them make a purchasing decision and find related products.



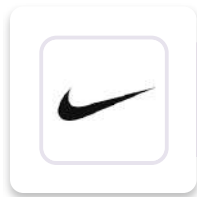
- 4 **In-store coupons:** App users can download special offers from the app to their mobile wallets so they can receive a discount in-store. This weaves their customer's mobile and IRL shopping experiences together more tightly—all while encouraging more visits to physical Sephora locations.



Dexter's Key Learning

Our Director of Enterprise Services shares his top takeaway from this app teardown.

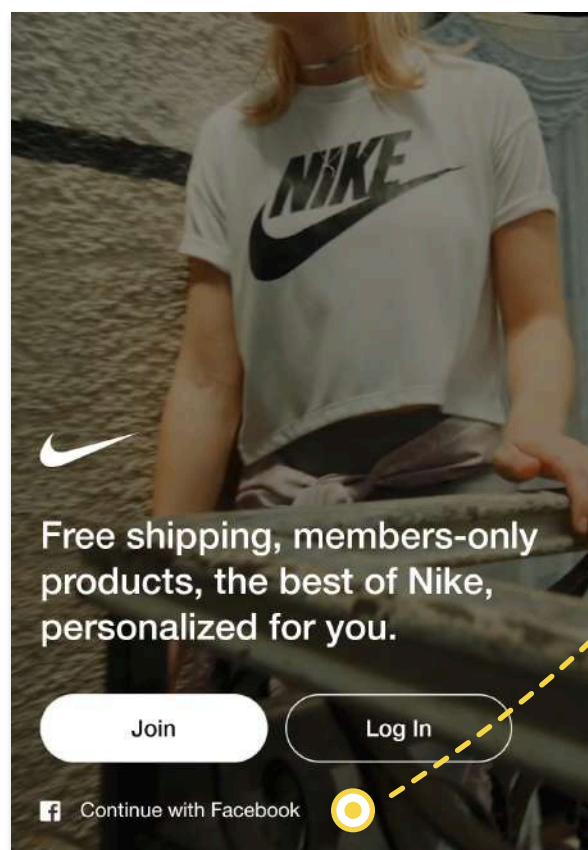
"It's common for users to go straight to the search function rather than browsing product pages on e-commerce apps and websites. Sephora's SKU count is incredibly robust, which is why they have so many ways to help users discover products. Better search features encourage browsing and longer sessions. E-commerce leaders have dedicated product teams focused on optimizing search, so consider tasking one of your teams with this goal."



App Onboarding & Activation

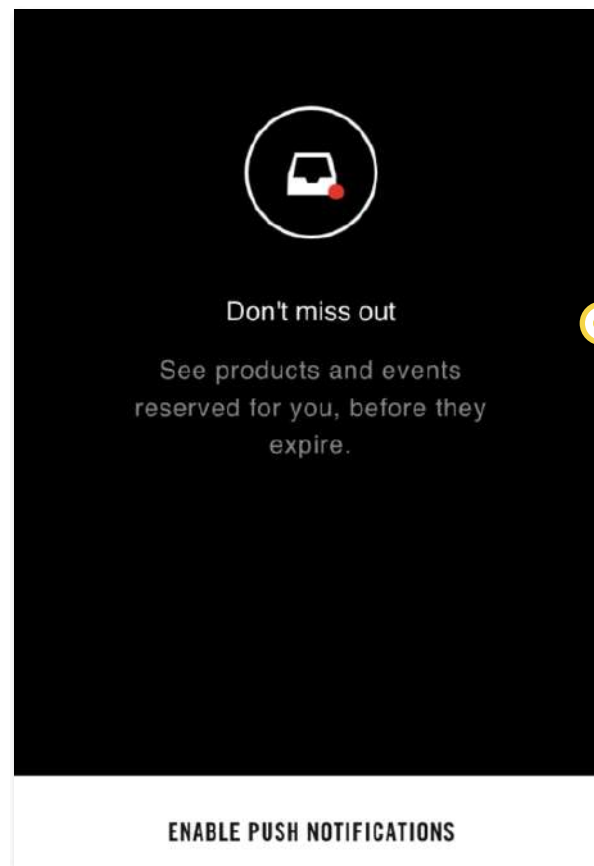
Nike's onboarding forces users to follow a set of screens before entering the app. They use prompts to collect opt-in permissions for notifications and location tracking. More importantly, they collect personal information so they can customize the user's experience (which we'll cover in a later section).

- 1 **Social join to speed up account creation:** Because Nike forces users to complete the onboarding flow before browsing products in the app, it offers a social sign-in option to speed up the registration process and prevent drop-offs.



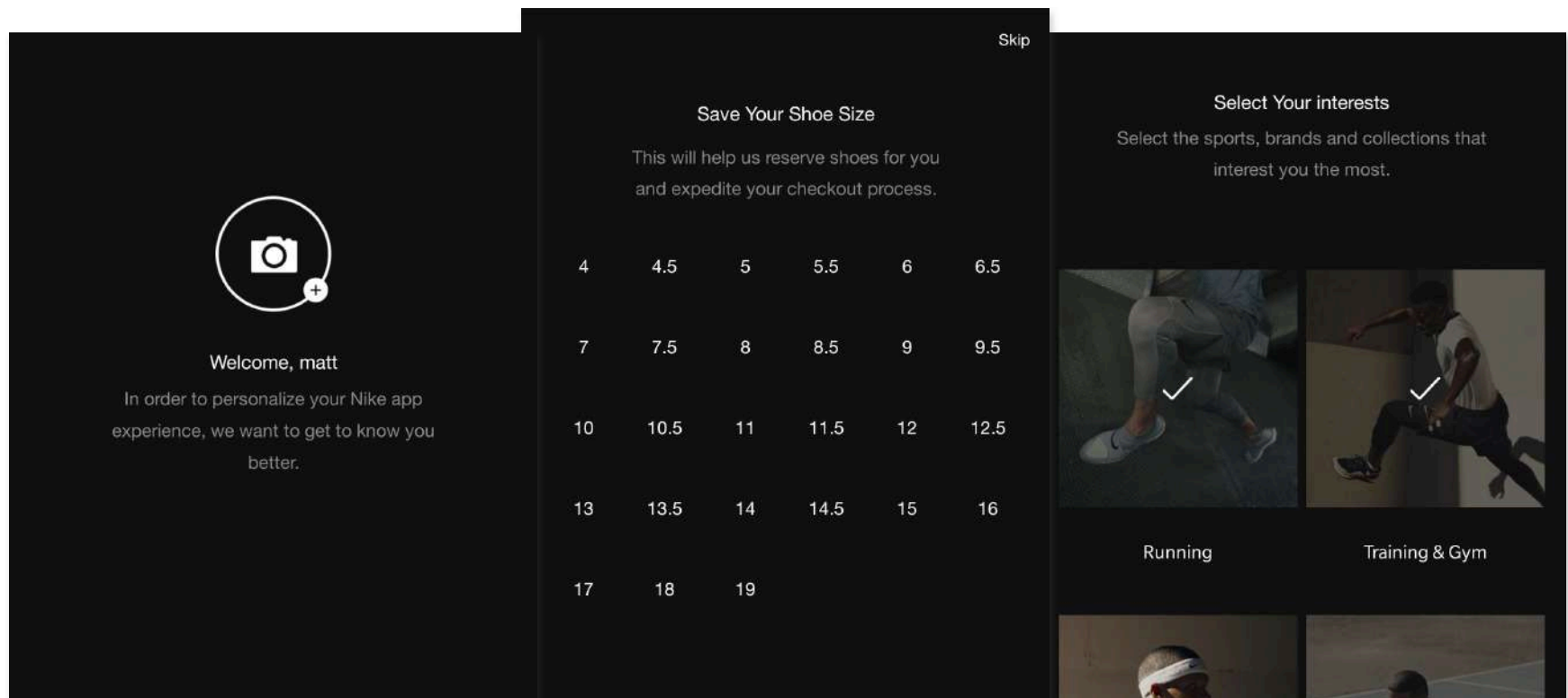
Nike's account creation splash page includes a Facebook login option, which requires less typing than traditional form-fill registrations.

- 2 **Driving opt-ins with benefit-based messages:** Value-driven messages explaining the benefits of opting into push notifications appear before the generic permission requests pop up. This increases the likelihood that users will allow push messages to be sent when the prompt pops up after this screen.



* This message uses FOMO and exclusivity to encourage users to opt into push notifications.

- 3 **Collect user preferences:** Nike's onboarding collects users' gender, size, and interests so it can personalize the app experience later. An educational message appears before these prompts to explain why it wants to collect this information. Offering users a customized experience makes them more likely to share their personal info.

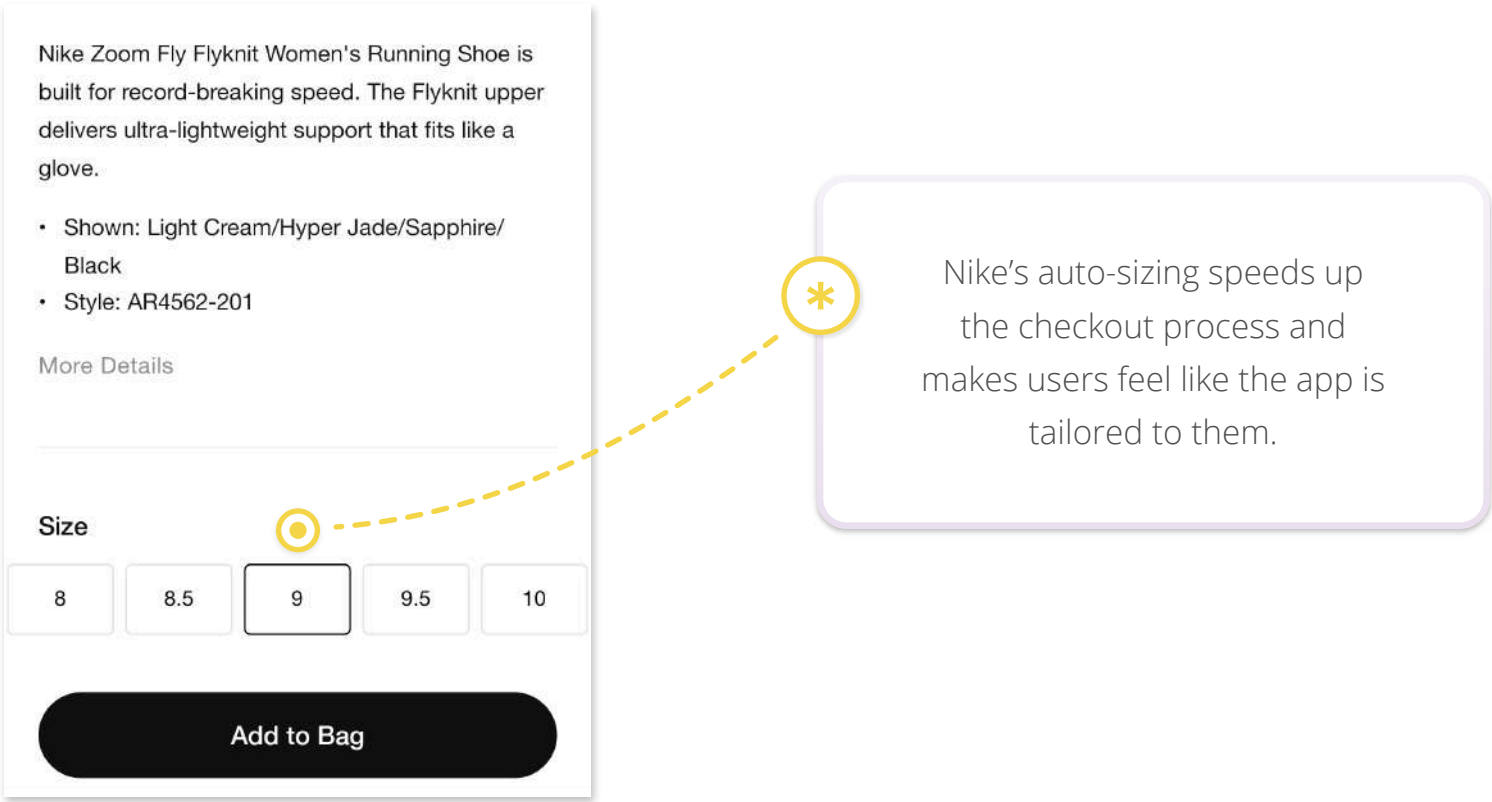


Nike goes beyond sizing and asks about user workout preferences so it can use this information to customize the app later.

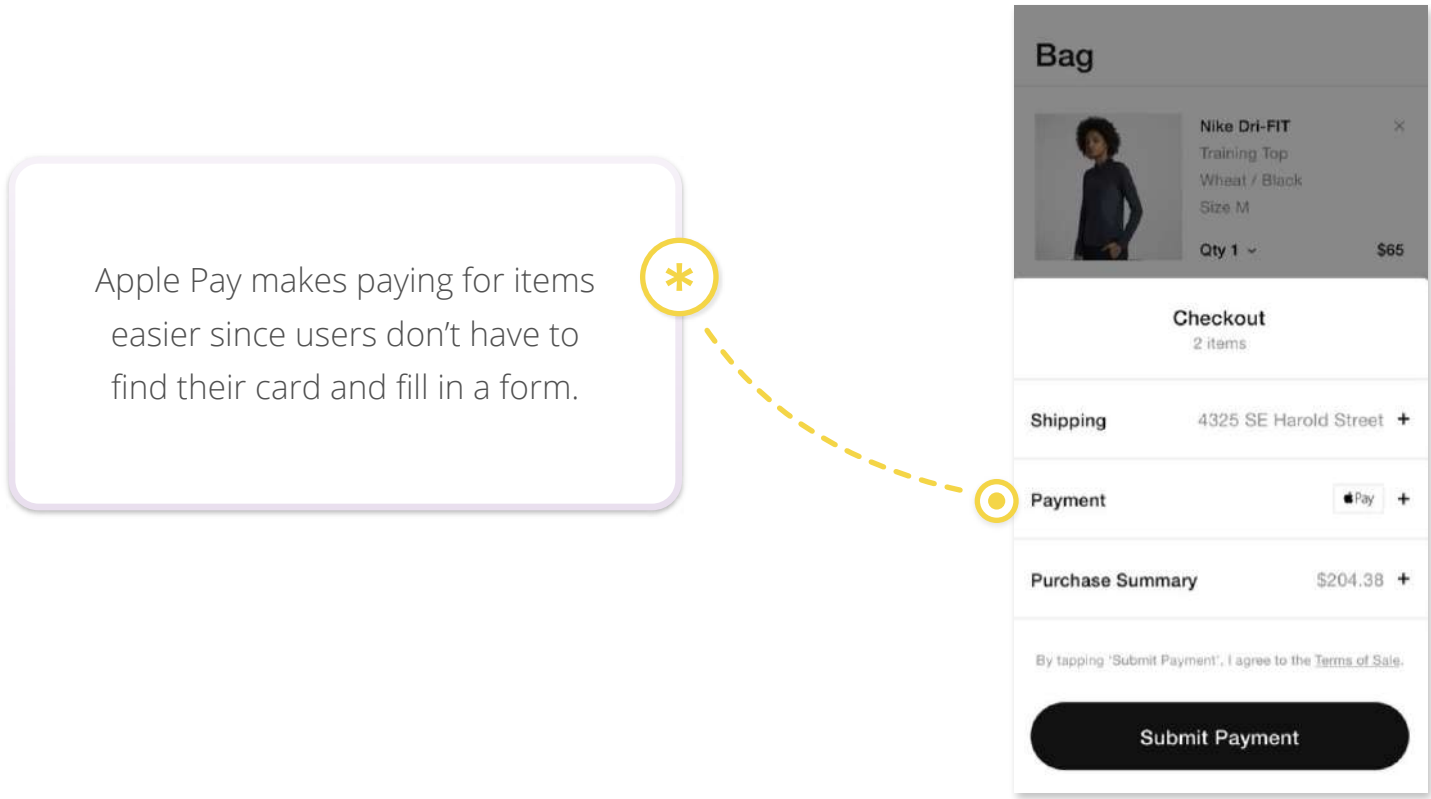
Path To Purchase

Nike’s app has several features that make completing a purchase faster for mobile users.

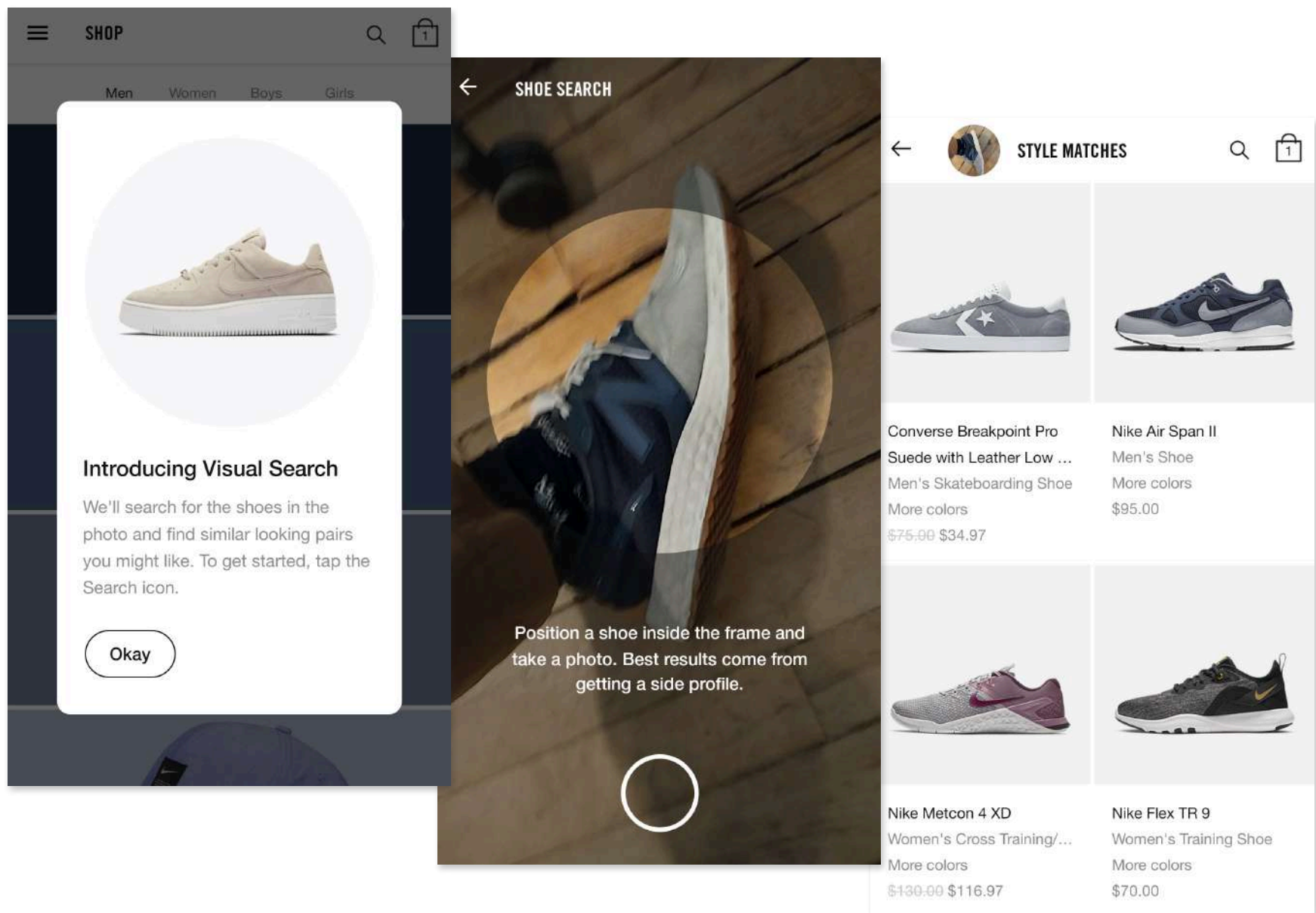
- 1 **Automatic sizing:** When users browse an item and add it to their cart, their size is already selected (if they shared that information during onboarding). This feature reduces the number of clicks it takes to make a purchase.



- 2 **Mobile wallet payment options:** Customers can use their mobile wallet to make a purchase, which increases checkout speed and the chance that users will complete an order.



- 3 **Search by image:** Users can find items by taking a photo on their phone camera. The app will then create a list of similar looking items. This unique search feature ensures users find items similar to ones they already like, which makes a purchase more likely.

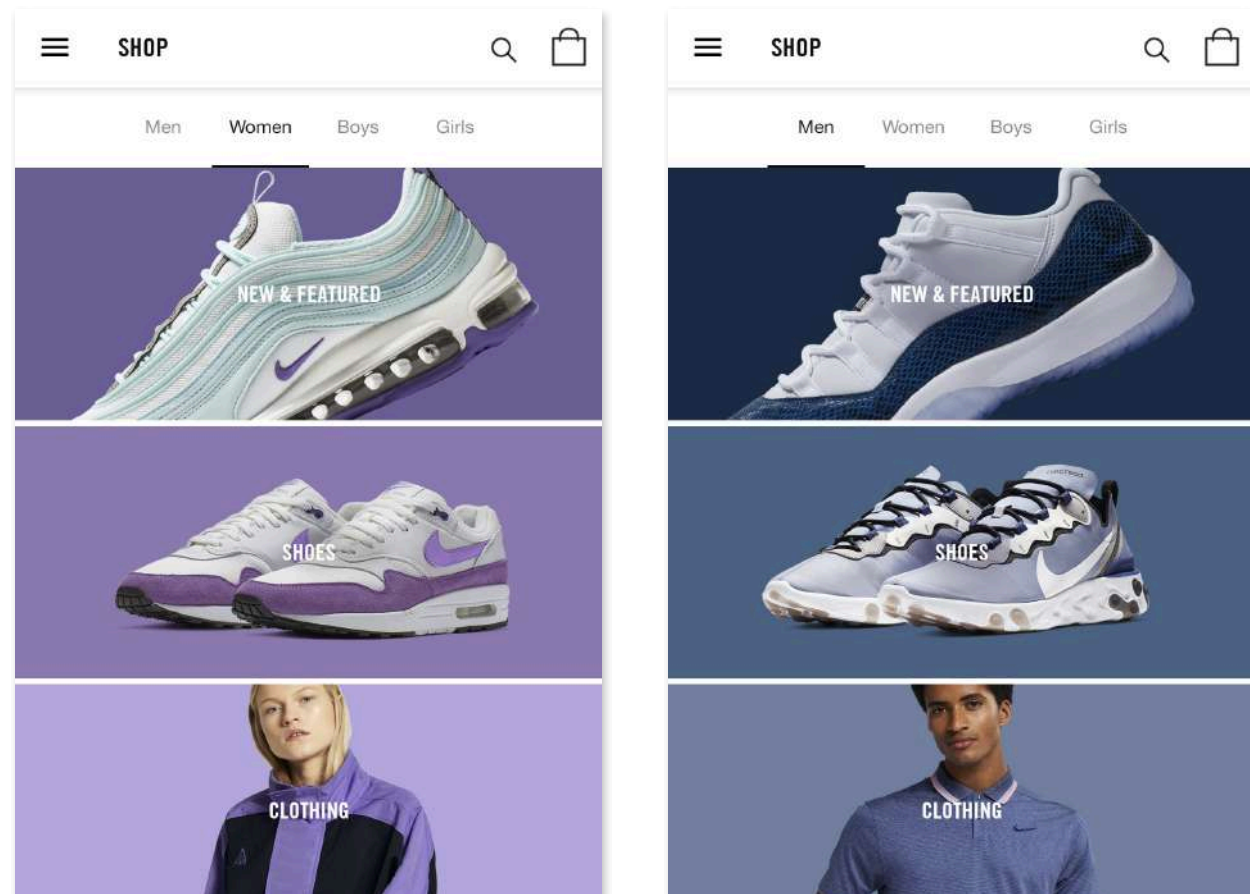


Users receive style matches based on photos they take with their camera or save to their mobile phone.

Personalization

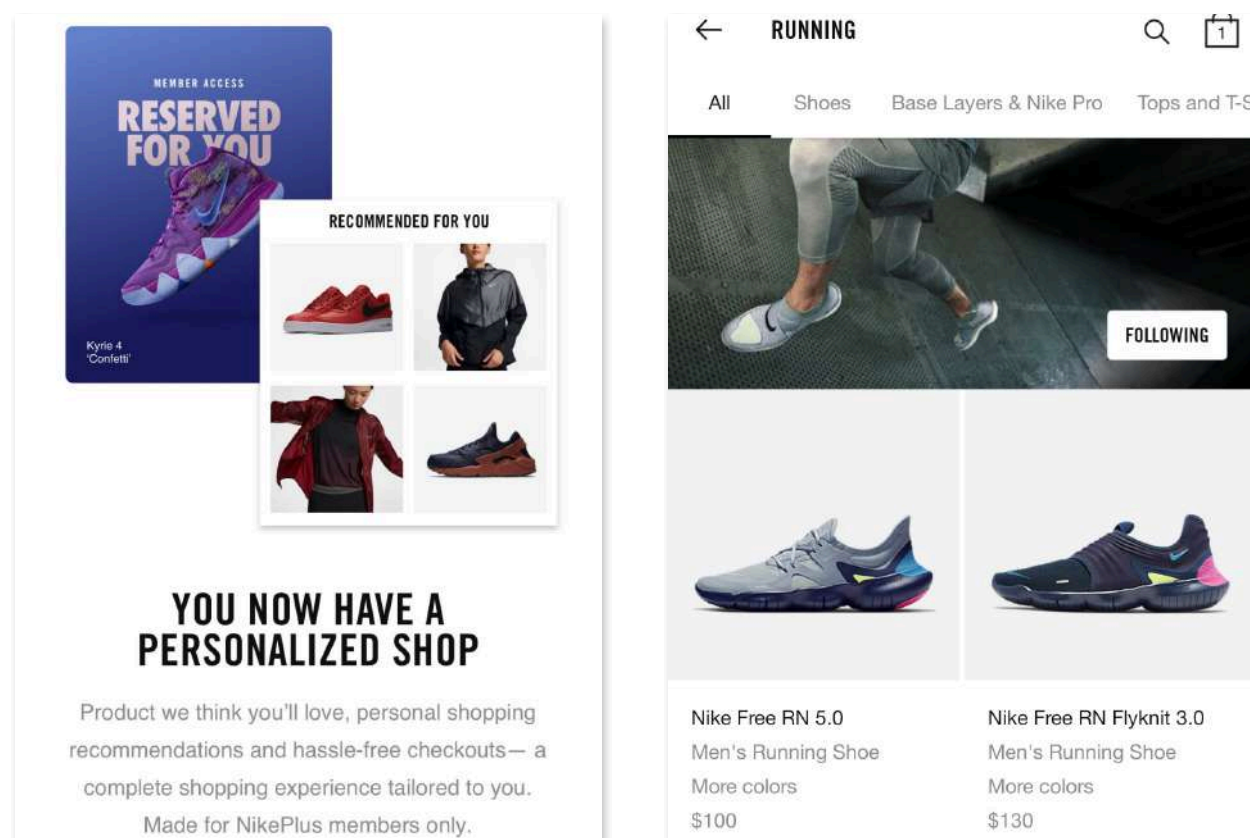
Nike uses the information it collects during onboarding to change the appearance of the app for its customers.

- 1 **Targeted home page:** If users select a gender during onboarding, they're presented with styles created for that group when they first re-open the app.



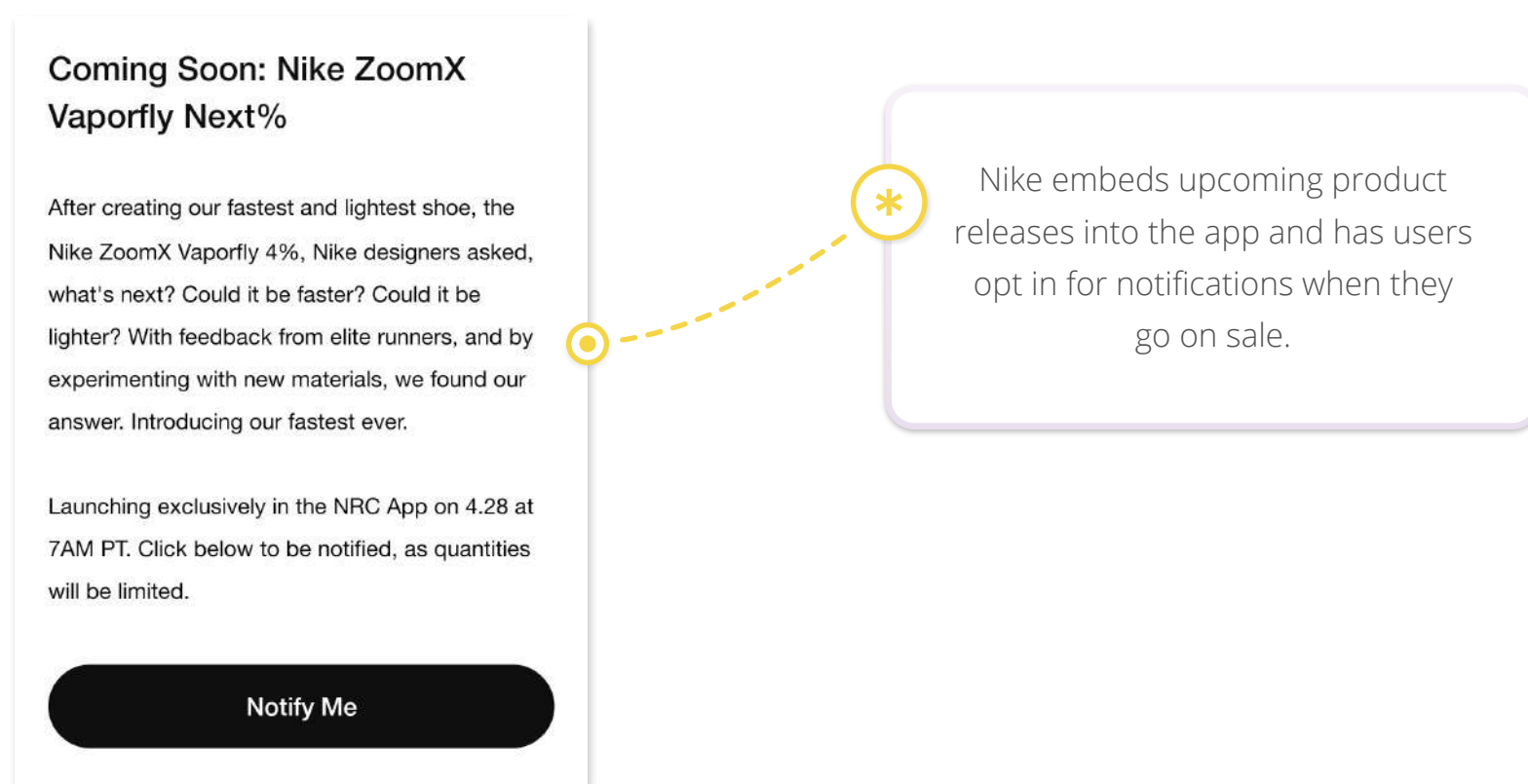
The homepage changes based on a user's preferences and gender.

- ② **Recommended products:** The app curates a product recommendation list based on several factors. Users can also browse a range of products based on the interests they've chosen from the home screen. These lists reduce the effort it takes for users to find relevant products vs. searching on their own.



The Nike app makes finding relevant products easier through a variety of product categories and personalized lists.

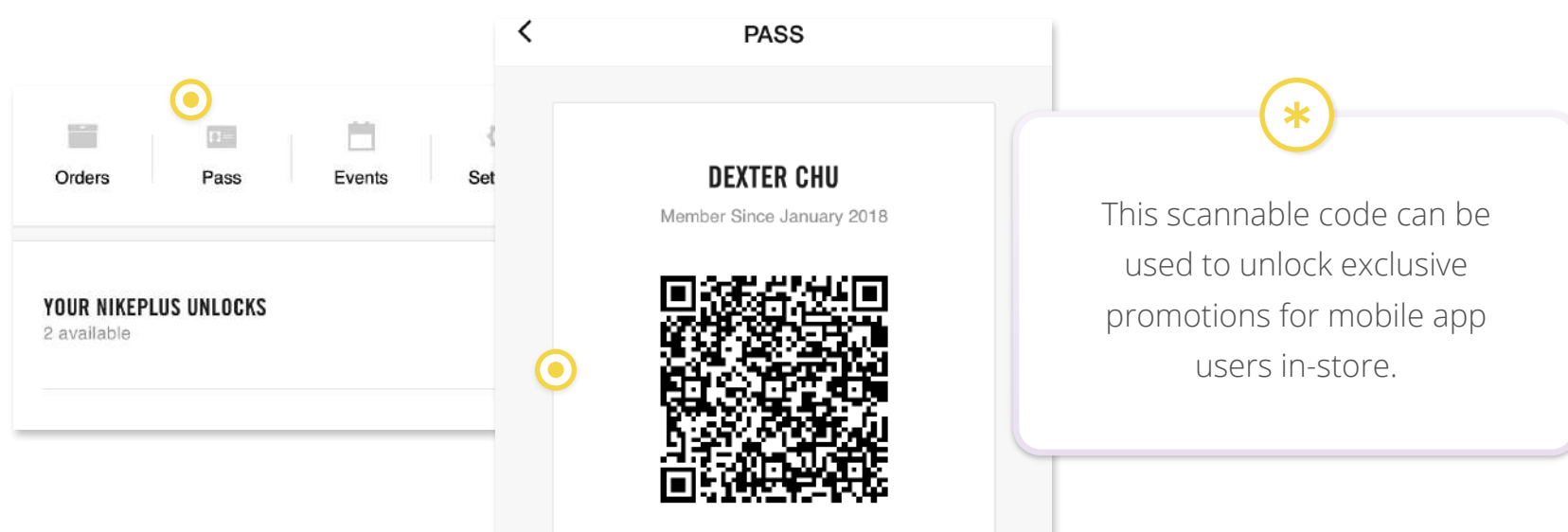
- 3 **Personalized notifications:** Nike users can preview upcoming product launches and opt into receiving a message when they're available. This sense of exclusivity and personalization drives user loyalty and repeat purchases.



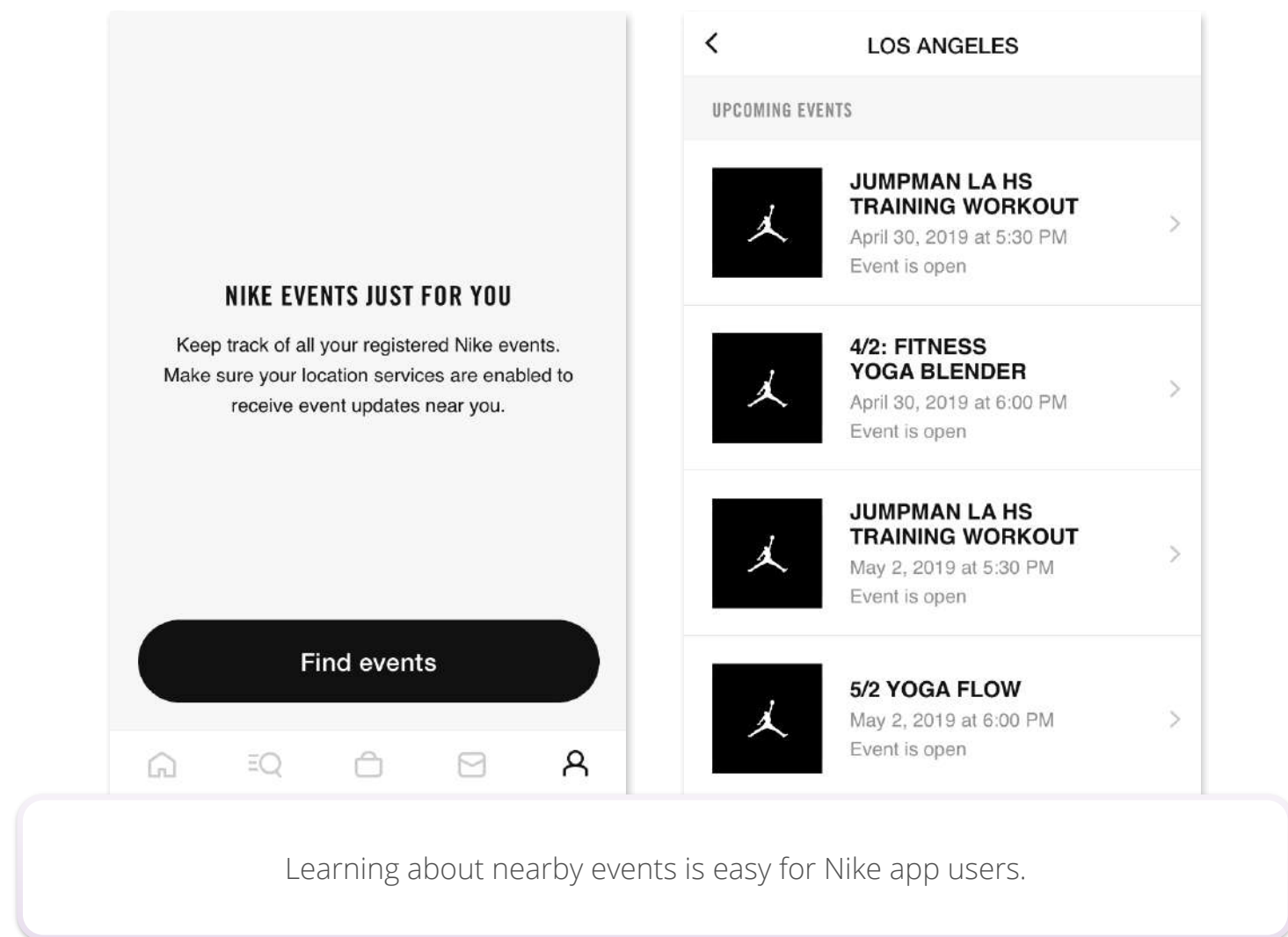
Connecting The Digital & In-Store Experiences

Mobile app users can get special perks and experiences at IRL events and brick-and-mortar Nike stores.

- 1 **NikePass for in-store services:** Customers who join the NikePlus loyalty program (which can be done through the app) receive a QR code that they can use to check into stores. When they check in, they can get unique services, like a private styling session and customized products. This creates a sense of exclusivity and a habit around visiting physical stores—which keeps customers engaged with the brand both online and off.



- 2 **Find nearby events:** If users enable location services, they can search for Nike events happening near them and check into events. This encourages app users to interact with the brand more and solidifies Nike's connection to their customer's lifestyle.



Dexter's Key Learning

Director of Enterprise Services

"Nike clearly communicates why users should share their personal data. Then, it delivers on that promise by targeting users with a customized app experience. Find unique and creative ways to collect these data points so you can deliver unique experiences and experiments to your users."



App Onboarding & Activation

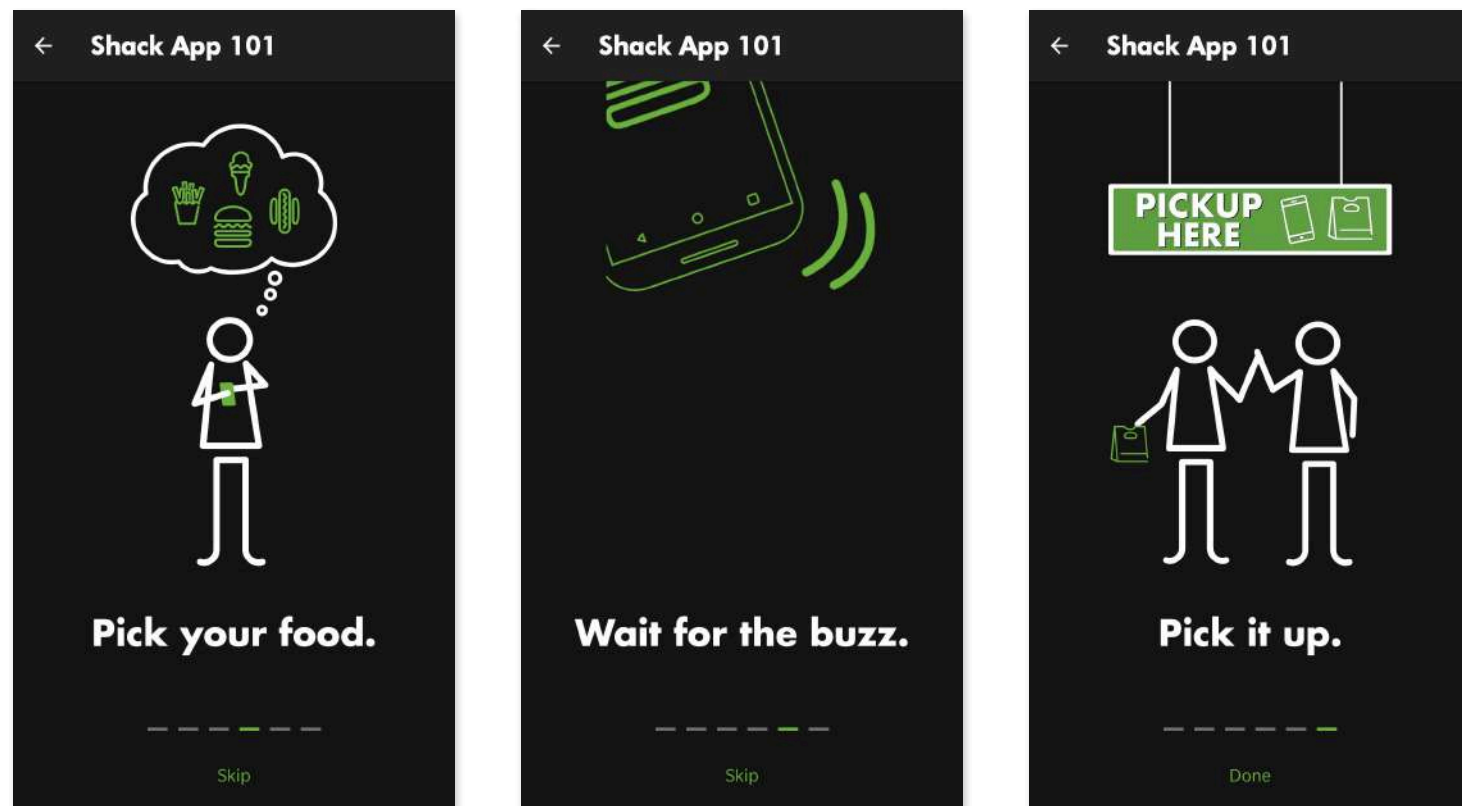
Shake Shack's food ordering app doesn't have a traditional onboarding flow. Instead, users go to a home screen where they can start exploring the app. Shake Shack has other methods for getting users to create an account and putting them on the path to purchase.

- 1 **Registration embedded in the order process:** The home screen has simple messaging with three CTAs that prompt users to start making an order. (The location button also prompts users to start an order after they select a nearby restaurant). Once they're ready to submit their order, users hit a registration wall. At this point, they're less likely to abandon since they're invested in order completion (and hungry!).



Users are pushed to make an order before they need to create an account—making them less likely to abandon the sign-up process.

- 2 **Optional onboarding:** If users want to learn more about the ordering process and the benefits of the app, there's a "Shake Shack 101" tutorial in the About Us section. The tutorial gives users who aren't ready to order a way to understand how the app makes their experience more convenient—while reducing first-time order friction for new users who are prepared to buy.

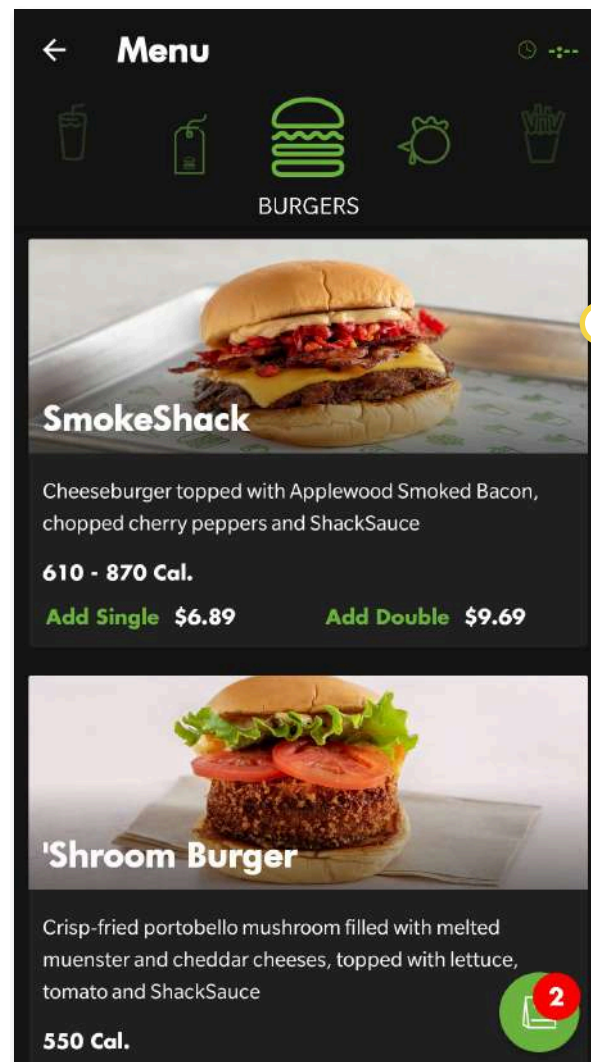


Shake Shack has a traditional onboarding tutorial in the "About Us" section of their app for users who may want to learn more before making an order.

Path To Purchase

Shake Shack has several features and design elements that make the ordering and check-out process simpler.

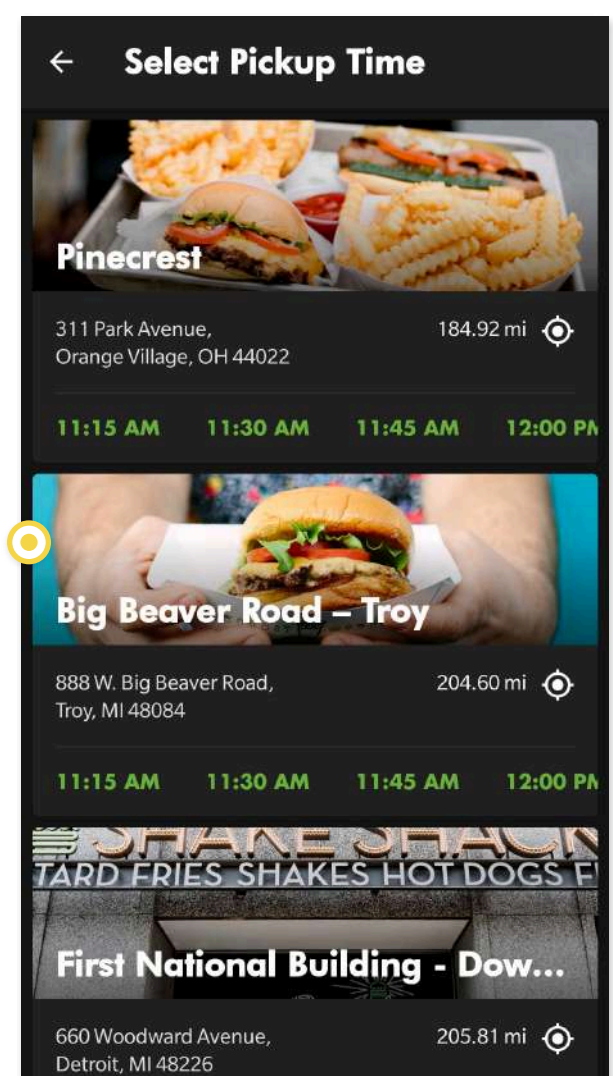
- 1 **Easy menu categories and navigation:** Confusing UX can reduce the number of orders an app receives. Shake Shack's top navigation makes it easy for users to browse through food categories. They also have bright green text CTAs that make the ordering process clear and simple.



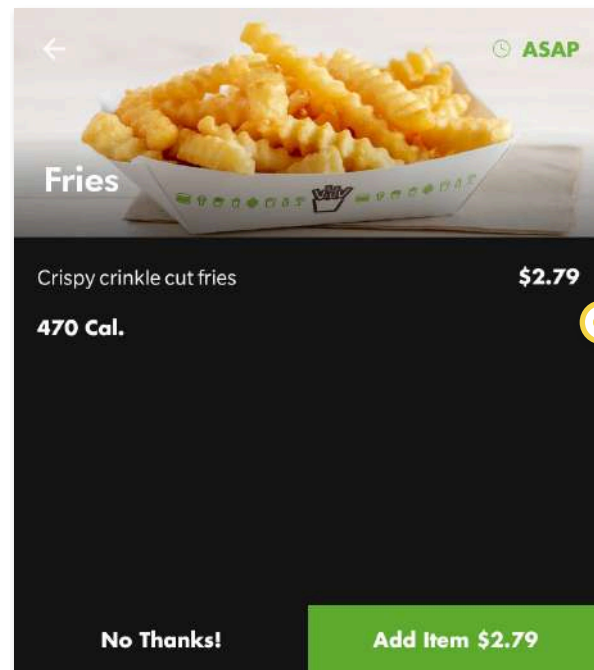
Shake Shack's ordering flow is straightforward to navigate and balances images with text CTAs well.

- 2 **Mouth-watering images:** Shake Shack forgoes the typical description-based menus. Instead, it opts to use large, beautiful images with smaller descriptive text to drive cravings—and, subsequently, more orders—throughout the app.

The app's big product shots make the menu and browsing experience more compelling.



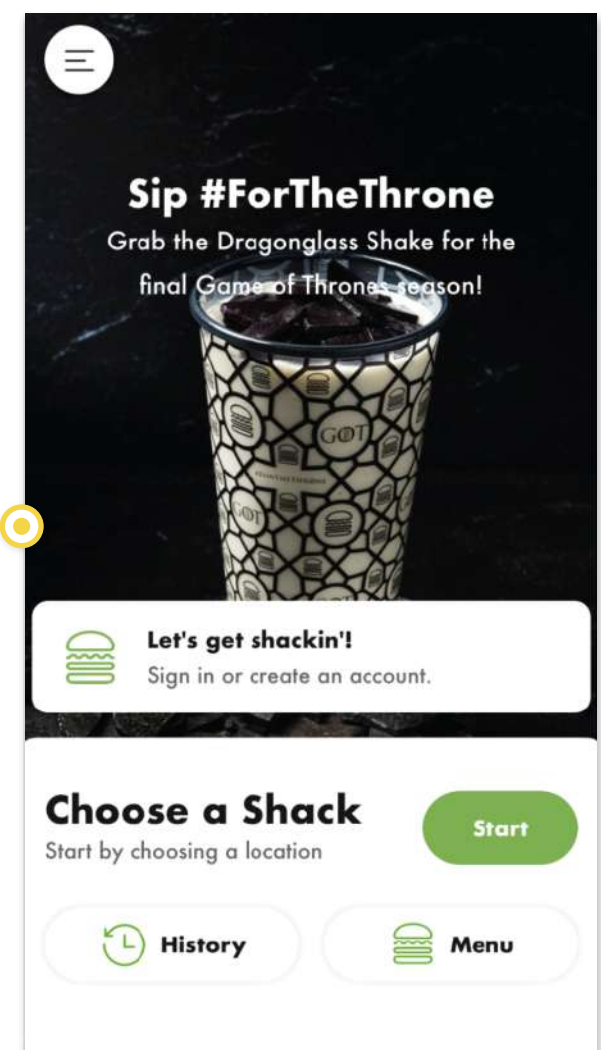
- 3 **Relevant suggested add-ons:** Shake Shack suggests pairings (based on the order) on a separate screen after users hit the “Check Out” button. The suggestion appears on its own screen, with a large product image and a clear CTA (the green “Add Item” button).



The app suggests logical pairings with the current order in a bold way to increase the average order value.

- 4 **Timely promotions:** Campaigns based on events, holidays, and seasons can drive in-app purchases and engagement. This delightful Game of Thrones promotion encouraged app users to order a themed shake in honor of the premiere of the TV show's new season.

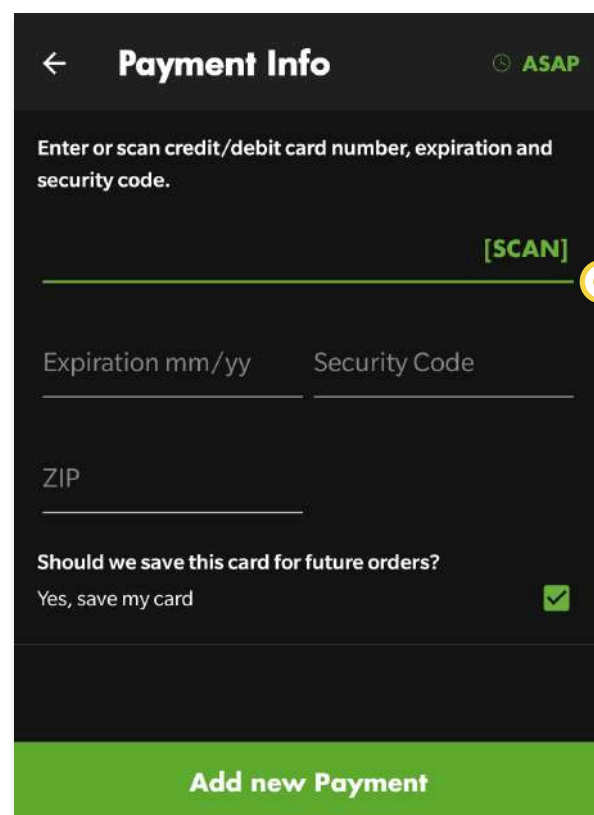
This Game of Thrones offer took over the entire home screen of the app to drive users to order a special shake and share the experience on social media.



Personalization

While Shake Shack's personalization options aren't as robust as our previous two examples, they have a few elements that make users feel like they're receiving a customized experience.

- 1 **Saved cards, location, and previous orders:** To make re-ordering a habit, users can save cards, restaurant locations, and view a list of their favorite past orders. They can also scan their card vs. filling out the form fields to speed up the order process.

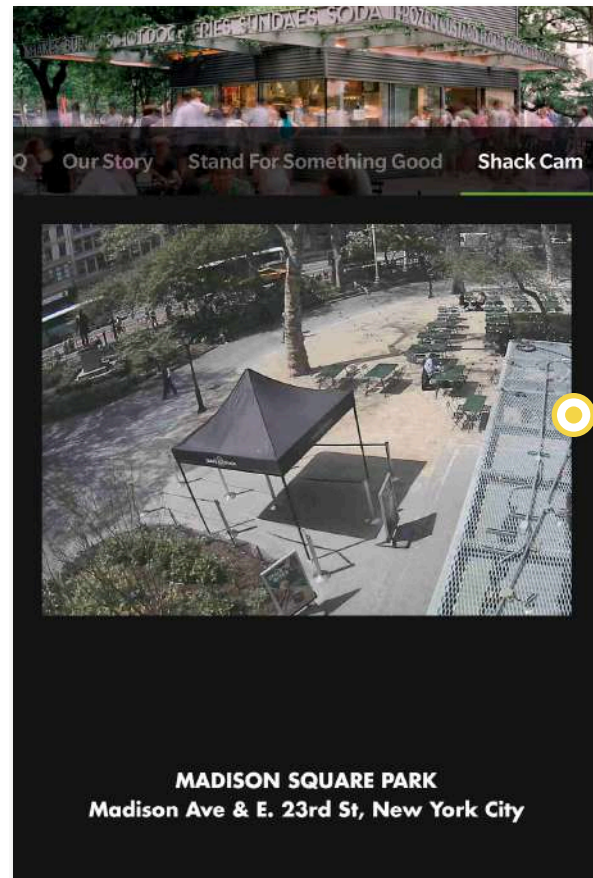


The Shake Shack app's card saving and scanning features create a convenient checkout process.

Connecting The Digital & In-Store Experiences

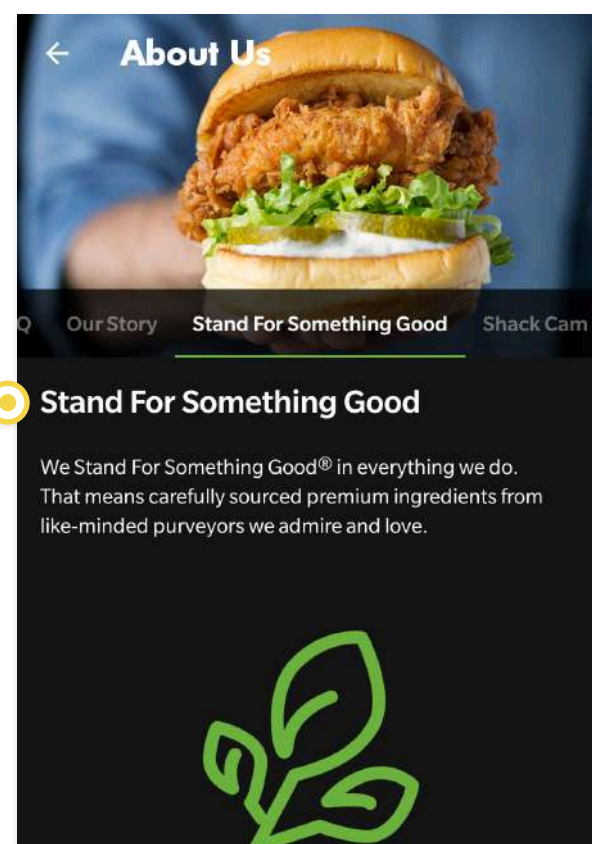
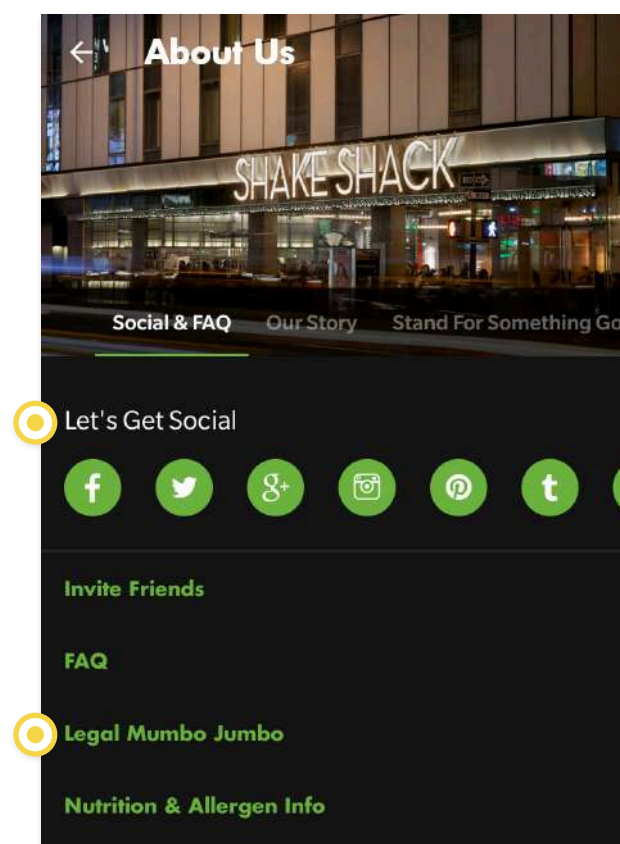
Shake Shack has a unique brand voice and a cult-like following. They've used these to extend the in-store experience to app users and help customers get the food they love faster.

- 1 **Live Shack Cam:** Shake Shack is notorious for having extremely long lines. The app has a live camera that shows how long the line is at their original location in NYC, so local users can decide if they want to visit that restaurant or order ahead. The value prop of the app is "Order ahead, cut the line." This fun feature plays into that idea nicely and makes users feel like an insider.

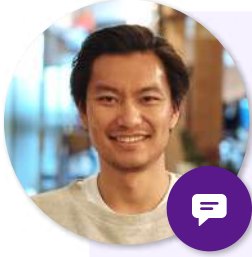


Users can check the line at the original Shake Shack before making a purchase. (Or just gawk at the crowds for fun.)

- 2 **Consistent tone of voice:** Shake Shack's fun, tongue-in-cheek tone is woven into all of the copy in their app. They also share information about their company's values and charitable work within the community, which makes users feel closer to the brand experience they get in-store through the app.



Shake Shack's learn more section uses phrasing like "Legal Mumbo Jumbo" and "Let's Get Social" to keep a fun and consistent brand voice. They also share their values with app users through more informational sections embedded in the app.



Dexter's Key Learning

Director of Enterprise Services

"Shake Shack's ordering and checkout flow design is exemplary. Through mobile A/B testing with our clients, we've seen that copy CTAs with a single purpose ("Buy Now") perform better than buttons with multiple types of information in them (i.e. "Total Price: \$12.75 - Check Out Now"). Shake Shack is nailing this! Next, they could experiment with making more products visible above the fold to see how it impacts order size or completion rates."

Taking Retail Apps To The Next Level

The best retail apps mix personalization, intuitive design, and convenience to drive engagement. They also give users a sense of exclusivity and the ability to customize their app experience for themselves.

Some of the key takeaways from these apps include:




- * Traditional mobile onboarding isn't necessary.** Switch up rigid flows with skippable account creation options. Embed requests for opt-ins elsewhere in your app where it makes sense.
- * Provide context when collecting personal info.** Clearly explain to users the value of sharing their data. Let them discover some of these prompts on their own as they navigate through your app and learn about its benefits.
- * Weave your brand's value propositions into your app.** If your brand stands for convenience, expedite the checkout process. If you sell sought-after merchandise, play up features and messages that appeal to your user's desire for insider access.

Every retailer's customer base is unique. To understand which features will deliver the most value, you'll need to experiment and iteratively roll out features.

If you're curious to learn how Taplytics helps our clients do this through mobile and web A/B testing, [drop us a line](#). We'd be happy to walk you through our process.

— The TLES Team

Related Resources

-  The Retailer's Guide to Creating Remarkable Digital Experiences →
-  18 Inspiring Location-based Push Notification Campaigns →
-  The Ultimate Mobile App A/B Testing Guide →

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