

Mobile Lifecycle Benchmarks: Activation

Understanding **Critical Moments**
That Follow App Downloads



Attention is fleeting.

Brands have minimal time to capture customer attention and prove the value of what they're offering in an app. Add to that the rising [cost of acquisition](#) since the release of iOS 14, and it's clear why the activation phase (Days 1-30) of the app lifecycle is critical to the mobile customer journey.

Our research shows that some brands see customers with app sessions as short as 10 seconds. App retention data shows customer interaction wanes in the first two days after download — app sessions drop by 6% between Day 1 and Day 2. During Days 1-30 after download, the [number of customers who return to the app](#) declines from 22% on Day 1 to 8% on Day 30.

Here, we show results of three core metrics for the activation phase. Then we summarize the characteristics of high performers as shown by our data. Finally, we cover how to emulate high performers to improve your activation results.

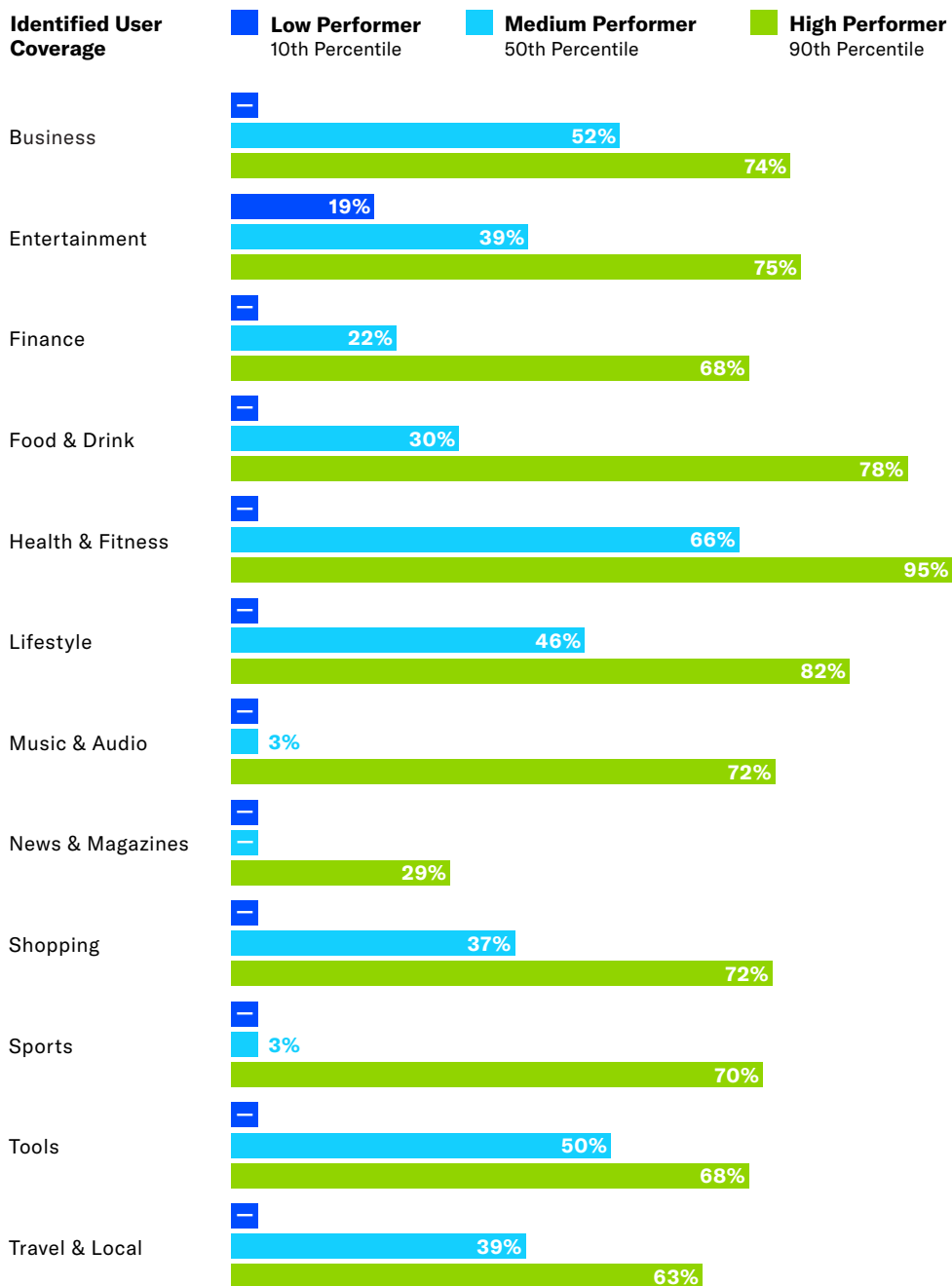
Activation Performance Across Industries

The following results, organized by app store category, distinguish high, medium and low performance.

Identified User Coverage

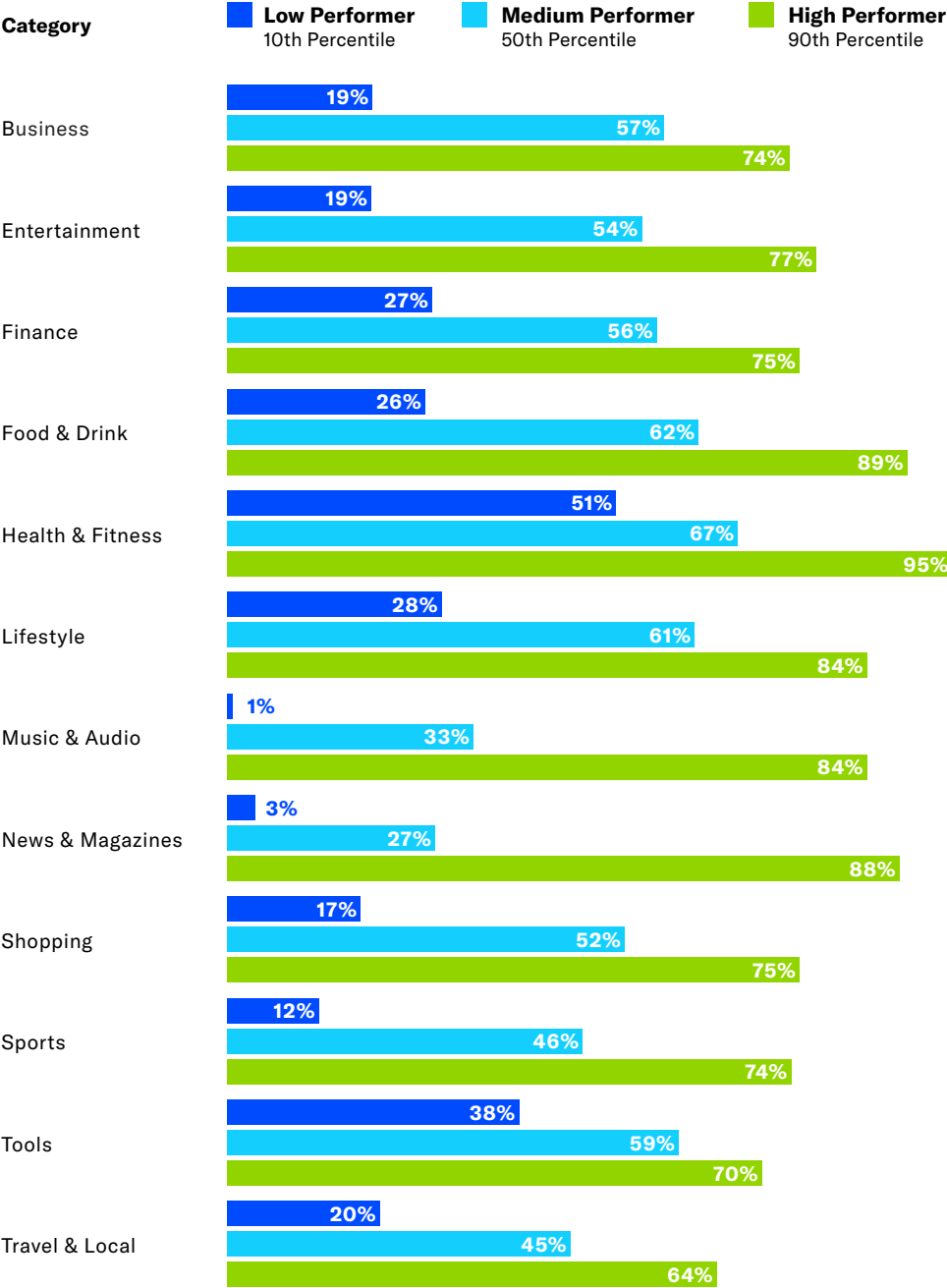
Identifying the customer on a recurring basis allows you to link all the data you have about them across channels and then provide a better, more personalized experience. This measure shows the percentage of a brand's audience that's paired with a unique user identifier. It's calculated using the devices associated with a customer ID divided by the total devices.

All Apps

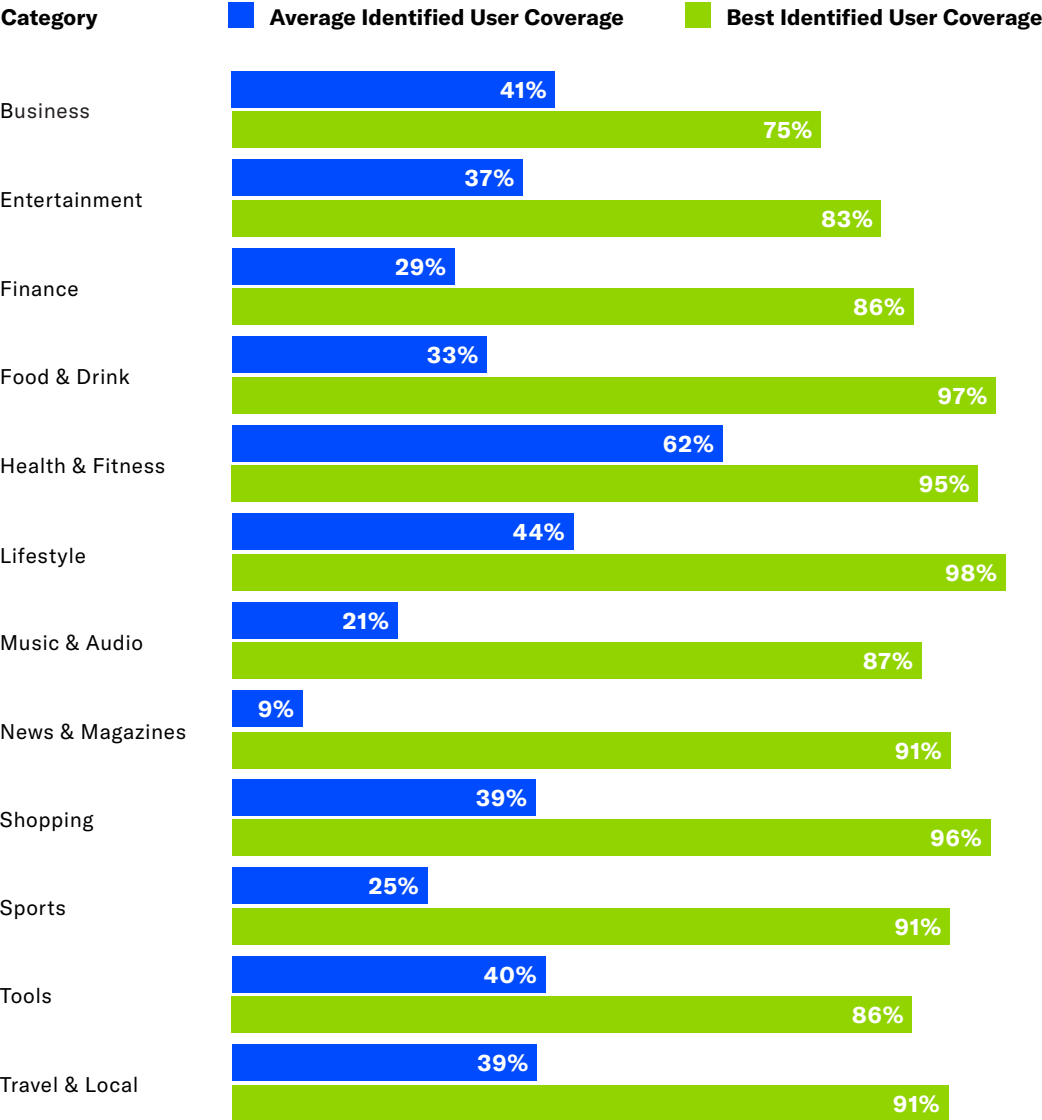


Not all apps have adopted a unique identifier. In the benchmarks for all apps above, the “Low Performer” benchmark is 0 since it includes apps that have not adopted a unique customer identifier. The benchmarks in the chart below represent only apps that have adopted a unique customer identifier with Airship.

Apps That Have Adopted a Unique Identifier

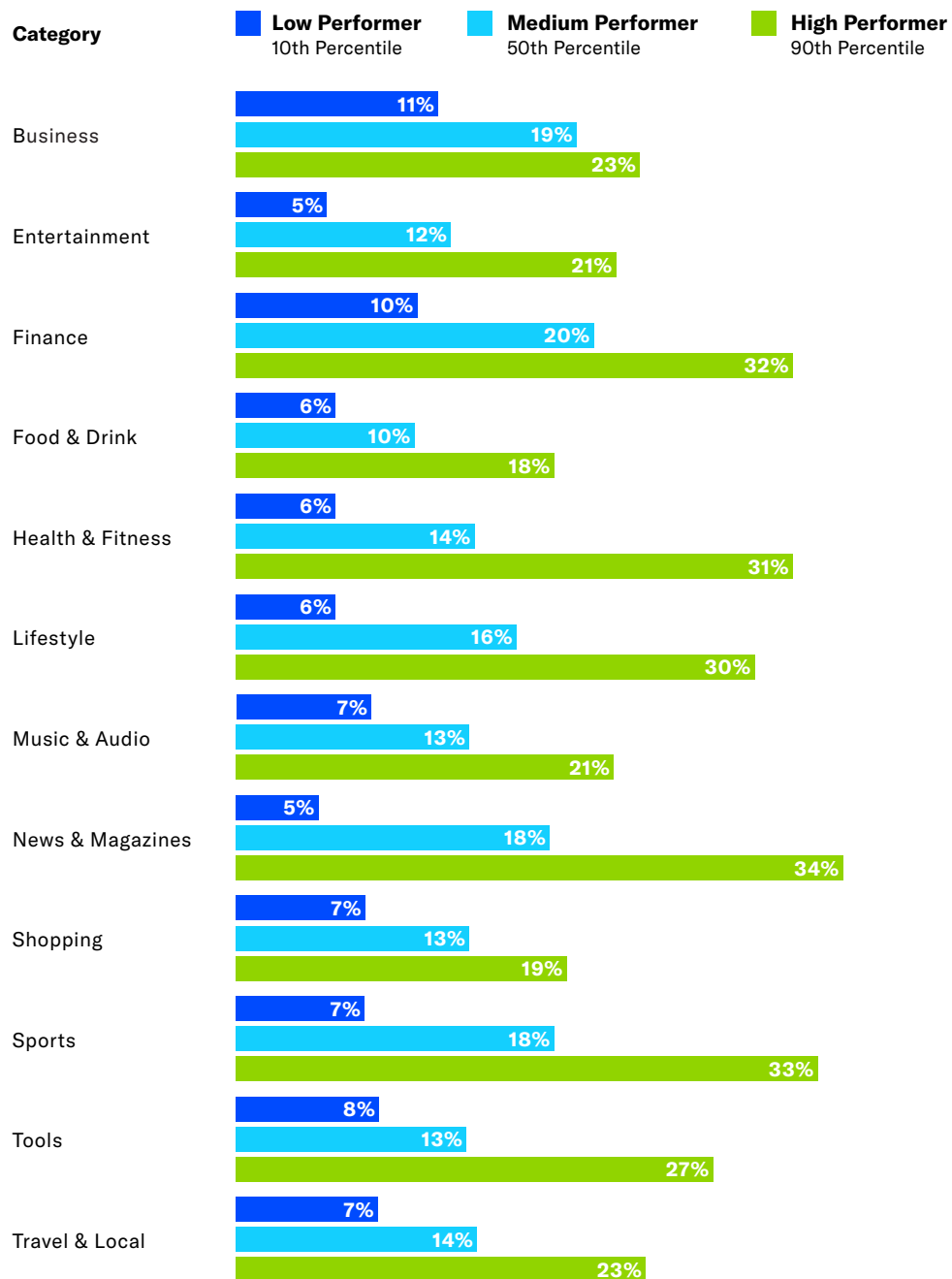


The average Identified User Coverage across categories is 35%, but the trends vary widely across categories. As an example, the majority of News & Magazine apps do not require a login for users to view content, so their average Identified User Coverage is only 9%.

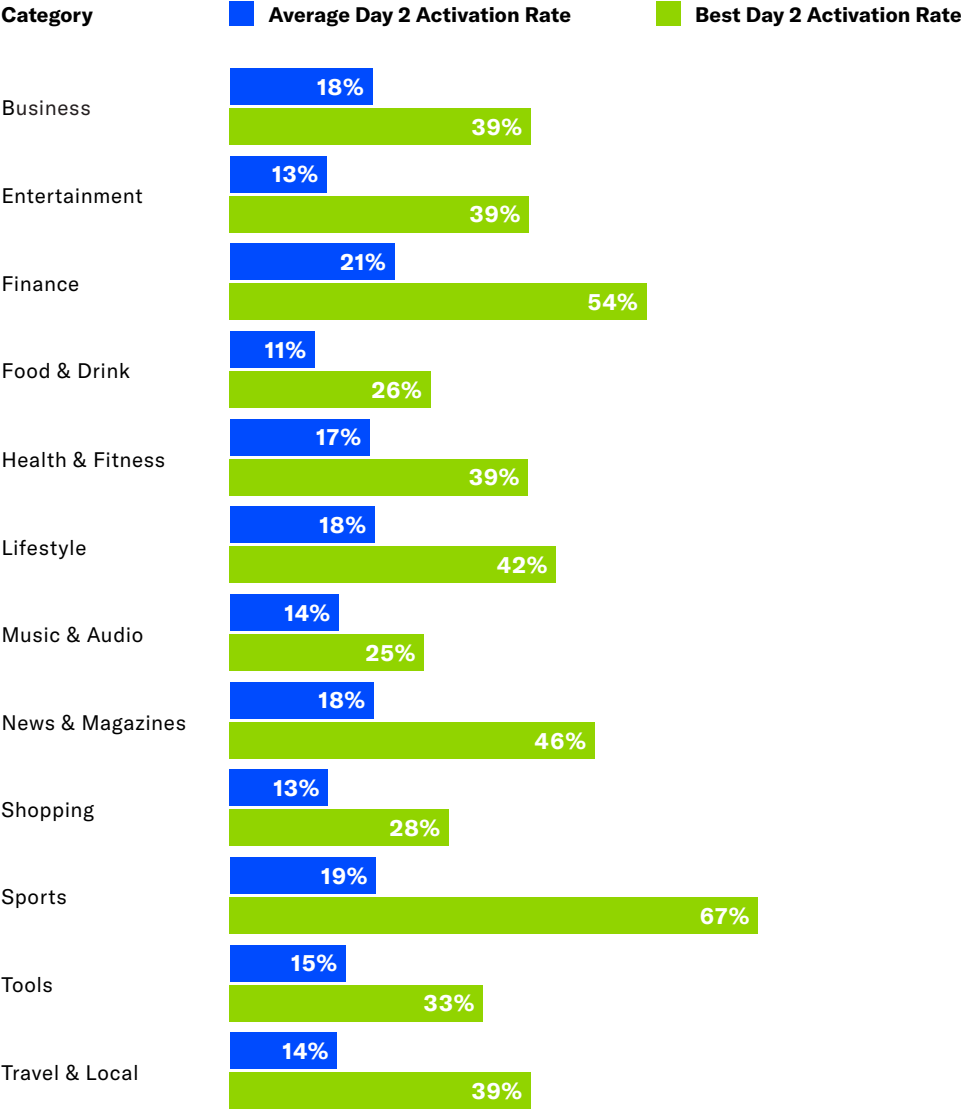


Day 2 Activation Rate

This measures how many customers return to the app on the 2nd day after download. It's calculated using the download date and subsequent app sessions.

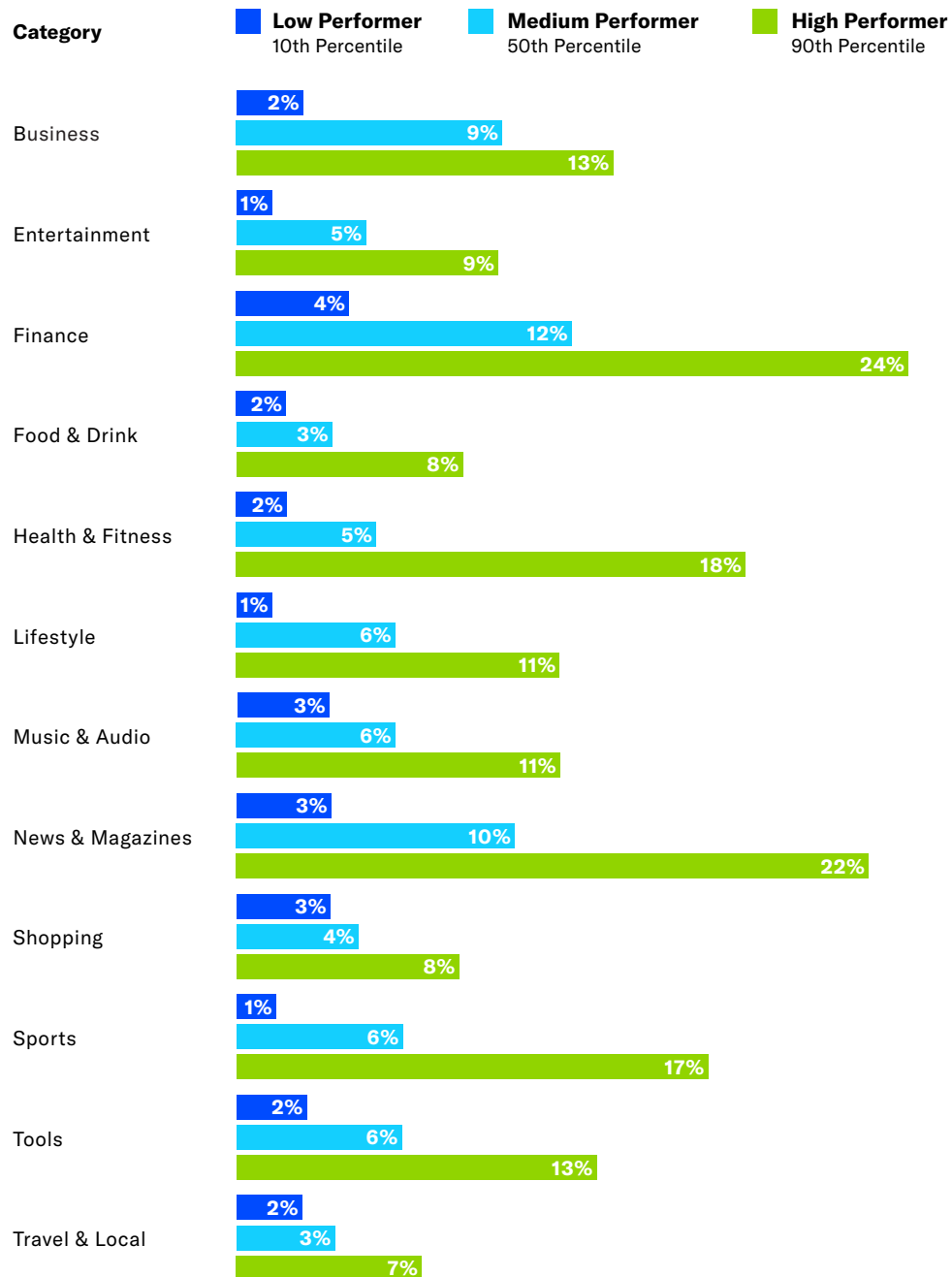


The average Day 2 Activation Rate across categories is 16%. Unlike Identified User Coverage, the variance by category is not as wide. However, both the Finance and [Sports categories](#) exhibit a pattern of users returning to the app more frequently throughout the first 30 days. Sports apps attract users through events and these users tend to return to the app more frequently.

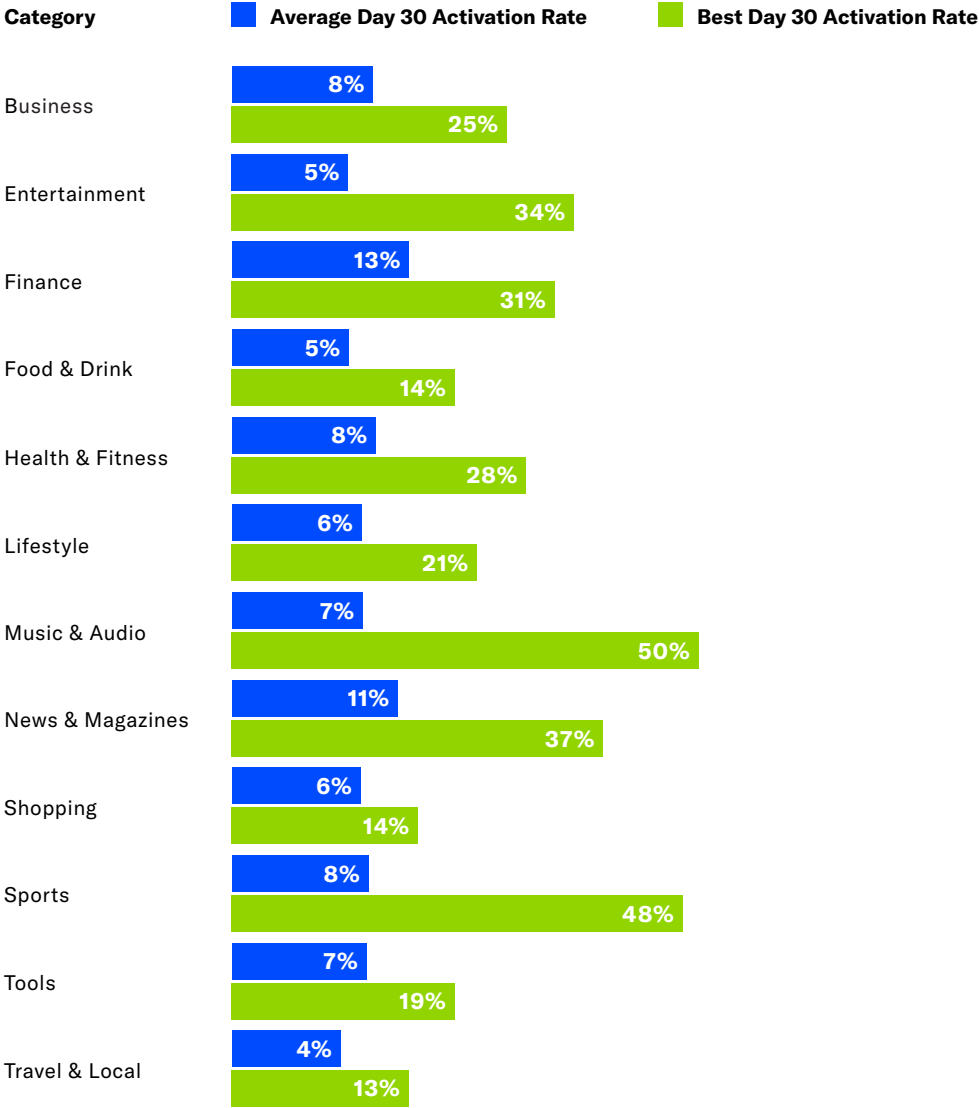


Day 30 Activation Rate

This measures how many customers return to the app on the 30th day after download. It's calculated using the download date and subsequent app sessions.



The average Day 30 Activation Rate across categories is 7%. For some categories, like Travel & Local, it's not surprising that users are not returning 30 days after download since they likely downloaded the app around their day of travel. For other categories, the low activation rate on the 30th day after download demonstrates a gap in activating customers to build a habit of interaction with the app.

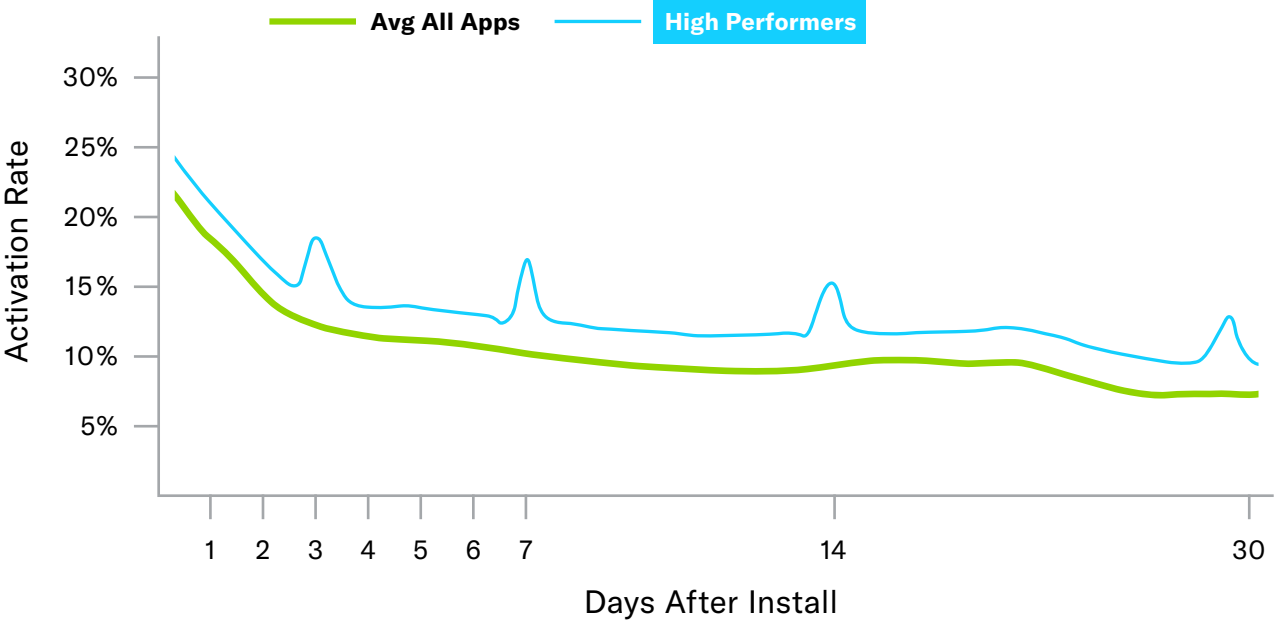


Characteristics of High Performers

Apps that are high performers in the activation phase have two key characteristics:

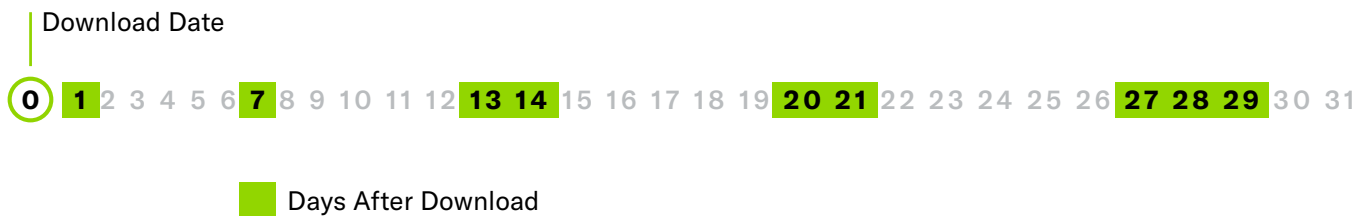
- **First, they see spikes in activation rate throughout the first 30 days after download.**
- **Second, they have a higher-than-average number of identified users in their audience.**

The spikes in the activation rate indicate an increase in the number of customers returning to the app. The data shows that [this pattern of repeat visits](#) is typically connected with welcome series messaging delivered via push notifications or email.



The days after download that have the highest potential impact on activation rate (an increase of 15% or more from the prior day) are days 3, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 27, 28, and 29. Some brands see an increase as high as 30% on these days. These results give us two guidelines for planning an onboarding series:

- **Onboarding should continue through the first 30 days after download and not stop after the first week.**
- **The cadence of messaging should allow customers the opportunity to experience the value of the app at every touchpoint during these critical first days.**



Brands that are **high performers in the Day 30 Activation Rate** metric are also **high in Identified User Coverage**. These apps have an average of 20% more identified users than their category's average.

How You Can Improve Your Activation Performance

In the first 30 days after download, high performers strive to achieve three things as shown by their activation activities: getting opt-in permissions from new customers, converting customers from anonymous to identified and gathering customer preferences.

Get the Opt In

Whatever your app monetization model, it's critical to get opt-in permissions from your customers. Push notifications are key to delivering glanceable value to customers and bringing them back into the app.

Customers who are opted-in to push notifications have a 13% lift in the number of purchases compared to opted-out customers. More purchasing power means more revenue, which is always a good thing.

13% Lift in purchases by customers who are opted-in to **push notifications**

Getting the opt-in is critical, but before deploying OS permission prompts, consider them from the customer's point of view. We've all had the experience of opening an app for the first time and being bombarded with permission requests. The experience is frustrating for customers who are trying out the app for the first time and have yet to explore its functionality.

Instead, focus on your [onboarding experience](#). Convey your app's value proposition, key features, and why opting in to push notifications or sharing location benefits the customer.

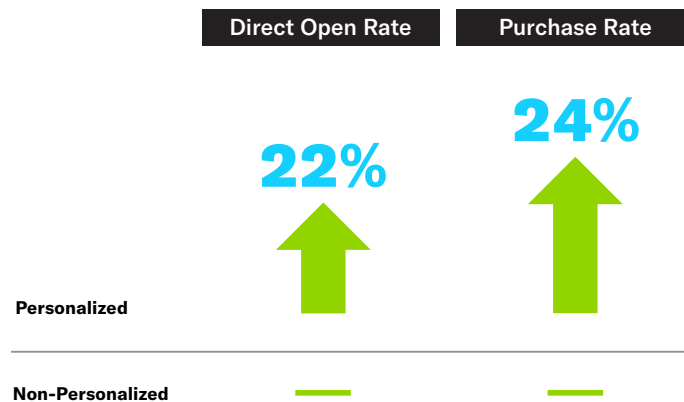
Identify The Customer

The second core element of the activation phase is converting customers from anonymous (or non-identified) to identified. Identifying customers allows you to link any data you already have on these customers from previous brand interactions across other channels.

Identified customers and their data profiles are the gateway to personalization. Personalized app messaging increases customer engagement. **Push notifications that are personalized have a 22% average lift in direct open rates over messages that are not personalized. And personalized push notifications increase purchase rates by as much as 24%.**

Identifying customers also allows brands to orchestrate communications across channels. If a customer is an app user, it may not be necessary to notify them via push and SMS simultaneously. Orchestrating across channels can lower communication costs and allow you to respect customer preferences while testing channel mix effectiveness over time.

The order and timing of asking for the opt-in and a sign-in/sign-up action varies by app category. Subscription model brands often ask customers to sign in/up before accessing the bulk of the content. The request for opt-in to notifications typically comes later. But non-subscription-based media brands ask for the opt-in well before guiding customers to sign in. Brands should test the order of these requests to see what works best within your onboarding flow.



Gather Preferences

Customers spend around [5.5 hours per day](#) on their phones, and screen time continues to increase each year. Within each app, the average customer spends only 1-2 minutes per session. That's a potential of **>150** app-specific interactions daily per person.

1-2 Minutes per session
for an **average customer**

With customer attention divided so broadly, brands must demonstrate value quickly. Personalization is key to standing out above the noise. To achieve [great personalization](#), brands need to identify their customers and gather preferences.

There are two primary types of preference data: implicit and explicit. You can collect implicit preferences through customer interactions with your brand. For example, retailers have information on past purchases; entertainment brands have viewing history. But you can't use implicit data on its own. I may have purchased gardening tools as a gift, even though I live in an apartment. In this case, implicit data is more likely to lead to a disconnected customer experience.

That's why brands must ask customers about their interests and progressively grow explicit preferences. Nothing replaces asking a customer what they're interested in. When it comes to mobile experience, it's easy to start collecting data. Brands can use in-app surveys, preference centers or even simple thumbs-up/-down ratings. Check out our [survey of 11,000 global consumers](#), which shows that across 15 types of information, consumers are most likely to share their interests relevant to a brand, superseded only by their email address.

Activation in Action – Customer Spotlight

German-based media company Regiocast focuses on the activation stage of the customer lifecycle by creating sweepstakes only available to new users who create an account.



Use Case:

Move activated app customers deeper into the lifecycle by **gamifying the listening experience** with a sweepstakes for listeners who streamed a certain amount of content daily. To be entered, listeners needed to be logged into their account on the mobile app.

Results:

By the end of the 49-day sweepstakes, Regiocast had increased listener time by **14.5 million minutes** and generated over **9,000 new listener profiles**.

Want to see how your app compares to others in your app category?

[Try Airship Now](#)

[Talk To An Expert](#)

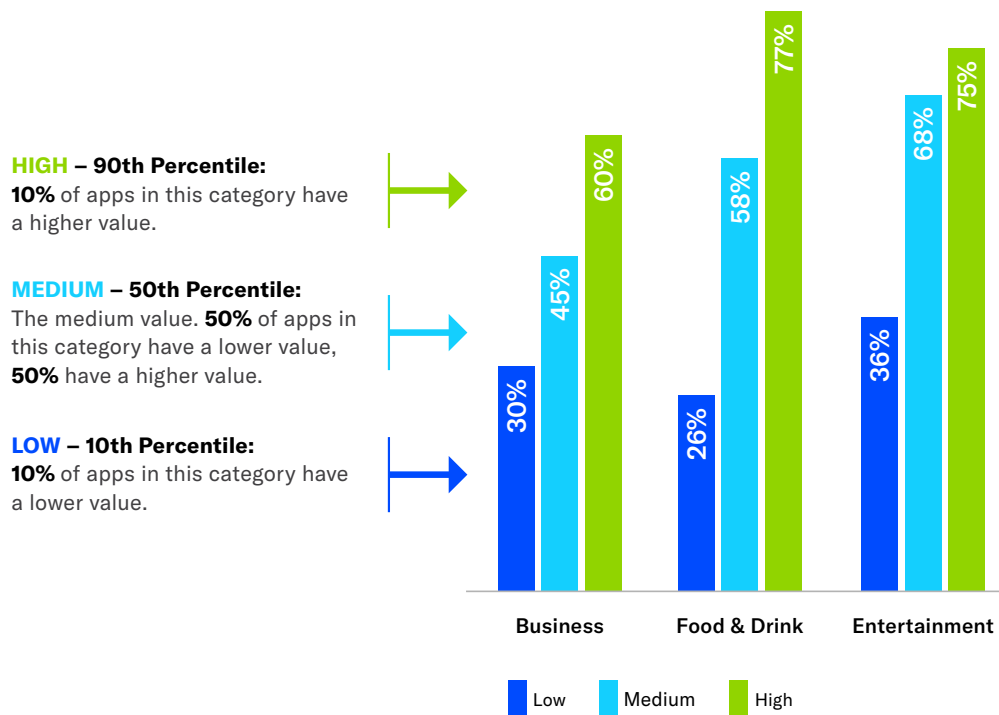
Methodology

Airship analyzed customer data in aggregate of apps with at least 100,000 monthly active users from January to June 2023. That group included approximately 2.6 billion devices across 12 app categories. Benchmarks are based on calculations across the entire 6-month evaluation period.

The benchmarks were broken down into high (90th), medium (50th), and low percentiles (10th). The 50th percentile is the median for the app store category. The 10th percentile number means that 10% of the apps had a lower value, while the 90th percentile means 10% of the apps had a higher value. This provides additional context for businesses to understand high- and low-performance, rather than just average or median rates.

Benchmark for High, Medium & Low Performers

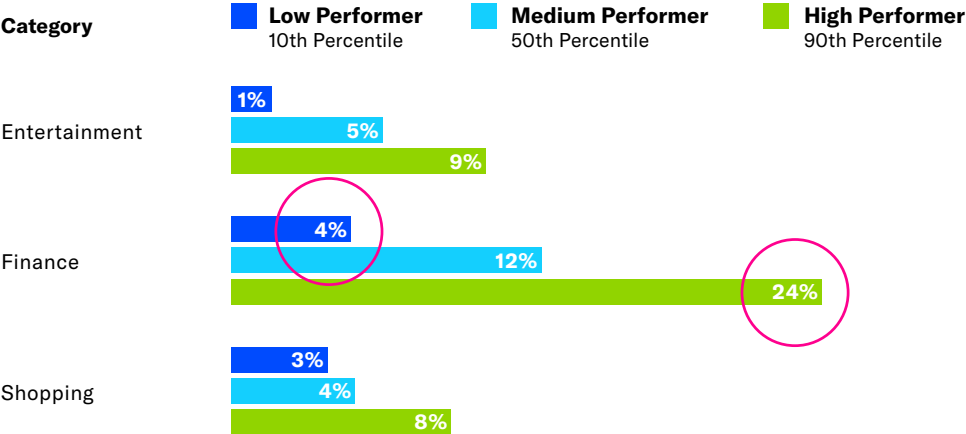
To offer performance benchmarks, we reported results on the 90th, 50th and 10th percentiles for all apps and verticals.



Looking at the graph below showing **Day 30 activation rates**, if you are a finance brand with a 24% (or higher) Day 30 activation rates, you compare to the top 10% of apps in this study and can feel great that you have some of the highest activation rates within your app store category.

However, using that same chart, if your Day 30 activation rates are less than 4%, you're in the bottom 10% for your app store category, so there's significant room for improvement.

Day 30 Activation Rates



About Airship

At the dawn of mobile apps, Airship powered the first commercial push notification messages and then expanded its data-led approach to all re-engagement channels (mobile wallet, SMS, email), app UX experimentation, no-code native app experience creation and App Store Optimization (ASO).

With the Airship App Experience Platform and Gummicube’s ASO technology and expertise, brands now have a complete set of solutions to optimize the entire mobile app customer journey – from the point of discovery to loyalty – driving greater value for everyone involved.



Having powered trillions of mobile app interactions for thousands of global brands, **Airship is proud to be at the forefront of what has become the digital center of customer experience, loyalty and monetization – mobile app experience (MAX).**

No one knows more, does more, or cares more than Airship when it comes to helping brands master MAX.



About this Report

This benchmark report was created by Airship’s Customer Insights team, led by [Jennie Lewis](#), a mobile experience researcher who helps brands with guidance and economic impact for their mobile strategies. Lewis also created the Mobile Lifecycle Measurement Framework, which is a series of metrics that analyze app activation and engagement.

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