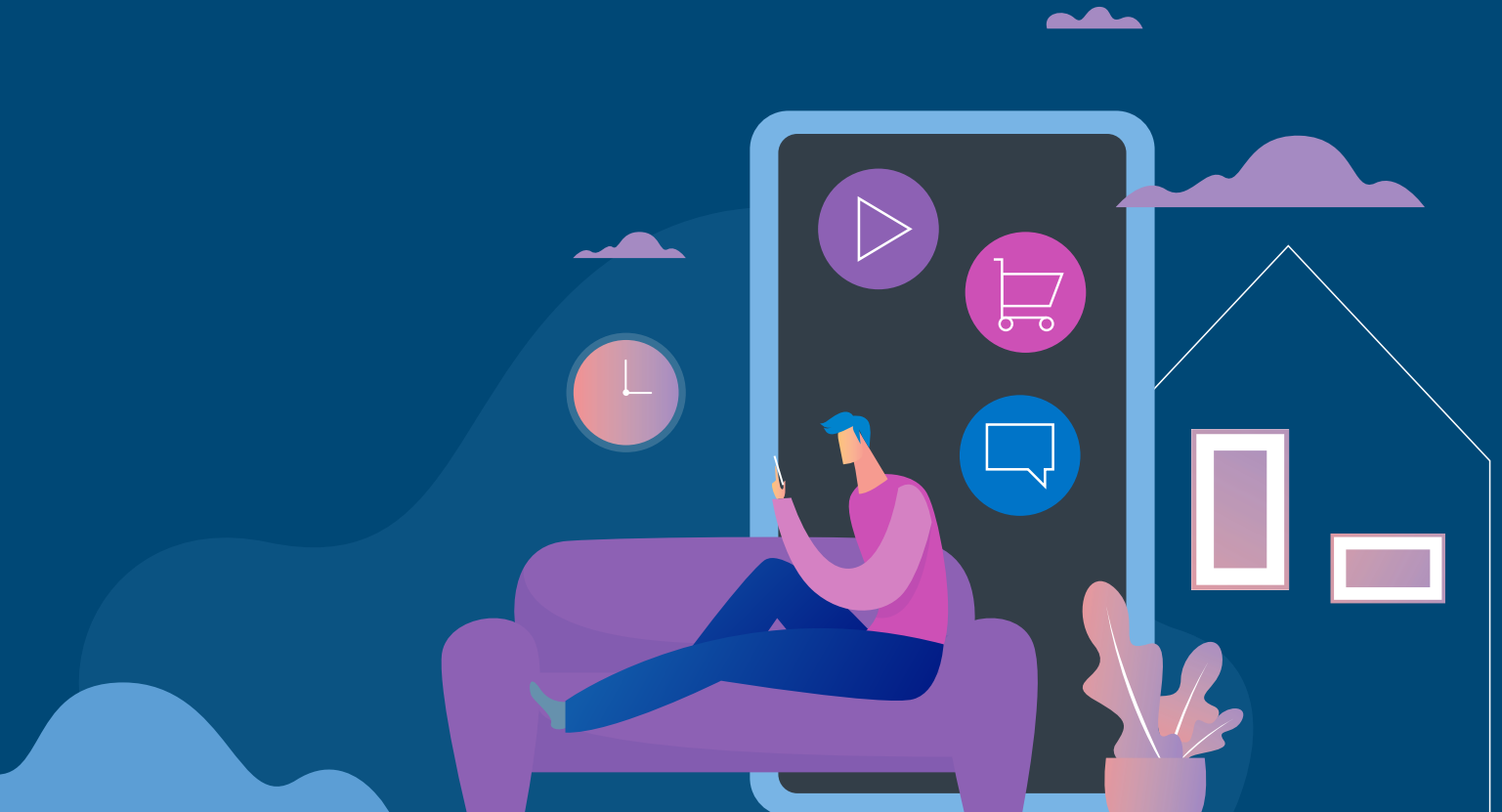




# 8 Organic Growth Strategies in the Age of COVID



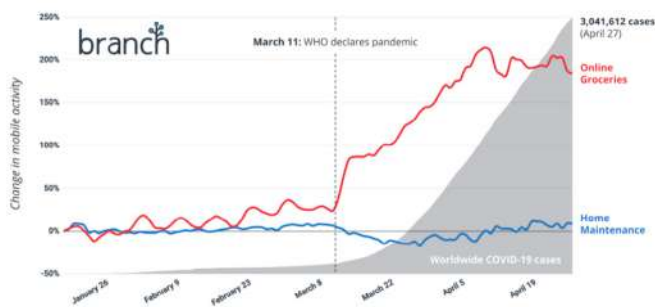
# What's Inside

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Intro  | 1  |
| 8 Organic, Cost-Saving Methods to Acquire More App Users                 | 3  |
| 1. <b>User to user sharing</b>   | 3  |
| 2. <b>Social posts</b>   | 6  |
| 3. <b>Web to app banners</b>   | 8  |
| 4. <b>Email to app</b>   | 12 |
| 5. <b>QR Codes</b>   | 13 |
| 6. <b>Engage Brand Advocates</b>   | 16 |
| 7. <b>Content and SEO optimization + personalized web to app banners</b> | 19 |
| 8. <b>Text me the app</b>  | 21 |



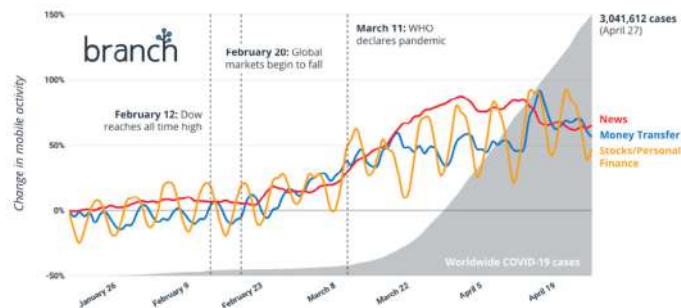
Despite budgets being short during these times, it's more important than ever to invest in digital transformation. The adoption of everything virtual, from food delivery, shopping, work, dating, birthdays, and workouts has accelerated to a place where it would have taken years and decades to get to otherwise. A **good** digital presence is crucial to surviving, and a mobile app is key to that presence. In fact, our data shows significant app usage in many verticals, including some that are surprising like dating and eCommerce, and notable shifts in how apps are acquiring new users.

### App usage shows people preparing to shelter in place



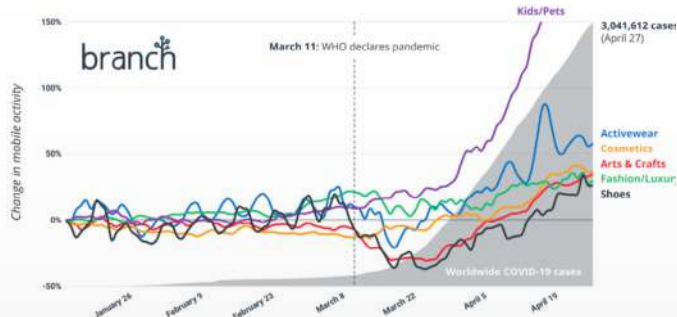
Sources: JHU; Branch

### Some verticals have seen increased activity from COVID-19



Sources: JHU; Branch

### People are still shopping online, but buying different things

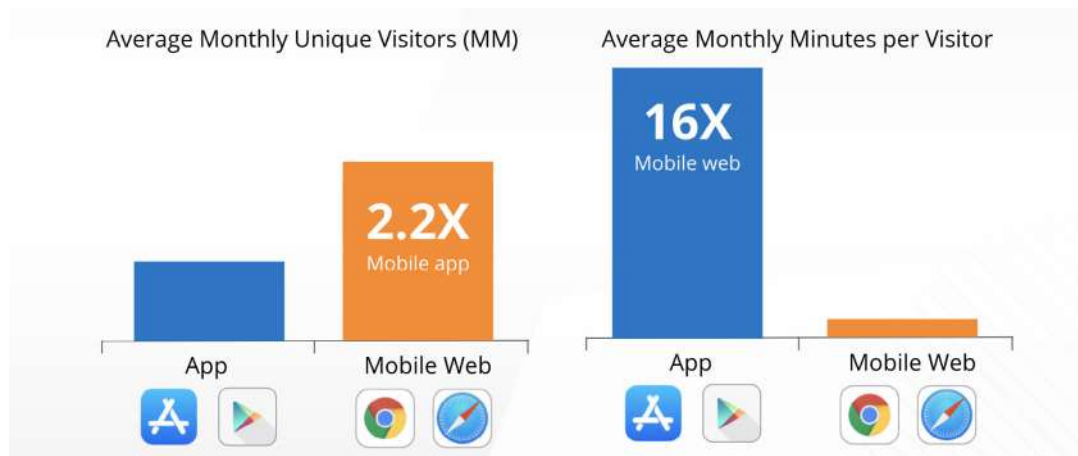


Sources: JHU; Branch



What this means for you – it's more critical than ever to bring users to and invest in your mobile app. Here's why: getting a user to download your app is like going steady with them. By giving you a dedicated space on their home screen, they are entering a committed relationship – and on average, app users convert at a double rate and are twice more likely to return to your brand than a web user.

### Top 500 apps vs. Top 500 Mobile Web Properties



Source: Comscore

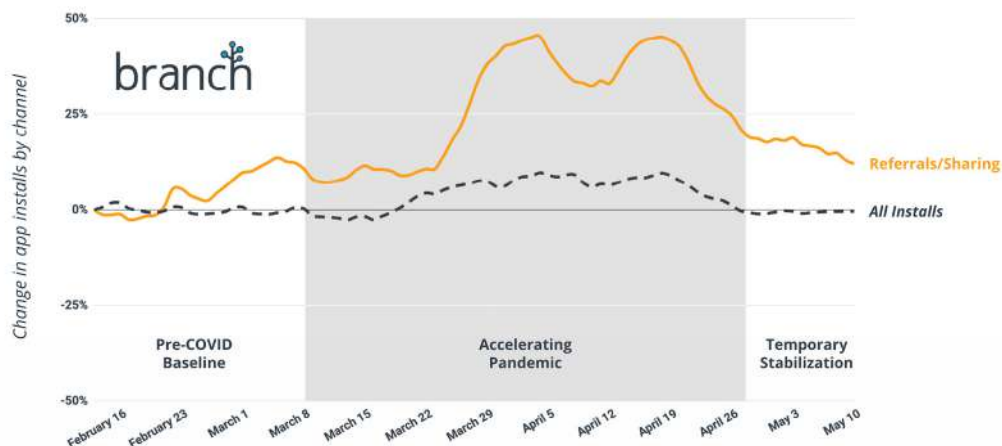
So now that I've convinced you that the app is better (which most of you already knew), let's go over eight organic strategies to acquire more app users:

# 8 Organic, Cost-Saving Methods to Acquire More App Users

## 1. User to user sharing

In our new normal we look for ways to connect – sometimes it's Zoom calls or Houseparty rooms, other times it's sending someone a virtual gift card, or a link to a news article, or a pair of shoes that reminds me of them. In this physically disconnected world, we look for virtual connections, and if you haven't invested in a good sharing or referral program, now is the time to do it. When we looked at referral data in the past, we found that a majority of apps who have sharing or referrals through Branch were seeing a big portion of their traffic come from these user to user referrals. Those percentages have increased over the past few months as people share more and marketers have cut paid budgets to conserve cash in case of an economic downturn.

### Referred installs spiked during the pandemic, and have remained high



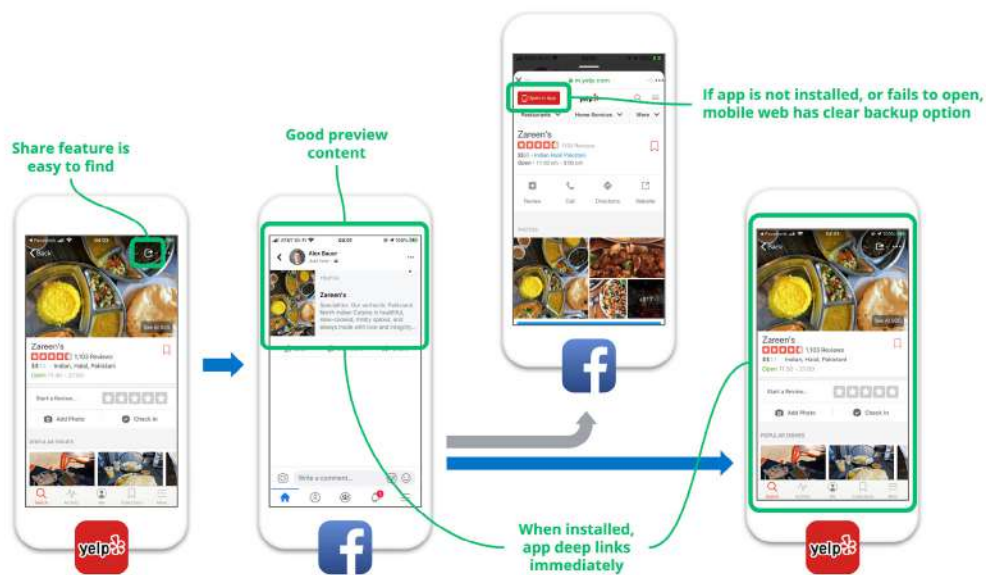
Source: Branch



What are some good practices for building your own sharing and referral program?  
Here's what I've learned from analyzing hundreds of these over the years:

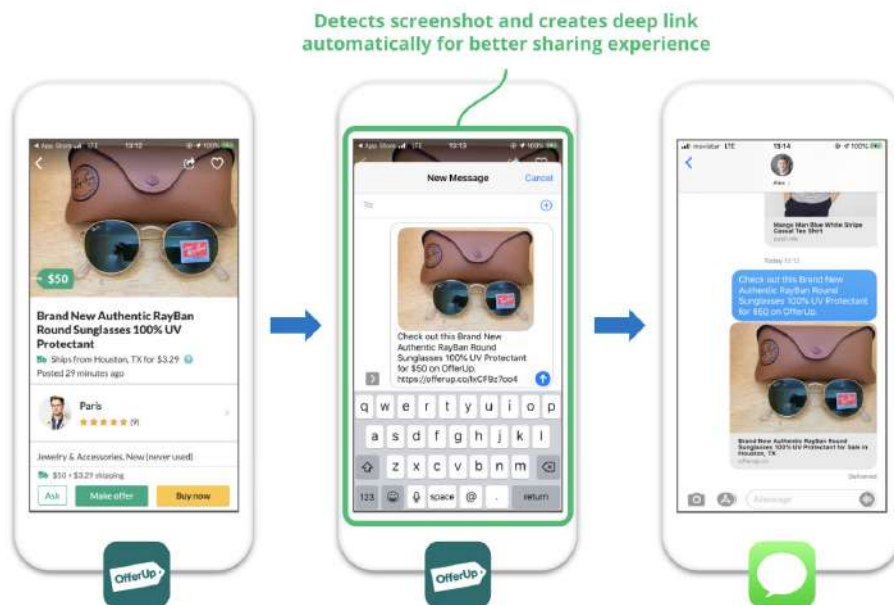
- **Make sure your links can share the app but also the content inside your app** – content is usually what turns viral and is what users share.

## Yelp | Content Sharing



- **If you can, incentivize your users to share**, and if you give an incentive, two-sided incentives work best. In these times, people are more conscious than ever – giving a friend a discount to something cool and getting a discount or promo themselves can work wonders. Branch links can have a referral code and user ID embedded securely to make this easy.
- **Make sure your links work and that they deep link through install** – if a user gets a link to something but can't find that item after downloading the app, they tend to drop off and not come back. Deep linking delights users and Branch links ensure that your new users get the best possible experience when they click on a link shared from a friend.

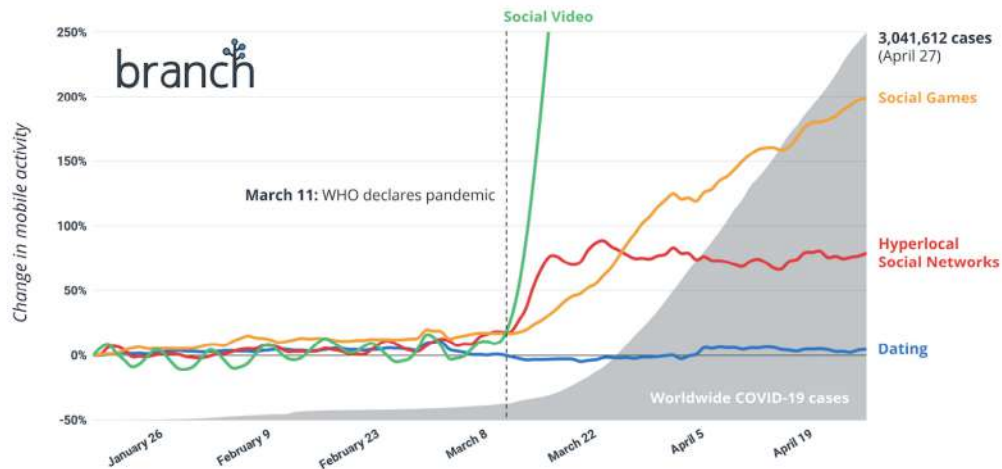
- **Make sure you make it easy to share on the most used platforms** – we recommend using native share sheets, or if you build it yourself, making it dead easy to use.
- **Sharing a screenshot of the content in addition to a link** helps the new user be more likely to click on the link and download your app.
- **Advanced:** Some apps enable sharing when a user takes a screenshot in their app – showing a pop-up asking if the user wants to share – that enables them to add a link in addition to the image for better tracking and better UX for the user getting the link, who otherwise might not consider uploading the app.



## 2. Social posts

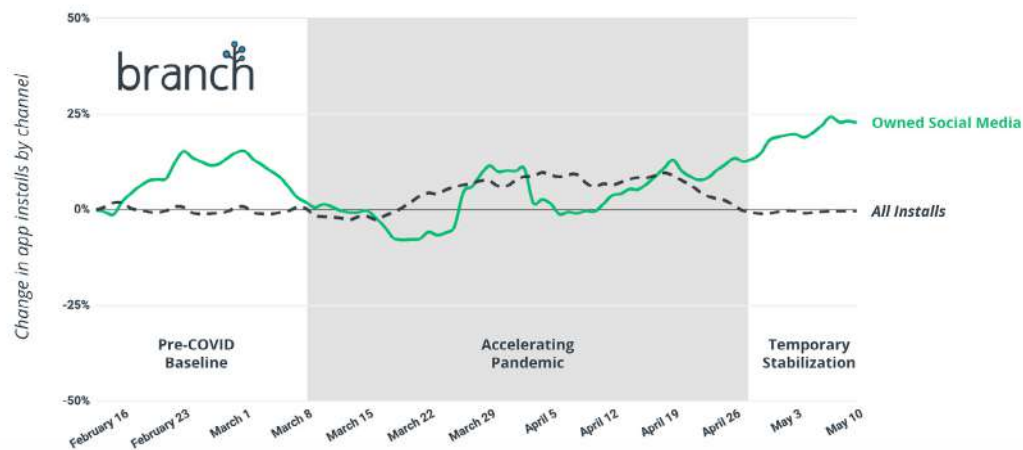
As we looked at all the different verticals and how they changed as social distancing became more prevalent, one thing stood out: Everything to do with social blew up, from video to games.

### During physical distancing, apps are helping us keep in touch



Sources: JHU; Branch

### User acquisition via owned social media continues to climb

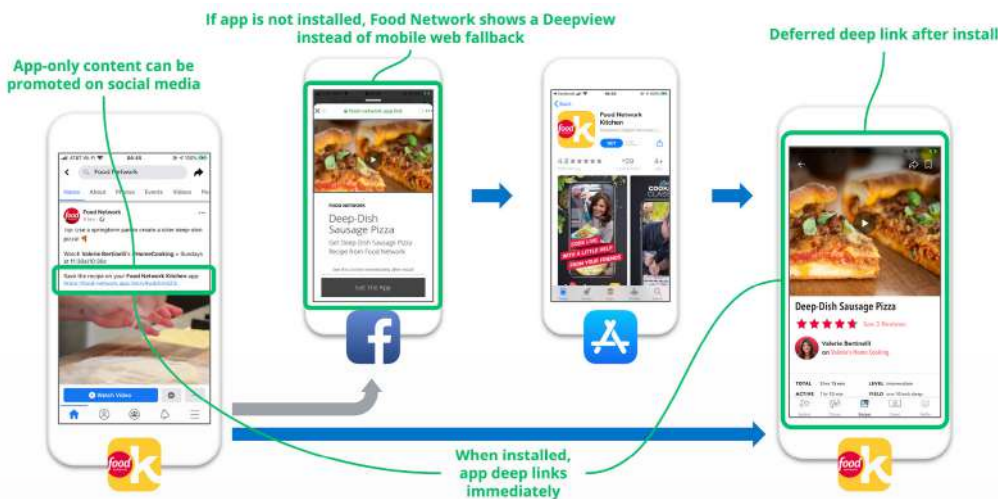


Sources: JHU; Branch

We are spending time at home and we are bored, so time spent on social networks has skyrocketed. What does that mean for your brand? This is the time to spend time and effort on your social media strategy – be interesting, be bold, and post often. Here are some learnings from what I've seen around:

- **Authenticity works** – the great thing about being stuck at home is that the layers peel away and the world sees us for who we are, from SNL over ZOOM, to seeing our co-workers' homes (unless they are obsessive about Zoom backgrounds).
- **Post interesting content** – this could be anything from your products, to lists of interesting uses of your products, to news, to video, etc. For example, at Branch we started doing videos of our customers using Branch and calling them #branchinthewild, and we have seen a lot more views and adoption since social distancing began.
- **Deep link to your content inside the app** – make sure your users get a good experience by actually deep linking the content in the app if they have it, or take them to [a web preview of that content](#) with [a web to app banner](#) if they don't.

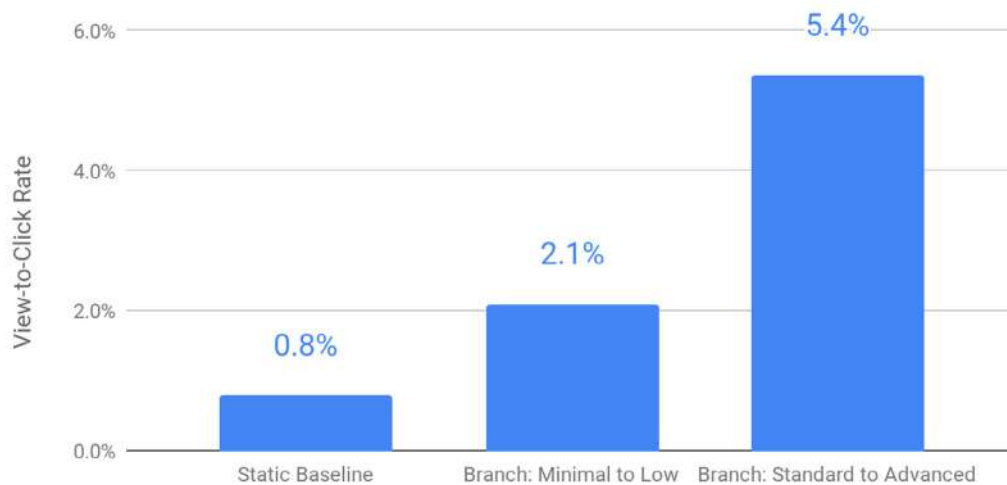
## Food Network | Social Media



### 3. Web to app banners

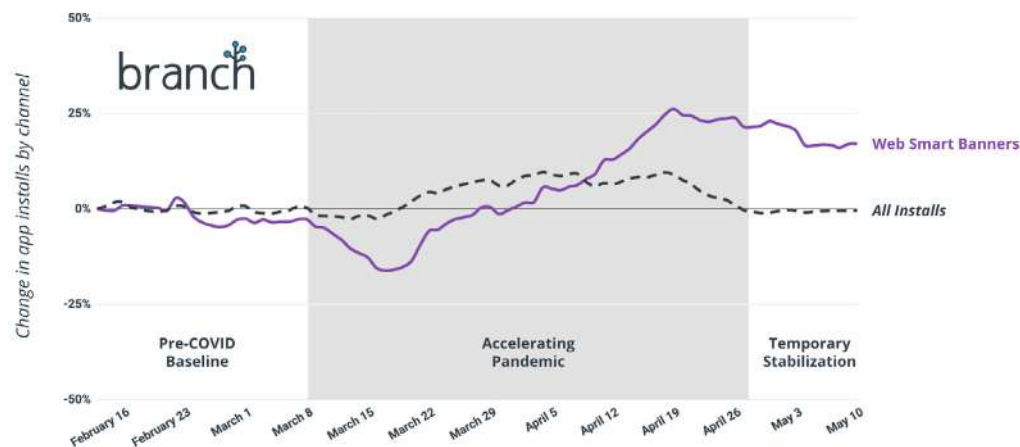
While this is a tool that many of the bigger companies use, I am often surprised by how many brands don't customize and personalize their banners. When we looked at our data, we saw that by personalizing and targeting your banner, you can increase the view-to-install ratio by 5X. That's right: you can get **on average 5X** more click-to-installs from your web visitors.

#### View-to-click rates by adoption of Branch Journeys



Source: Branch

#### Smart banners have been driving more app installs during the pandemic



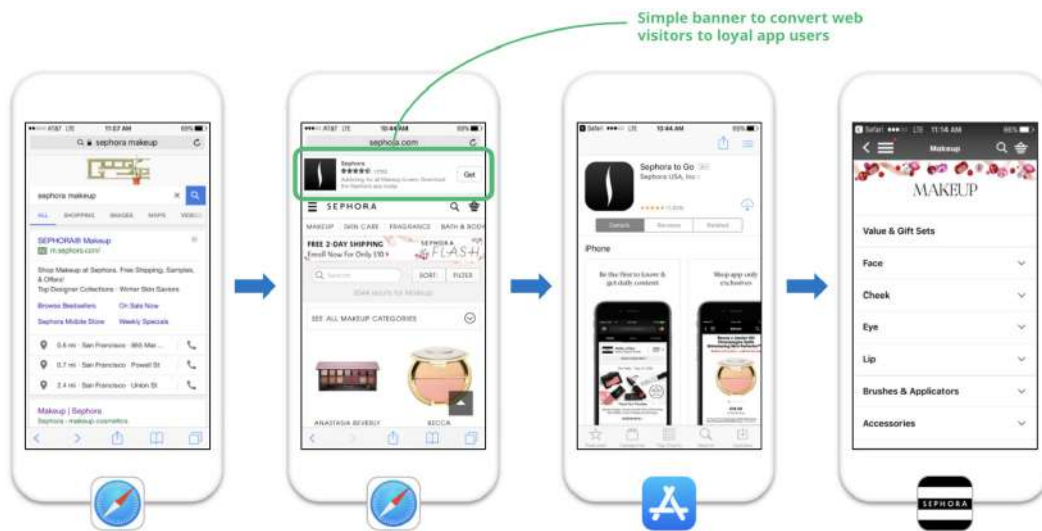
Source: Branch



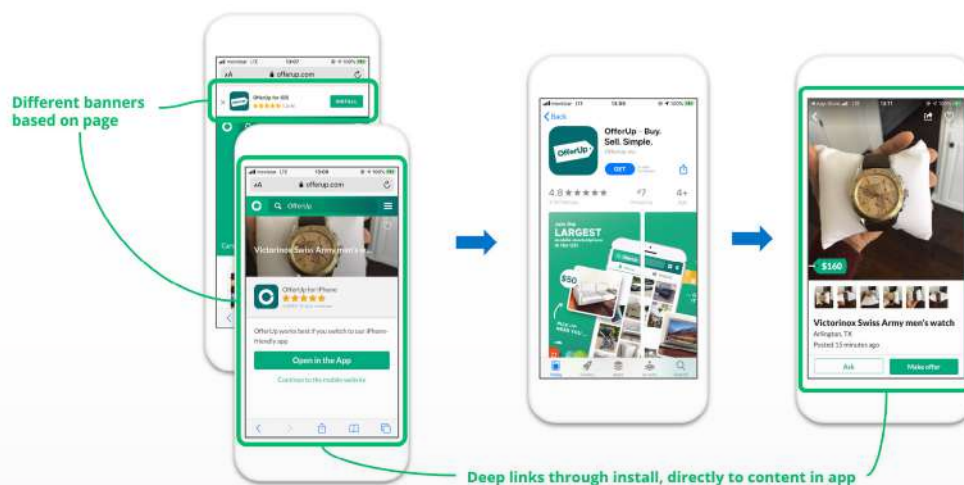
While there are some advanced techniques here like optimizing your SEO and using banners to drive that traffic into the app, here are some basics for your banners:

- **Use them often and deep link to the content in the app.** On pages where you don't want to distract the user or on pages where users come from searches, you can choose the top banner or float button (Google can penalize you for interstitials, but is fine with small banners).

### Sephora | Web → App

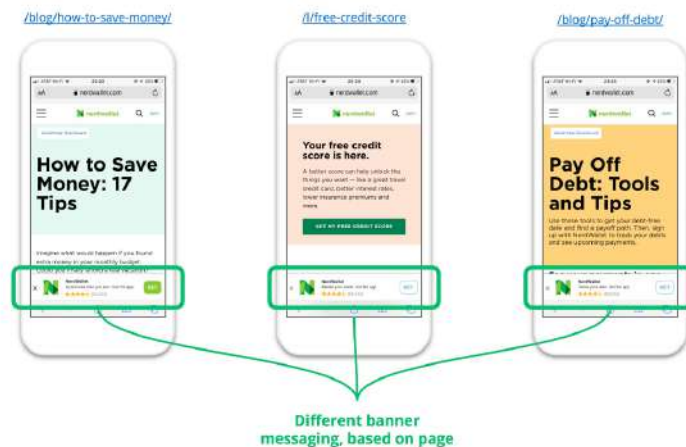


### OfferUp | Web → App



- **Personalize depending on the user.** Users should get a different experience if they have the app installed (you can be pushier). If they don't, you should ease them in. You can also personalize by language, type of page they are on, and how active they are – the more sessions they have, the more aggressive you can get.

## NerdWallet | Web → App



Select the audience you want to target  
(Note: all of these conditions must be true for the Journey to show)

Platforms  
☒ mobile web  
☐ AMP web ⓘ

Devices  
 Android: ☒ phone  
☒ tablet  
 iOS: ☒ phone  
☒ tablet

This Journey will show if user...

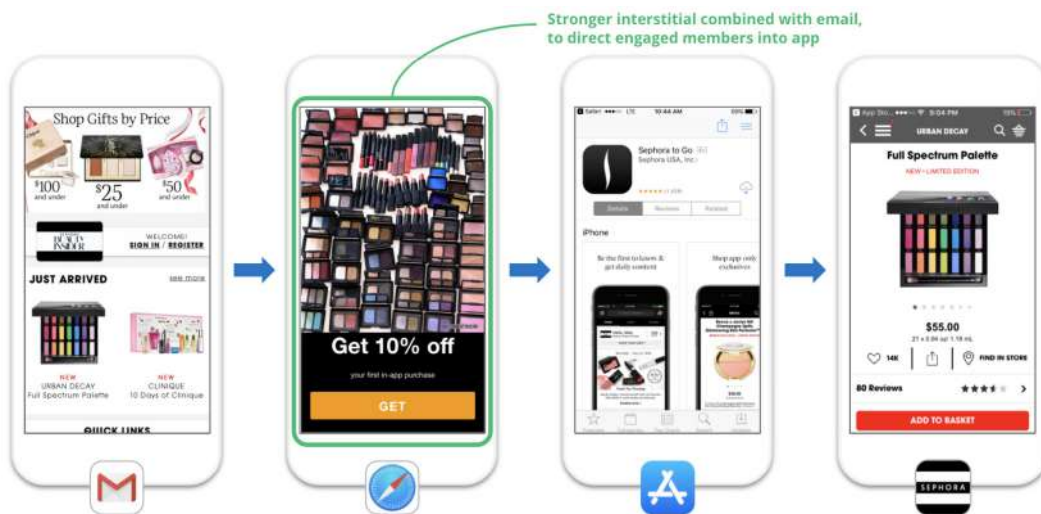
|                          |                       |                       |                    |      |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------|
| Has completed event      | PURCHASE              | more than or equal to | 1                  | time |
| Came directly from a url | starting with         |                       | https://google.com |      |
| Has clicked on Ad        | more than or equal to |                       | 1                  | time |
| Has visited the app      | less than or equal to |                       | 1                  | time |

Add Filter ⓘ

- **Personalize dismiss settings** – in some cases (such as lower engagement, no app installed), you might wait a long time once a banner was dismissed to show something again, while in other cases (highly engaged user, has the app, just purchased) you might want to make that window smaller.

- **Try an incentive** — since app users are twice as likely to buy and return, converting a web user into an app user is valuable. What we have seen work well is offering organic web visitors a discount or special price if they download the app and passing that as a parameter in your banner link — Branch makes this super simple. What if some of your products are low margin or some users have a high acquisition cost? You can target the promotion depending on which pages the user is on or where they came from!

### Sephora | Email → Web → App



## 4. Email to app

Last but not least, email is a great way to get more users into your app.

Unfortunately, even though the data is clear, many brands still send their users from email to their website, even though those emails are read on mobile. The reason? Detecting the platform and whether a user has the app is not always easy, and furthermore, most email solution providers break universal links on iOS when they wrap email links in a redirect in order to track links. Our deep linked email solution fixes this — it opens the app if users have it, and falls back on a website only if they don't. This makes sure the user always gets to the right content and increases engagement. Better yet, **we help you track conversions from email regardless if they happen on the web or in-app!** In fact, our latest case study showed that just by implementing this practice, our customer boosted the [overall engagement of their user by 11%](#). Some best practices when it comes to email:

- **Deep link content promotions** — open the app if the user has it, fall back to your website otherwise.
- **Track conversions across web and app**
- **Set up app download promotions differently than content promotion email links** — make sure the link fallback is the app store, provide an incentive, and pass that incentive through the install.

**During the pandemic, email has remained a reliable channel for apps**

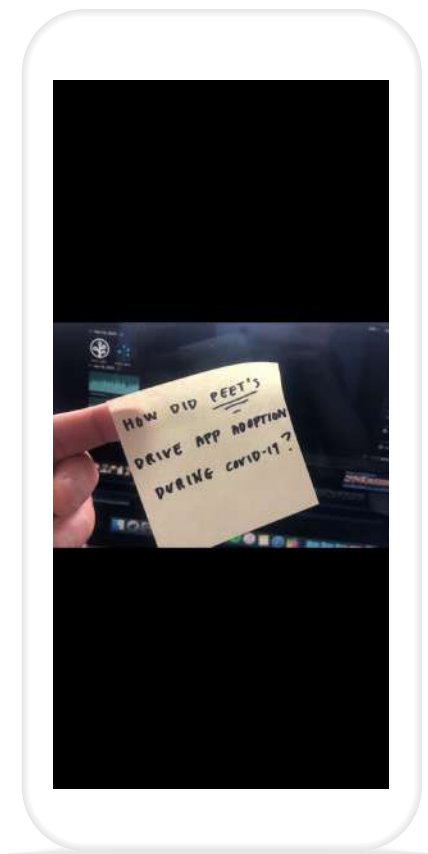


Source: Branch



## 5. QR Codes

One of the more advanced strategies that companies are using during this time is using QR codes to encourage users to download the app and to link to in-app content. Physical distancing has been tough to live through, but one thing is certain – it accelerated the adoption of technologies worldwide, including QR codes. I went to Peet's the other day and used a QR code to get the app to order ahead from my local store. The best thing about using QR codes? You can track each QR code link independently to see which location or which product is driving the most engagement. [Click here to view my experience.](#)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bZjzE5rzzY>



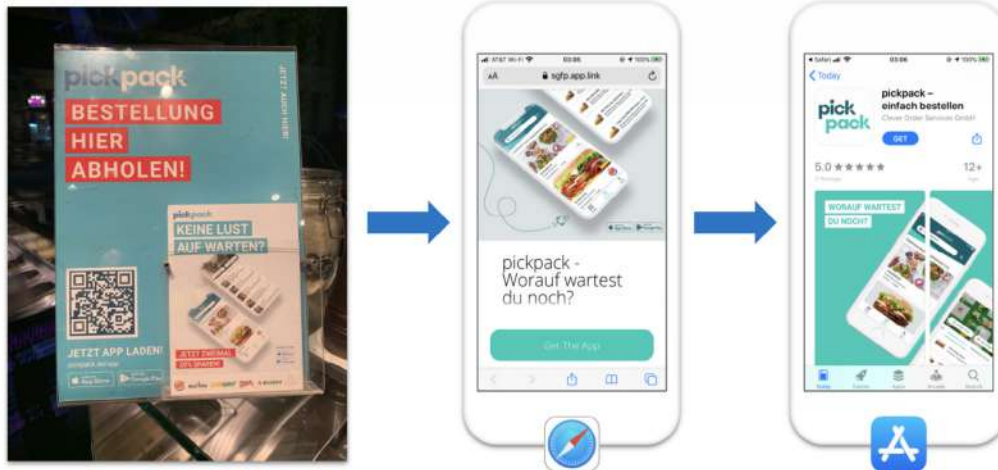
If you are thinking of using QR codes, here are some ideas and best practices:

- Use the QR codes in physical locations, and make sure that each location has a different code. This way you can actually differentiate between locations to see which ones drive the most app installs or in-app purchases. Get store employees to promote the app by running a competition between stores and offering a prize to the store that generates the most downloads or purchases.
- Use QR codes on your products. These can promote the app, but can also be used for tracking purposes to see which products generate more installs. You can even set up the QR code to defer deep link to the product inside the app once the app is downloaded!

### Peet's Coffee | QR Codes



- Use QR codes on ads and tie promos to them. I always wondered why this is not more prevalent in the States – adding a QR code with a download link and in-app promotion associated with it is a great way to measure the efficiency of ads throughout a city or on billboards.



- Use a link/QR code generator that ensures that the link can be updated – the QR code can be expensive to print and you might change the content or the promotion associated with it. With a tool like Branch's link generator, you can easily refresh the link behind a QR code when necessary.

|            |                                     |                            |   |   |   |   |     |
|------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 2020-05-06 | Branchinthewild with Shop - YouTube | ...nch.link/dU1lmdnh6      | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ... |
| 2020-05-06 | Branchinthewild with Shop - YouTube | .../branch.link/6VsDRmHmh6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ... |

1 2 3 ... 18 19 20

- Edit
- View stats
- Debug
- Duplicate
- QR Code
- Archive link



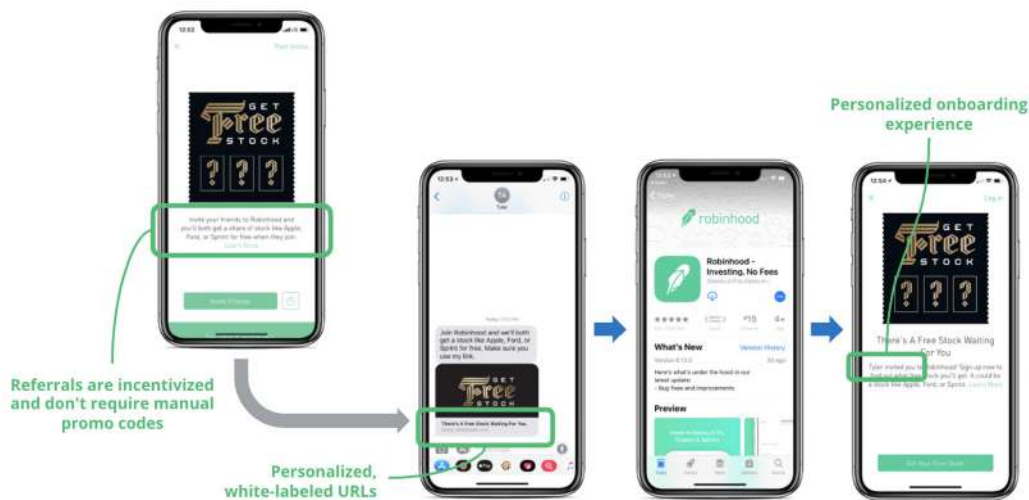
## 6. Engage Brand Advocates

Brand advocates are the loyal champions of your brand who organically promote and spread word about your company, product, and services. They're a type of influencer but don't require any monetary compensation because they advocate for your brand based on their fondness for it. Influencer marketing – including the use of brand advocates – has been [a go-to method](#) for many brands to gain exposure, but based on a recent social roundtable I moderated, physical distancing is actually getting influencer marketing to grow even more – since we can't try things out and we can't shop, we spend more of our time on social media and make all of our decisions on purchases based on online content. I know I have bought a miracle pan, cookbooks, exercise equipment and seven types of dog food all based on videos on various social media platforms. Some things to think about as you explore the use of and engage your brand advocates:

- **Tracking the ROI of each advocate is key.** It's important to track downloads or in-app purchases that come from different influencer links or content to understand their performance. One of our customers, rewardStyle, saw a huge lift in engagement and conversions once they used Branch links for every influencer. This allowed them to track their conversions from sharing to purchase, and tie the results back to individual influencers.
- **Every user can be an advocate** if you create a good incentive and tracking

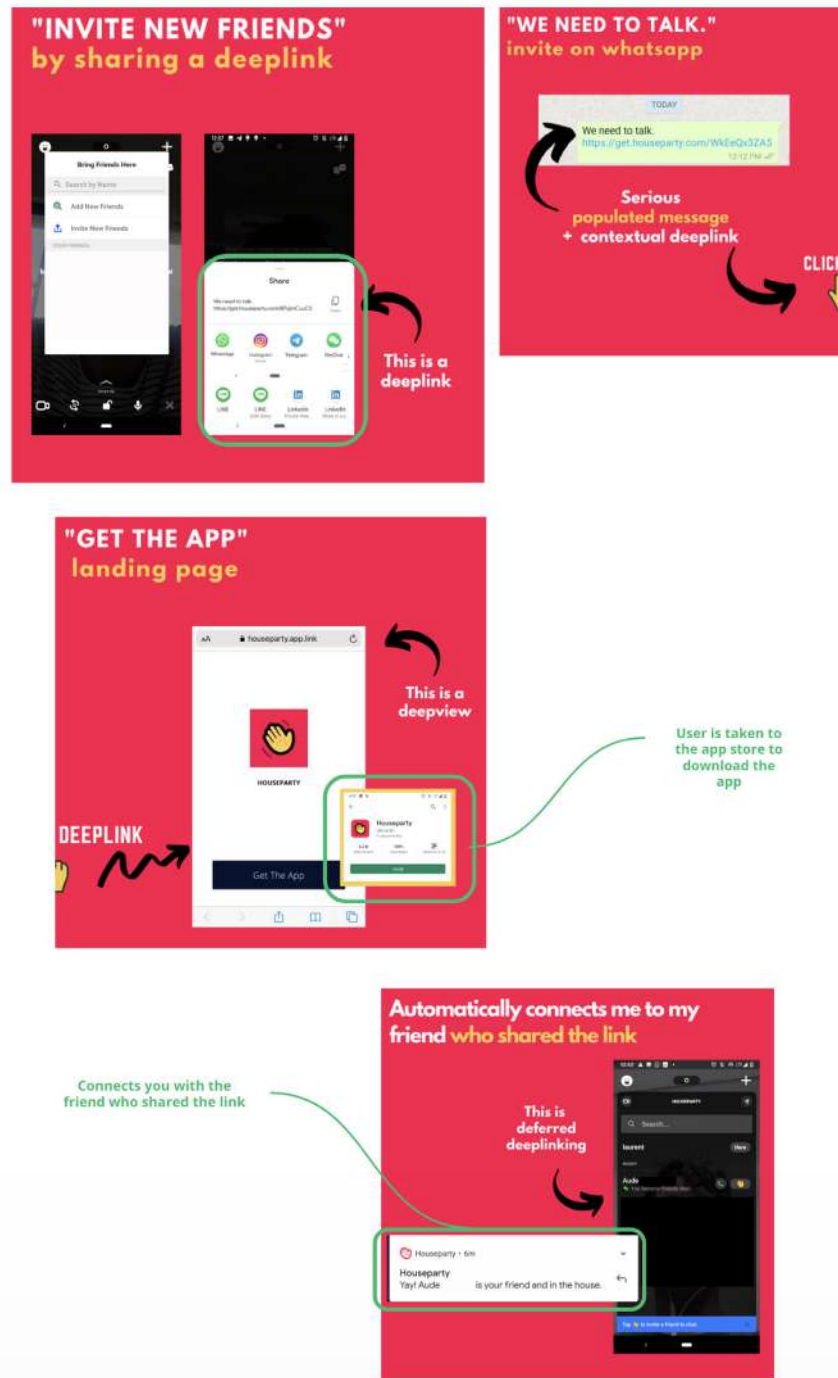


program. Robinhood did an amazing referral program where for every user who was invited that joined the app they got a free stock and the referrer got a free stock. What was great about their referral program is that the stock was a surprise, so it encouraged the referrer to go back into the app to see the stock they got. The user was also potentially fueled by the spike of dopamine from receiving the stock and was more likely to invite even more people to the app.



- **Personalize the onboarding for people coming to your app from referrals and advocates.** Making someone feel special when they come to your app improves conversion rates — in fact, Trip.com A/B tested this a while back and saw that [mobile personalized onboarding almost doubles the signup rate](#) on their welcome screen. If you know where someone came from, you can show the name of the friend who invited them after install, a special offer, or more. Houseparty has been growing a lot recently and their flow

is genius — when you are added to a party, you join the party (your group of friends) right after install because the install link uses the meeting as a parameter that gets matched after install! See below:



## 7. Content and SEO optimization + personalized web to app banners

As I think about one channel that every single company can use to drive more growth, it's probably [SEO and intent-based marketing](#). So much of what we do as marketers entails creating demand, educating, and creating a need — which takes time. The magic of a user who performs a search query about a product or service is they've already shown interest and intent, so our job becomes a lot easier. That's why conversions from leads that perform a search query are so much higher than conversions from display ads, or pretty much any other channels. As a test, if you compare conversions on ads shown in Google vs Facebook, the Google conversion rate is much higher, whereas Facebook achieves the same number of conversions by showing an ad to a LOT more people. Here is my advice:

- Create a streamlined process to analyze potential keywords. Our process at Branch has two steps:
  - a. Compile a list of all the potential keywords you are targeting.  
Some sources can include keywords driving traffic to your site now, competitor keywords you can find using tools like Moz or SEMRush, and new keywords based on a brainstorm with your team.
  - b. Come up with keyword rankings based on a formula that takes into consideration how relevant a keyword is to your brand, the ease of ranking for it in search results (based on the keyword difficulty rating you can get from tools like Moz or SEMRush), keyword search volume, and search intent score (based on conversion rates from cost per click bidding scores — the higher the CPC, the higher the intent).

| Formula %                | Contribution to Final Score |   |  |  |  |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Relevance Score          | 35%                         | How Relevant Is The Keyword Group + Search Volume Contribution, Normalised to 100                     |  |  |  |
| Avg Rank                 | 10%                         | Average Branch Rank in Search Results Page  |  |  |  |
| Search Intent Score      | 20%                         | Search Intent based upon the KW CPC, Normalised to 100  |  |  |  |
| Competitor Urgency Score | 15%                         | Competitor Urgency Score is based on how many competitors are ranking above us for a specific keyword |  |  |  |
| Ease of Ranking Score    | 20%                         | Ease of Ranking Score is basically the inverse of the KW Difficulty                                   |  |  |  |



- c. Come up with topics based on user intent and calculate topic scores based on the keywords in that topic and their scores

### Target by ~~Keyword~~ intent

| Intent         | Topics           | Key Phrases   |
|----------------|------------------|---|
| Browse Product | LCD TVs          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Best LCD TVs</li> <li>- LCD TV reviews</li> <li>- New LCD TVs</li> <li>- LCD TV 2019</li> </ul>  |
|                | Homecoming dress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Black homecoming dresses</li> <li>- Red homecoming dresses</li> <li>- Black homecoming dresses near me</li> <li>- Junior homecoming dresses</li> </ul> |
|                | Eyeliner         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eye liner liquid</li> <li>- Eye liner make up</li> <li>- Eye liner pencil</li> <li>- Eye liner</li> </ul>  |

Source: [Webinar with Branch and Graphitehq.com](#)

- Follow up on user and keyword intent — make sure that once you understand intent, you use intent down the conversion funnel. Below you can see a proposed methodology on how to think about intent from SEO all the way to product and design.

### SEO by Intent

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Intent     | Target by <b>intent</b>                         |
| Authority  | Build <b>topical authority</b>                  |
| UX         | Design <b>UX</b> to fulfill intent              |
| Content    | Create <b>premium content</b> to fulfill intent |
| Conversion | Drive users to <b>convert</b> on their intent   |

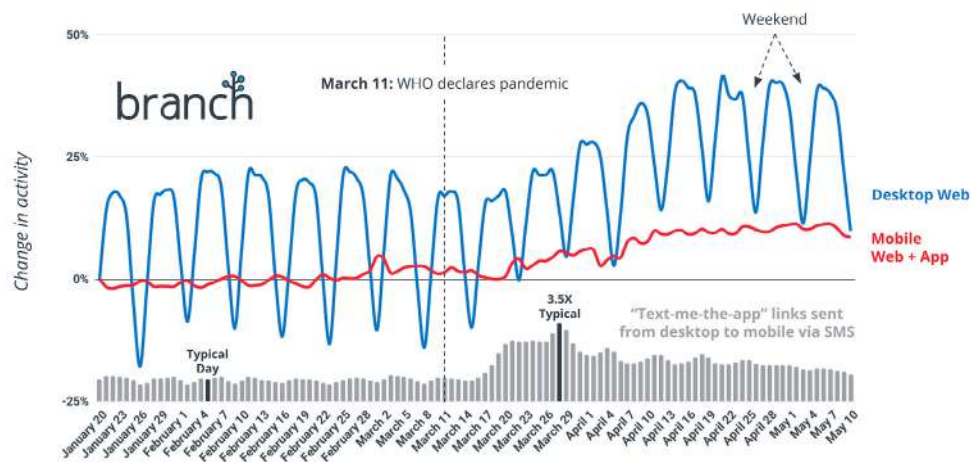
Source: [Webinar with Branch and Graphitehq.com](#)

- Convert the right user to the app, but make sure you don't appear to be intrusive. More in my previous article on converting web users to app users.

## 8. Text me the app

As we looked at trends, one thing is certain: both desktop and mobile usage have increased greatly during the pandemic (though desktop activity has grown the most with spikes during the weekdays), and the balance between desktop and mobile is not equal throughout the week. I even noticed that I use my computer more to research things, shop, or consume entertainment during the week, but by the weekend I am on my phone even to do any work I might have.

### All platforms show increased activity, but desktop web is up the most



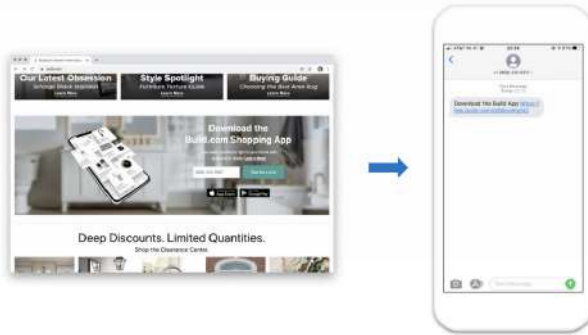
Source: Branch

During these times, investing in cross-platform experiences is even more important, specifically converting desktop web users to mobile app users. One way to do that is through text me the app pages or banners that allow a user to text themselves or a friend a link to the in-app content they are browsing. Here's some examples of how companies are doing it below:

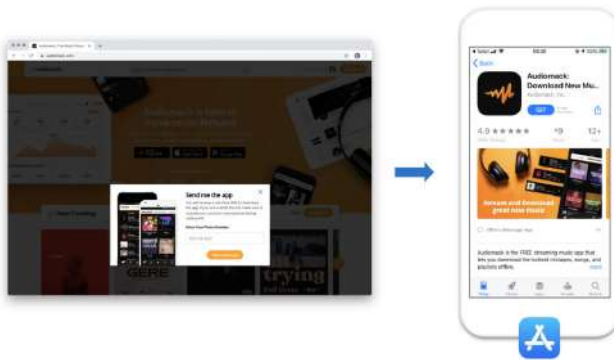
### CQ Hotels | Desktop → App (SMS)



### Build.com | Desktop → App (SMS)



### Audiomack | Text-Me-The-App



Although many marketing budgets have been put on hold, that doesn't mean app growth is something to disregard, nor is it impossible. Whether you choose to focus on upping your social media game or investing in web-to-app banners, these eight tactics will help you grow and build retention and engagement with your users even with a small marketing budget. The cherry on top: by following the strategies outlined above, app users are more likely to stick during this period and beyond, and will help your business outlive the effects of COVID-19.



## About Branch

[Branch](#) provides the leading cross-platform linking and attribution platform, offering solutions that unify user experience and measurement across devices and channels. Branch powers mobile links and cross-platform measurement to more than 3 billion monthly users across the globe, and is a trusted cross-platform marketing, engagement, and measurement solution for over 50,000 apps — including Adobe, BuzzFeed, Yelp, OfferUp, and many more.