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Introduction
The Growth Hacking Funnel

Most companies only track topline and bottomline metrics (e.g. traffic and revenue). The problem is that those numbers, by themselves, aren’t very helpful. The magic is what happens in between.

The key to growth hacking is to map out the user lifecycle for your product. For most sites, a user lifecycle looks something like this:

1. A person hears about your site  
2. ...visits your site  
3. ...creates an account  
4. ...visits again later  
5. ...refers a friend  
6. ...and finally, pays you

Each of these steps represents a user state. The growth hacker’s job is to figure out how to move users from one state to the next.

This is where the growth hacking funnel comes in.
This is the **growth hacking funnel**. It represents the major stages of the user lifecycle for nearly every product.

**Acquisition** – People come to your site after they’ve heard about you through press, blogs, word of mouth, and other acquisition channels.

**Activation** – If people like what they see on your homepage or other landing page, they’ll become users by either creating an account, signing up for a newsletter, or some other form of activation.

**Retention** – Users come back to the site through emails reminders and stay active through product features they encounter while they’re back on the site.

**Referral** – Active users refer others through viral product features and other incentives.

**Revenue** – You monetize active users through advertising, lead generation offers, subscription, or business development.

One way or another, every growth hack fits into one or more discrete stages of the growth hacking funnel. In the upcoming sections, we’ll cover three examples of growth hacks.
Case Study: Wall Street Journal

Acquisition & Activation

growhack.com
Case Study: WSJ

Approach: Acquisition & Activation

The Wall Street Journal recently took an approach to both acquisition and activation by offering access to free WiFi in high-traffic areas in New York City such as Union Square, SoHo, Greenwich Village, Chelsea and Times Square.
Case Study: WSJ

Approach: Acquisition & Activation

After attempting to access the free WiFi, a user is directed to a custom landing page designed to build trust and featuring the Wall Street Journal branding. Devices which a user is likely to be on, with images that include a person’s face. An international journal argues efforts such as this, which are designed to stimulate “face-to-face” interaction can enhance initial trust.

In order to use the WiFi, a simple instruction is provided which requests “Name”, “Password” and “Job title”. Creating an additional data collection field such as “Job Title”, can help create targeted email marketing for future retention campaigns.
Case Study: WSJ

Approach: Acquisition & Activation

After registering, a user is given access to the web while receiving an email which features a large heading and offer to receive four weeks of the WSJ for free. This offer is followed again by images of faces to build trust, and an bright orange call-to-action “Upgrade your Access” button to grab a user’s attention.
Case Study: WSJ

Approach: Acquisition & Activation

Underneath the fold, the user’s name is dynamically inserted into the email. Personalizing the email makes it relevant and helps again build trust. If a user would like more details, additional links are provided under the fold of the initial heading, which is followed up by an additional “Upgrade your Access” call-to-action button.
Case Study: WSJ

Approach: Acquisition & Activation

Although a user is given immediate access to the internet and sent an email, after gaining access to the web, they are guided to a second activation funnel asking to “Please verify your account.”

A second activation funnel allows the user to immediately join the WSJ under a free account as a subscriber.
Case Study: WSJ

Approach: Acquisition & Activation

Finally, a user is sent an email to verify their email address (although images don’t render in Chrome/Gmail for some reason).
Case Study: WSJ

Approach: Acquisition & Activation

Along with a WiFi campaign, the WSJ supplements their effort with local advertising service such as Yelp.

Clicking the banner ad shows where a user can access a WSJ hotspot. This advertising is relevant and may change a user’s decision about where they’d like to go – whether it’s a local restaurant, salon, auto-repair shop or other local business they are actively searching for.
Case Study: Twitter

Retention
Approach: Retention

Creating a retention campaign means finding ways to tactfully reach out and engage an existing user base. One useful place is the inbox. Of course, sending a generic email is only going to result in your campaign ending up being unsubscribed from, or worse get your current and potentially future campaigns filtered out.

One way around this is to collect data from within the application which can be used to tailor your email campaign and make it relevant.
Case Study: Twitter

Approach: Retention

Twitter takes a multi-pronged approach to their email retention campaign. The first is sending an email when you have a “new follower.” Although power users might quickly hit “unsubscribe” which is conveniently visible in this email compared to others, users who are new or don’t use Twitter as often, are likely to take a new follower as a compliment and welcome these messages.

In this email, a user is given a bright blue button above the fold (you can see it without having to scroll down) with a “Follow” call-to-action button dynamically adjusted to whether the user is already following the new follower, or offering the option to “Follow” back.
Case Study: Twitter

Approach: Retention

If a user does decide to dive into learning more about the emails being sent, they are directed immediately to a page which allows them to opt-out of the campaign which Twitter labels as “Email notifications.”

Twitter also segments each of their campaigns under multiple headings such as “My Tweets marked as favorites”, and “My Tweets are retweeted.” Splitting up the email notifications in this way, makes it just a little harder to unsubscribe from every campaign at once, and makes users feel in control of the application.
Case Study: Twitter

Approach: Retention

Twitter also recently launched a “Top Tweets and Stories” feature which sends users a snapshot of news and tweets about once per week. This feature sends information based on data drawn from a user’s social graph.

In the email, a user initially sees personable images of the people who have retweeted a chosen story, a brief summary and a blue highlighted link giving the option to “Tweet this story” and immediately re-engage with the Twitter application. These images are above the fold, the immediately visible section of the email, and draw an user in to learn more.
Case Study: Twitter

Approach: Retention

Continuing below the fold, Twitter’s retention email includes tweets with the number of retweets. A retweeted message that is connected to a user’s social graph is likely to gain a user’s interest.

Finally, the end of the retention email, features a bold call-to-action with copy instructing the user not to miss out on what’s happening and directing them out of their inbox and to using Twitter.
Case Study: Living Social

Referral
Case Study: LivingSocial

Approach: Referral

When someone talks about “virality” in a product or service, they mean having your customers do the marketing for you. Coming up with creative referral incentive which is aligned with your business model, can be very powerful.

LivingSocial implemented a Referral campaign that becomes active only once a user purchases a product or service. If the user is able to convince three friends to buy the deal, they get their deal for free.
Case Study: LivingSocial

Approach: Referral

Along with creating an offer, LivingSocial makes it easy for a user to launch their own social campaign by sharing it with their Twitter followers.

After a link is shared, LivingSocial then directs users to follow them.
Case Study: LivingSocial

Approach: Referral

On the same page, LivingSocial also allows users to continue their social campaign by sharing their deal through Facebook, or over an email.
Case Study: LivingSocial

Approach: Referral

The email sent is targeted and customized leading in with the buyer’s first name, as well as a deadline for how long the deal is active to encourage an immediate decision.
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