

Grow Engagement with Relevant Content

ııblueshift

SMART GUIDE

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MEDIA & PUBLISHING

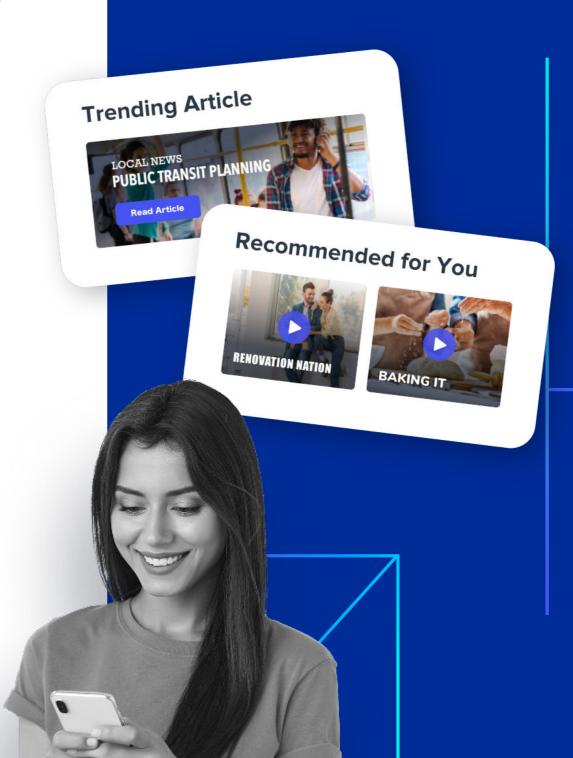
The Key to Driving Engagement and Maximizing Revenue?

Make it easier for new and existing users to discover fresh, relevant content in just a few clicks.

Today's consumers expect the stories, videos, podcasts, and other content from their favorite media brands to be curated to their individual interests — always. And brands such as Netflix have dominated the battle for consumer attention by doing just that. In fact, Netflix credits its recommendations with driving 80% of what's watched and projects recommendations save \$1 billion annually from preventing canceled subscriptions.¹

The good news? Surfacing relevant, engaging content is no longer a competitive advantage reserved for giants like Netflix, NYTimes, and Spotify. With advances in recommender systems, all marketers can make every brand touchpoint personalized to each user — you just need the right recommendations strategy.

In this smart guide, you'll learn about the different content recommendation themes, how to select the right ones throughout your user journey, and best practices to add relevance across every interaction with your brand.



NETFLIX RECOMMENDATIONS

+80%

Recommendations drive 80% of what's watched¹

\$1 Billion

Recommendations save \$1B annually by preventing canceled subscriptions¹

¹McKinsey. (2017). McKinsey's State of Machine Learning and AI, 2017.

DRIVING RELEVANCY

With Recommendations

We've all experienced how frustrating it is to waste valuable time searching for, rather than enjoying, interesting content — and we've stopped engaging with media brands as a result. That means whether you're focused on growing and retaining subscribers or increasing time spent consuming content, winning users' share of attention comes down to helping them quickly find compelling content.

Your brand has invested heavily in building vast catalogs of articles, videos, shows, podcasts, blogs, and images — or all of the above — for the purpose of showing it to the right users. Now comes the challenge of matching users with the right content for them and keeping it fresh. But how do you achieve that when you factor in varying content access rights and other content specifications?

Luckily today there are Al-powered recommender systems to assist you in connecting users with relevant content based on their individual interests, including stated preferences, inferred affinities, and media consumption behaviors. These highly flexible recommender systems do the heavy lifting in mining and analyzing user and product-level data to personalize content while also meeting your editorial guidelines to maintain the right brand experience.

But recommender systems don't run on autopilot. They optimize to selected recommendation themes, and the best recommendation theme to use will depend on a user's context and where they are in the lifecycle.

+209%

Higher conversion rate on emails with predictive recommendations

+111%

Higher click-through rate on emails with triggered recommendations

+64%

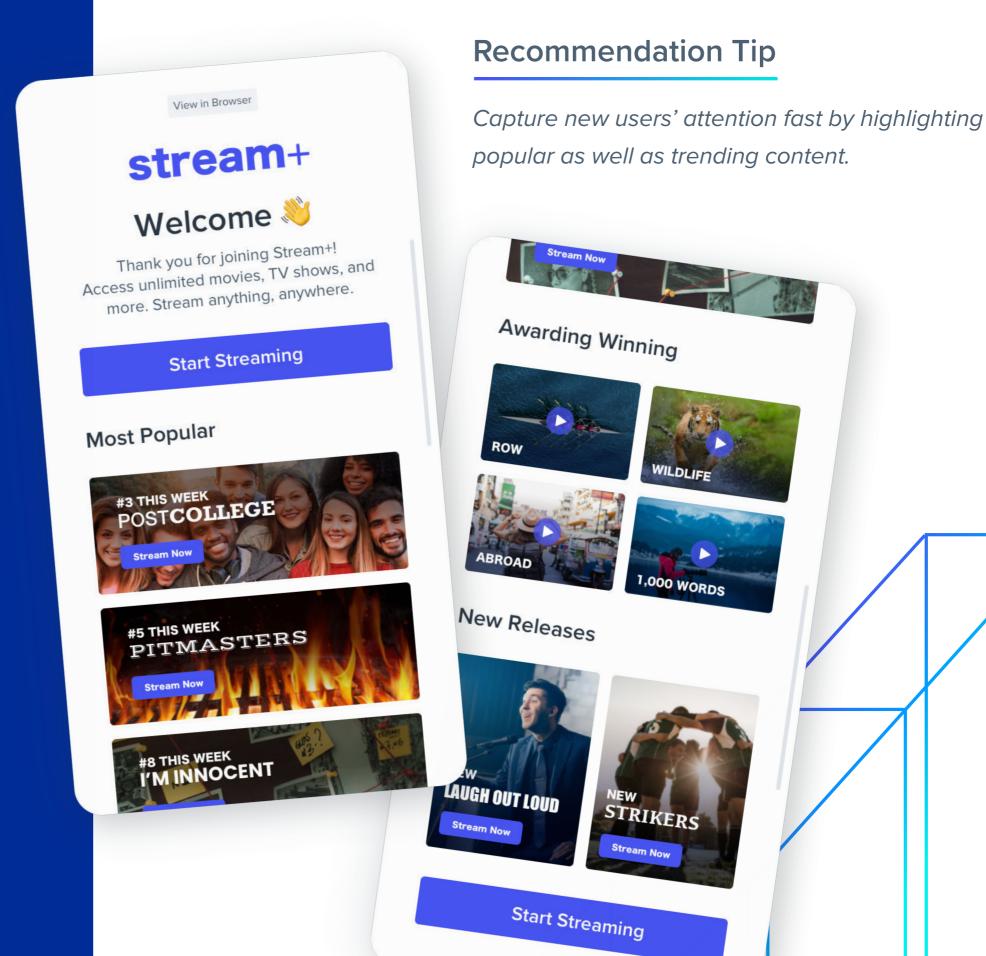
Higher click-to-open rate on emails with triggered recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

For New Users

The initial interactions with your brand provide an important, but fleeting, opportunity to make a lasting impression and convince new users that you have interesting, quality content worthy of their attention. But at this point, you have limited data about new users, and so the level of personalization will depend on the amount of data collected during the sign-up flow.

When you have limited user-level data available, we suggest recommending content that's popular or trending among existing users. Social proof is a powerful tactic early on because it validates your content is worth someone's precious time. In addition, you can further narrow down popular content by region, category, or stated preferences if available — then, as users continue to interact with your brand, you can start tailoring recommendations to their interests.



NEW USERS

Top Recommendation Themes



Most Popular & Trending

Suggest the most viewed, liked, or shared articles, videos, shows, podcasts, or other content from the last day, week, month, etc. Content can be specific to a location, category affinities, or preferences.



Free Preview

Provide limited free access to premium content for users who have a lower subscription tier. Content can be specific to a location, category affinities, package, or stated preferences.



Recent Content

New, fresh content is perceived to be more desirable. Highlight the latest content from the day, week, month, etc. Content can be specific to a location, category affinities, or stated preferences.



Expiring Content

Create urgency and play up FOMO (fear of missing out) by highlighting content that will no longer be available soon, either to everyone or based on their subscription.



Upcoming Releases

Pique their interest by providing users with a preview of the content they'll soon have access to. This can be specific to a location, category affinities, or subscription type.



Seasonal Content

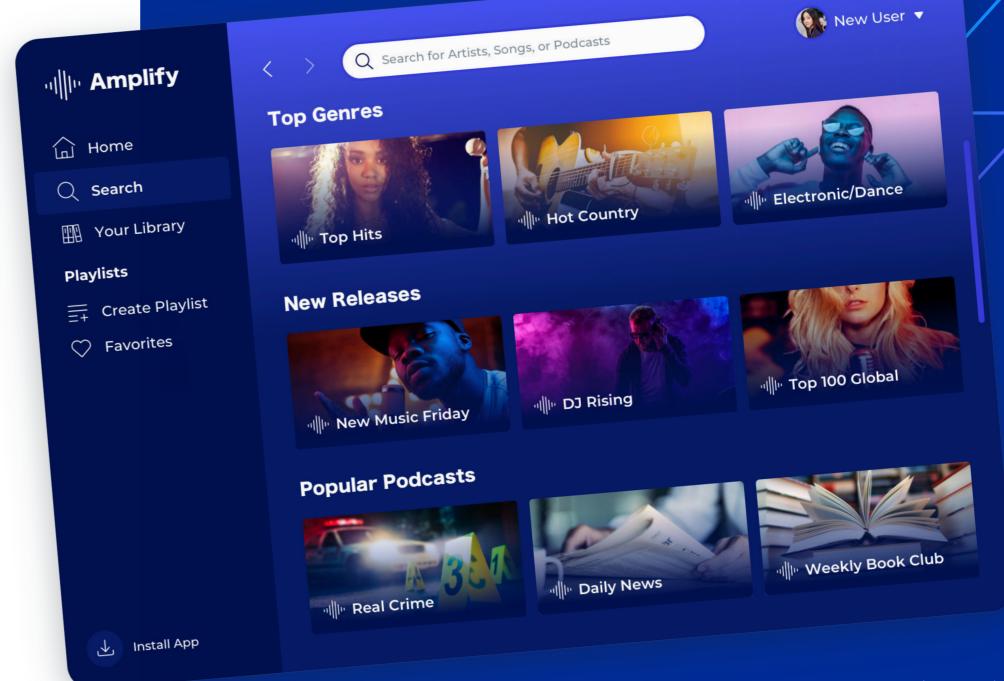
Be topical and drive immediate engagement by showcasing seasonal or time-bound content. Content can be specific to a location, category affinities, or stated preferences.

For New Users

You can incorporate these recommendation themes into a multi-touch Welcome Series with touchpoints across email, onsite, in-app, streaming devices, mobile push, and SMS. The goal is to hook users and keep engagement strong with a steady stream of relevant recommendations that highlight the richness of your brand's content while maintaining relevance to each user's interests.

Which theme should you use when? There's no reason to stick to just one theme — include multiple or all the themes within a message to help increase the chances of surfacing the most relevant content. A/B test which theme or combination of themes works best for your needs.

Then, when new users start browsing and engaging with content, your recommender system can start using that data to understand their content interests and media habits.



Recommendation Tip

Use multiple recommendation themes within a message to help increase the chances new users discover the right content for them.

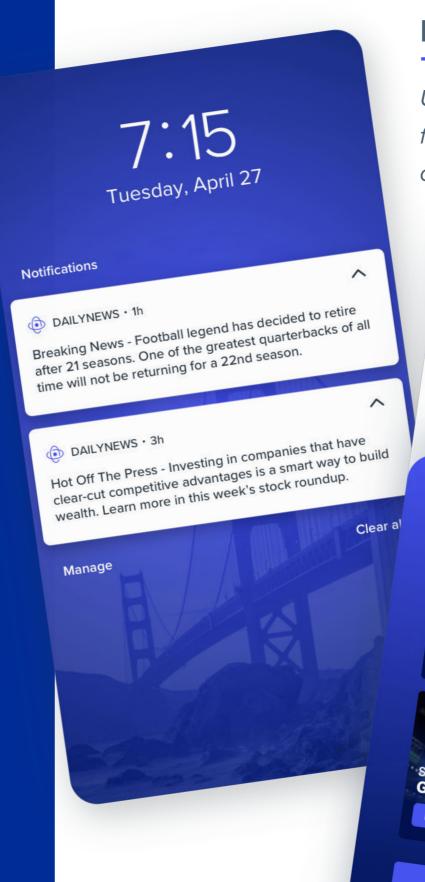
RECOMMENDATIONS

For Active Users

Your main goal with active users is keeping their interest and engagement strong. This is achieved by continuing to deliver the content they seek as well as surfacing fresh, relevant content to engage with next. It's important to maintain a seamless user experience by making it easy for them to continue where they left off and paving the path to engage further with new content regardless of the channel they use.

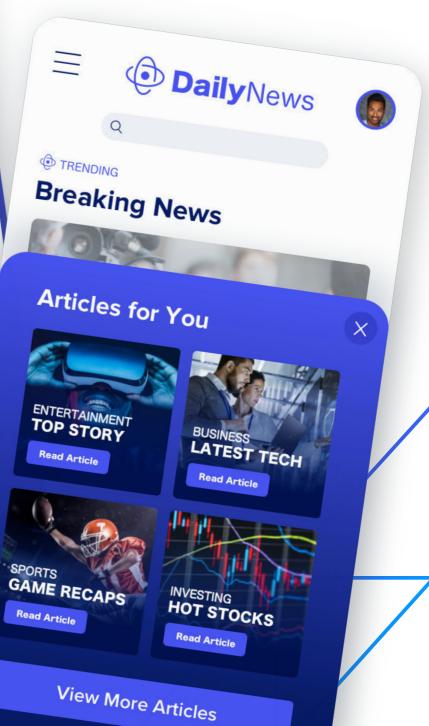
The good news is that as users continue to browse and consume content, your understanding of them builds and deepens. Now content recommendations can become truly 1:1 and adaptive to each user's current context — what they've recently engaged with, the channel they're on, the time of day, how deeply they've engaged with other content, and so on.

All the recommendation themes for New Users can also be used at this stage. But to make the recommendations even more tailored to each user's interests and activity, focus on the following recommendation themes.



Recommendation Tip

Use recommendations to make it easy for users to continue engaging with content regardless of channel.



ACTIVE USERS

Additional Recommendation Themes



Continue Watching/Reading

Remind users to pick up where they left off with videos, shows, stories, or other types of content.



Complete Series/Season

Remind users to finish a content series or a season of a show when there are only a few content items left.



Users Like You

Recommend content based on what users with similar preferences, content consumption behaviors, or demographics have engaged with.



Similar Content

Recommend content similar to what the user has been engaging with based on their favorite topics, genres, actors, authors, or other content elements.



Next

Showcase the next episode for the same show, season, author, topic, or other content in a series.



Watch Again

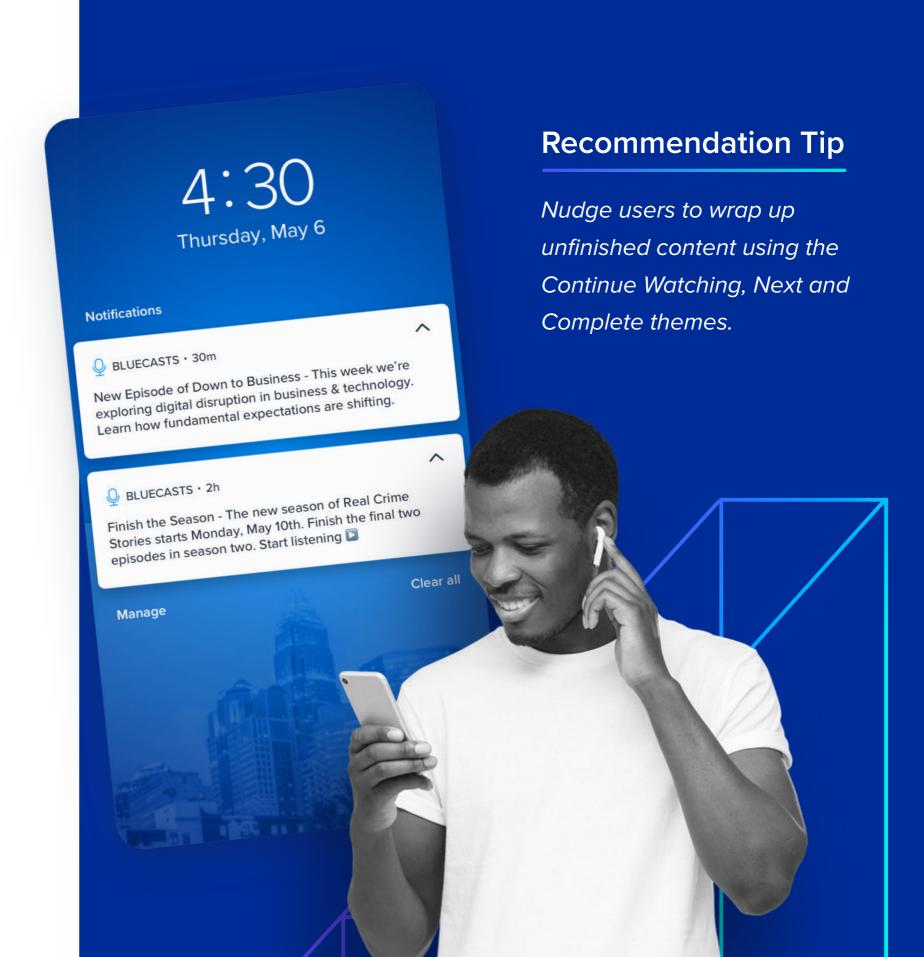
Remind users of content that they've engaged with in the past that they may be interested in watching again.

APPLYING THEMES

For Active Users

There are numerous ways to incorporate these content recommendations as active users engage with your brand across channels. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Send a weekly or daily email feed leveraging multiple content themes to increase the chances of surfacing interesting content.
- Nudge users to wrap up unfinished content using email, push, in-app, and other types of reminders leveraging the Continue Watching, Next and Complete themes.
- Trigger a message based on a behavior a user has or hasn't done, like finishing a podcast or reading multiple articles on a topic.
- Play up users' interests in specific actors, writers, or content producers by highlighting new content pieces from their favorites.

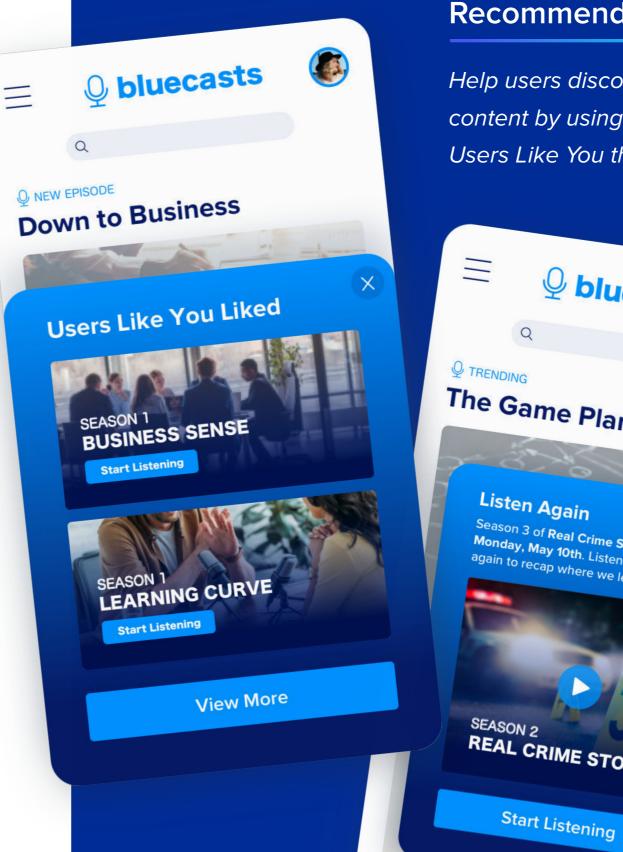


APPLYING THEMES

For Active Users Continued

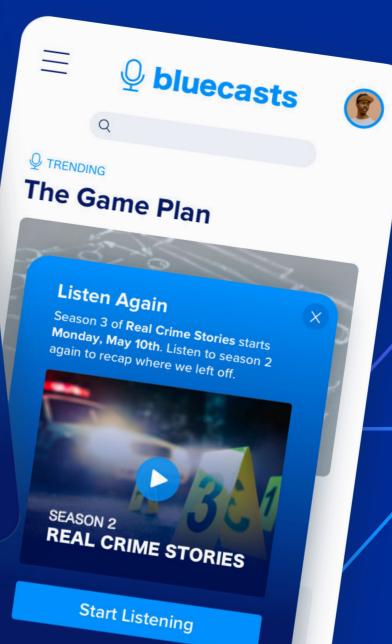
Here are a few more best practices to improve the user experience and content discovery:

- Recommend the next-best content as users are wrapping up a season or content series.
- Promote seasonal content that matches users' interests.
- Drive urgency by highlighting relevant content or popular content that will no longer be available soon.
- · Highlight upcoming live events that match users' interests.
- Help users discover new content they'll likely be interested in by leveraging the New, Similar, and Users Like You themes.



Recommendation Tip

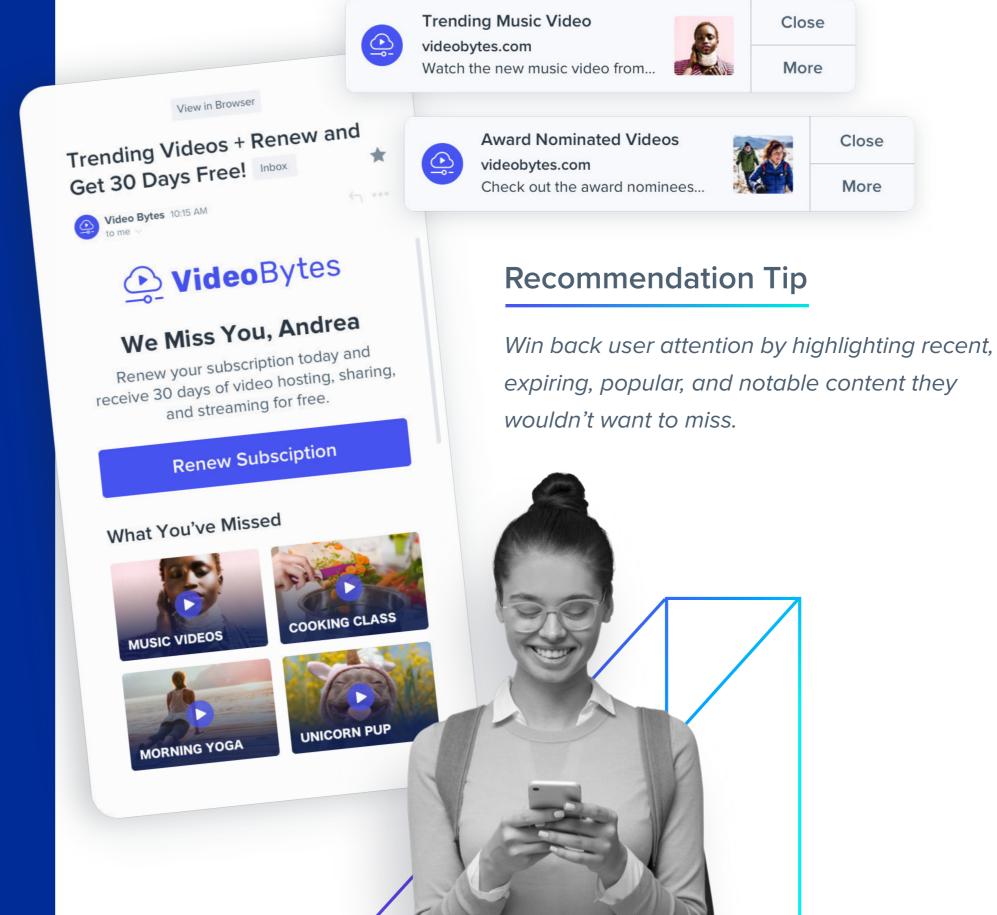
Help users discover new, interesting content by using the New, Similar, and Users Like You themes.



For Passive Users

When interest fades and users no longer engage regularly with your brand it's critical to win back their attention before they churn. Remind users of what used to appeal to them about your brand and its content by re-igniting their interest with popular content that's relevant to them.

The same recommendation themes that are effective for new and active users still apply for passive or lapsing users. However, now that they aren't interacting on your site or app, leverage other channels such as email, push, SMS, and digital ads to remind them of all the interesting content they're missing.



PASSIVE USERS Play into FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)



Recency

New content is perceived to be better than the old. Highlight the latest trending content that users wouldn't want to miss out on.



Popularity

We look to others to validate what's interesting, valuable, and worth our time. Highlight trending or award winning content users have missed.



Expiry

Give users a reason to immediately engage by providing one last chance to consume content before it's gone for good.



Editorial

Capture users' attention and build up your brand's value by highlighting awards that you've won or recognition that you've received.



Keep in Mind

Passive users' preferences may have changed since they last engaged with you, so add in broader recommendation themes to help increase the chances of capturing their interest.



Fredrik Salzedo

Director of Retention, Discovery+,

Discovery, Inc.

Discovery

MULTINATIONAL MASS MEDIA COMPANY

Discovery, Inc. Delivers Personalized Recommendations

"Blueshift really puts the customer needs first and they have an incredibly powerful platform, yet easy to use. Modern marketing and end-customer needs and expectations are being raised every day. Blueshift helps us to be relevant, interesting, and personalized to our end-customers."

1. Data

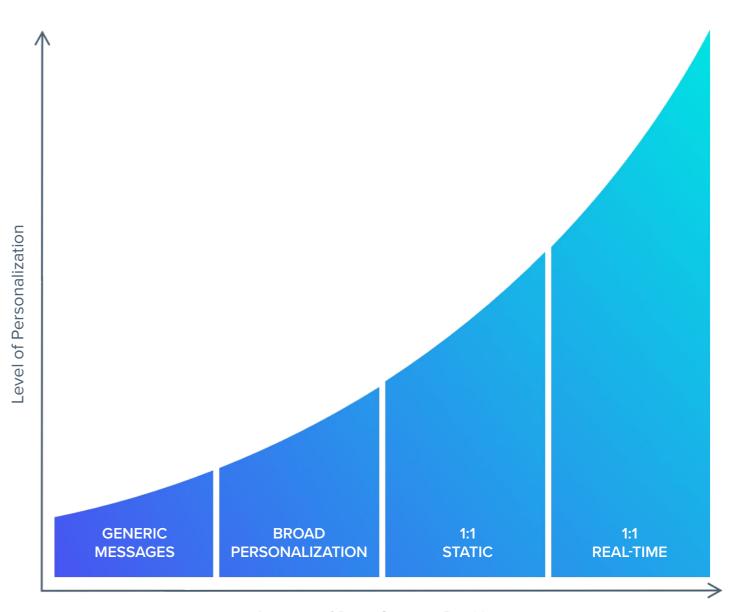
Modern AI and machine learning systems run on data. For recommender systems to effectively adapt content to each user's unique interests they need a deep understanding of your users — what they've engaged with recently, their lifetime and latest affinities, and what actions other people with similar content consumption behaviors have taken.

Pulling off truly 1:1 recommendations requires a Customer Data Platform (CDP) — or better yet a SmartHub CDP with a built in recommender system — that delivers a real-time, comprehensive view of each user that takes in their whole histories with your brand, including real-time event streams and historical data from across channels and systems.

Gather explicit data about users' preferences during sign-up flows or other touchpoints. Then, build upon that foundation with implicit data based on users' interactions with your brand — what they watched, read, browsed, shared, liked, commented on, engaged fully with, or bounced from.

Without a strong data foundation, content recommendations will be basic at best, or irrelevant and disengage users at worst.

Personalization Grows with Data



Amount of Data Capture Per User

2. Catalog

In addition to having a deep understanding of users, the recommender system needs detailed, structured information about each piece of content so it can better surface the most relevant recommendations. Ensure your content catalog is set up to capture all the relevant fields — the richer, more detailed, and organized your catalog is with tags, labels, metadata, and other variables the better (also ensure that it populates correctly).

One more consideration: if you're constantly adding new content, it's important that your recommender system can ingest all catalog updates in real time and immediately surface the latest content where relevant.

What to Capture in Your Catalog

Category	Description	Attribute
Keyword Tags	Tags allow you to find semantically similar content.	Genre/Topic/CategoryKeywordsActors/Artists/Writers/Producers
Timestamps	Create excitement or urgency for your users by surfacing newly available or expiring content.	 New Season/Collection New Episode/Album/Book/Article Release Date Expiry Date
Distribution and Access Rights	Surface content that is available for distribution in a given market or based on the partner the content comes from.	CountryLocation/RegionPartnership Status
Subscription Tiers	Ensure you surface only the media content that's available to a user based on their subscription tier or plan.	Package Tier (i.e. Basic, Premium)
Device Compatibility	Label which media content is compatible across devices to ensure the content delivered is consumable.	 Website Mobile App Streaming Device Gaming Console, Connected TV

3. Creative and Campaigns

Realize the full potential of recommendations within your campaigns with the following tips:

Set up automated messages with tailored recommendations that trigger based on key user actions (such as when they finished a show or article) or content availability (such as when a new podcast in a series is released).

☑ Personalize at the Time of Open

Make sure content is fresh and relevant by populating recommendations at the time of open, not send — especially if you're constantly adding new content.

☑ Time Messages for Engagement

Optimize the timing of a message to when a user is most likely to read an article, listen to a podcast, or watch a video based on their historical behaviors using Engage Time Optimization.

Remove friction and improve the omnichannel experiences by linking users directly from a recommendation within a message to where they left off with a piece of content or the appropriate content page.

☑ Personalize Subject Lines

Grab attention with dynamic subject lines that pull in content based on users' interests such as their favorite titles, topics, and other content attributes.

Continue to optimize every element of your messages by analyzing what's driving clicks and action. Make sure you have the right tracking and UTM parameters set up and that you have the right assessment tools, such as click heat maps.

4. Channels

Guidelines for using content recommendations to add relevance across all your channels in the right way:



Email

This is where you have the most real-estate for recommendations. Take advantage of this with daily or weekly newsletters incorporating multiple themes.



In-App

Help users stay in your app longer by introducing an infinite scroll of recommendations to easily skim through and find the right content.



Provide an easily accessible list of recommendations tailored per user to help promote cross-sell/up-sell content or products.



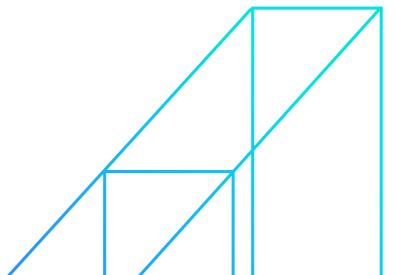
⊉ Push

This notification channel is great for creating urgency. Since there is less space, focus on one critical action you want the user to take such as continuing watching or reading a new article.



Onsite

Use onsite recommendations for in session recommendations based on users' most recent content engagement.



Keep in Mind

Since recommendations manifest differently depending on the channel, the real-estate you have within each channel will inform which themes will work best in that context.

THE FUTURE

With Recommendations

As you begin to perfect recommendations within your media experiences and campaigns, it's important to remember that there is no one right way to use recommendations — your technique will likely be totally unique to your brand. But, what you've learned from this guide provides a solid foundation for using content recommendations to enable seamless, engaging 1:1 user experiences and ongoing content discovery.

Key Takeaways

In review, the journey to highly personalized, relevant experiences starts with:

- The right knowledge and guidelines from recommendations experts
- The right tool to fully unlock your data, like the CDP
- The right recommendations strategy tailored to your business goals and customer engagement channels

Once all of the pieces are in place, the user journeys and experiences you've dreamed of will be a breeze to execute! Ready to start your journey to stellar recommendations that drive revenue for your brand? Reach out to our team of media marketing experts to learn more.

SCHEDULE DEMO

LEARN MORE

