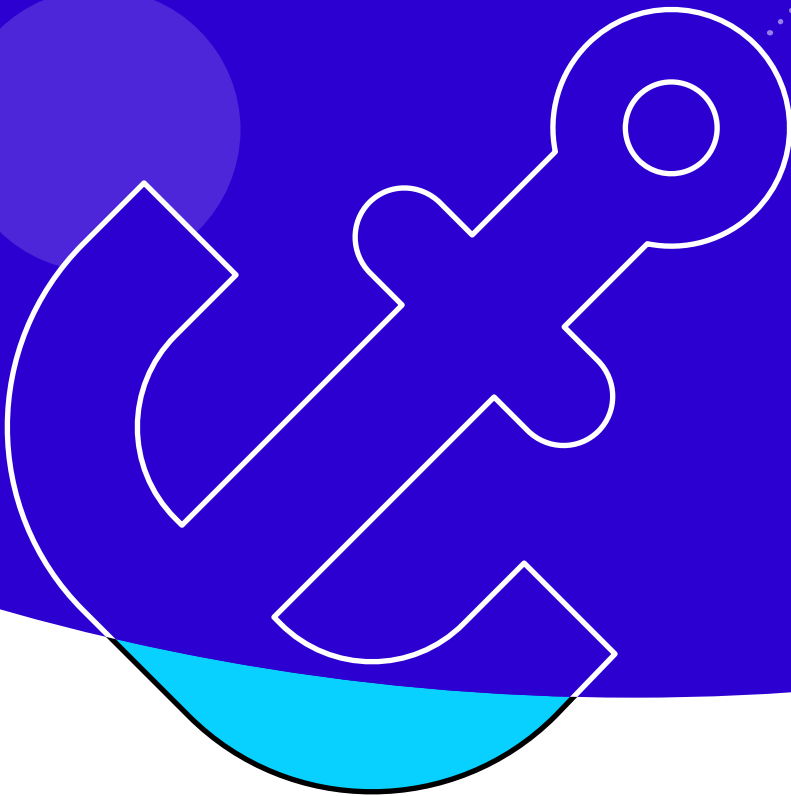# ADJUST

The Adjust guide to deep linking

Introduction

Deep links are an essential part of the app marketer's toolkit. They're the pathways that connect users from campaign to app, streamlining user experience and exposing users to the right marketing, and the right pages.

Deep linking has existed for some time, referring to the practice of sending users "deeper" into a website. Instead of linking directly to the homepage, marketers use deep linking to highlight the pages that work best in the context a user finds that link. For example, you want users to share songs from your music app, so you can add deep links that enable links to open the song straight away, instead of just opening the app.

Creating this capability is more complicated than you might think, and this guide aims to give you the rundown of exactly what deep links can do. Getting your deep linking right is incredibly worthwhile, as it will make your mobile campaigns that much more successful.

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What are deep links?

Let's explain with an example

You have an e-commerce app. The icon looks like this:

You want to retarget users who've stopped using your app with an offer for items still in their basket, redirecting them back to the checkout page. You begin with a handful of channels, including banner ads, targeted email, and even redirects on a special page on your website, as shown here ▶
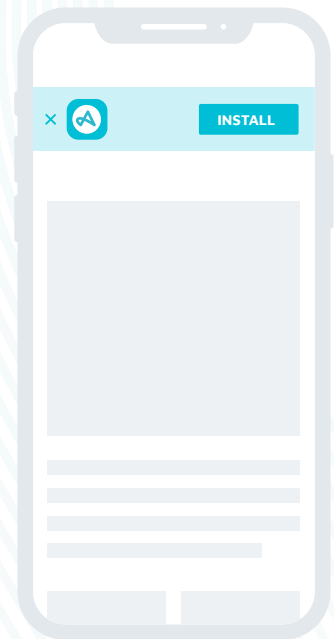
In the setup phase, it's not possible to create links to the app in any of these places with regular URLs. That's because regular hyperlinks, or URLs (like https://www.myapp.com/), don't contain the ability to link anywhere other than sites within web browsers. The job of directing a user from the web to an app is handled by deep links.

Deep links, though they're URI schemes, look different to URLs because they have another type of destination. Here's an example: myapp://path?routing_parameter

First, the scheme differs from a traditional URL, which begins with https://. In a mobile deep link, it's the name of the app. Here, that's myapp://. Routing parameters follow the scheme (path?routing_parameter), controlling how the link functions. Below shows what a deep link could look like if you had an e-commerce app and wanted to point users to a specific product page:myapp://product?product_id=6398342

This is the most basic form a deep link can take. Such links are known as "default deep links" and are relatively simple to set up. However, they only work if the user has the app installed, on their device. If you want to include users who may not have the app installed, you need to use deferred deep links. The next section covers these differences.

Two types of deep links

There are two kinds of links: default and deferred deep links.

1

Default

Default deep links only direct users to an app if it's already installed. If the app is not installed, the link can't reach the endpoint of an app so an error message is displayed.

Default deep links are useful for retargeting campaigns where an app marketer is solely interested in finding users who have the app installed, and want them to return.

App installed

App opens

Click on ad

App not installed

ERROR!
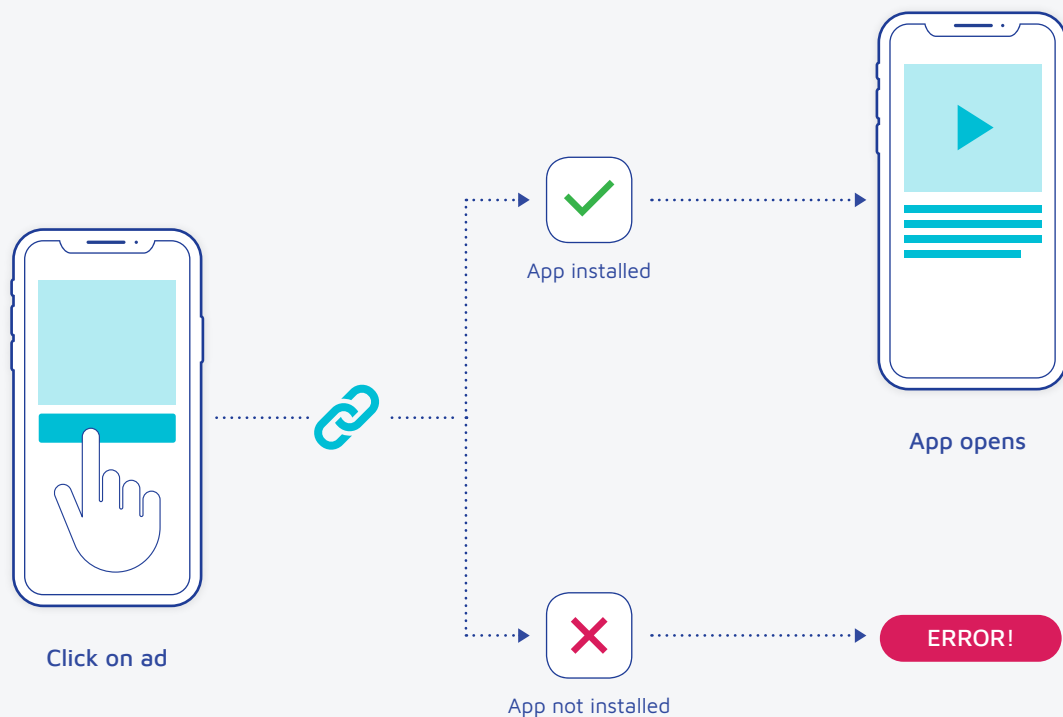
2

Deferred

Deferred deep links are more complex than default deep links. They can direct users to the App or Play Store if the user does not have the app installed (or to another location, such as the app's website for more information), and then open the original page that user was directed to.

So, for example, if a user downloads an e-commerce app after clicking an ad for a pair of shoes, but doesn't have the app installed, they will first be routed to the store for download. When they open the app after install, the product page would be shown.

Deferred deep links are only made possible through a deep linking solution like Adjust's. They're created via an SDK integration, and more information on this, click here for Android and here for iOS.

Click on ad

App installed

App not installed

Store

Download

App opens
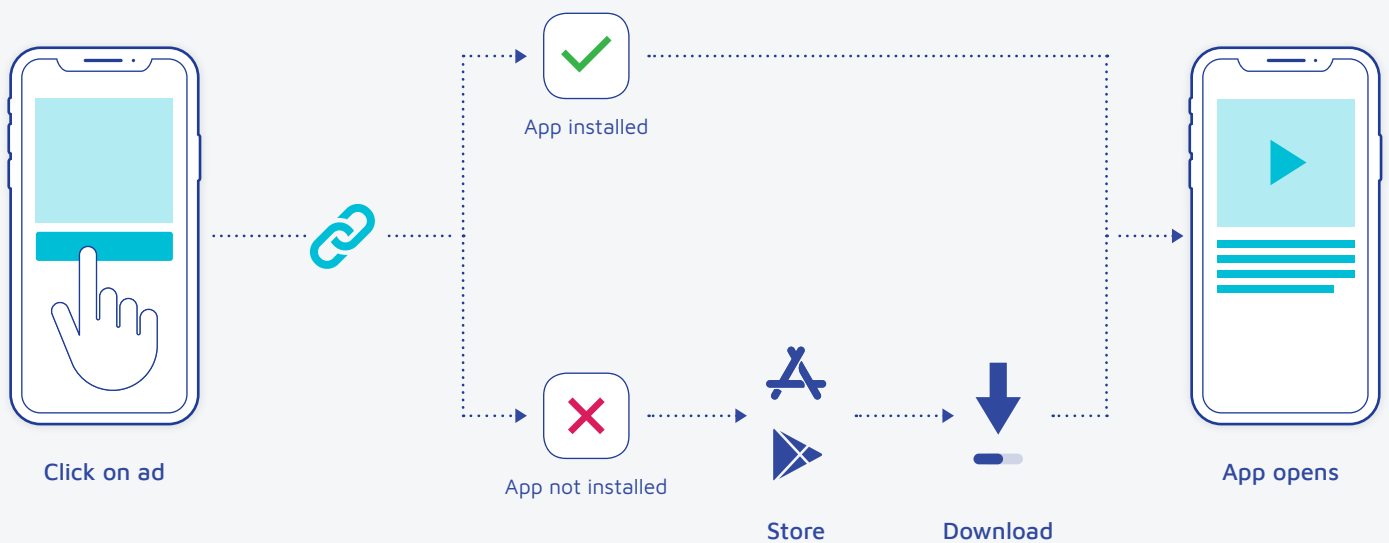
Contextual deep linking?

You may have heard the term contextual deep linking. These refer to links that ostensibly provide additional benefit, by being able to store more information allowing marketers to do more with their content.

Contextual deep links are default or deferred deep links with added parameters marketers can add themselves. Such links don't exist on their own.

Deeps links are not (necessarily) mobile measurement technology

Many MMPs advertise deep linking as proprietary technology. This couldn't be further from the truth. Any developer or app marketer can create a deep link – just set up the link, integrate and test.

Beyond opening the app, Adjust deep linking offers additional benefits:

• The ability to redirect the user into the app store if the app is not installed on their device (deferred deep linking)

• Tracking of deep link activity

These are two crucial functions that do require additional setup and support.

Say you set up a campaign with myapp://blabla as the deep link (blabla stands in for a sophisticated parameter). If the app is not installed on the user's device when they click on it, the user won't go to the intended page. A deep link solution like Adjust's can reroute the user to the app store if the user is not taken to the app first.
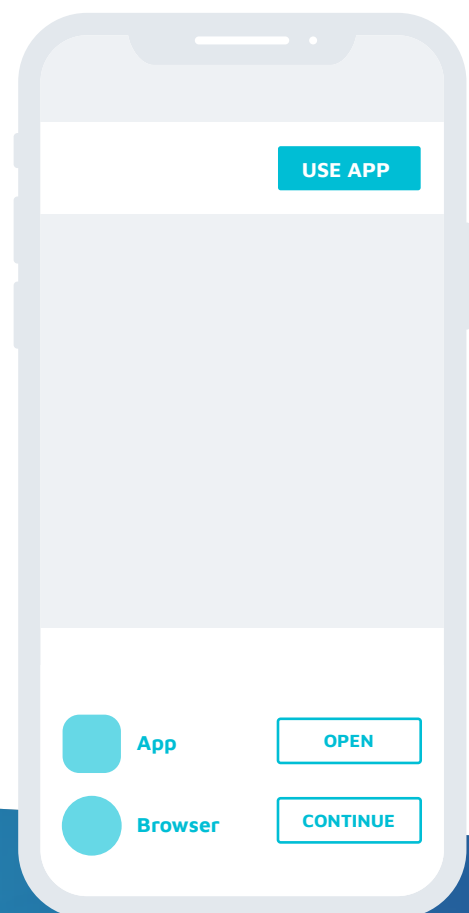
How do deep links benefit users?

So, if deep links are the mobile version of regular hyperlinks, allowing users to move between different mobile views and apps, where can they go? Here are a few examples:

- Website to App
- App to App
- Social Media to App

- Search Result to App (using app indexing)
- Mobile Phone Search to App

- Ad to App
- Email to App
- SMS to App

Deep links make the lives of users frictionless. Say a user wants to share a product from our app with a friend. Anyone can send a deep link to that page, sending the user to the content they want without any hassle.

Without deep links, finding the right product or page would be a navigational nightmare.

For user experience, marketers can also prompt users to open your app from the homepage, and settings will then be saved to remember that user preference.

USE APP

App   OPEN

Browser   CONTINUE

How do deep links benefit mobile marketers?

There are two real benefits that deep links provide to mobile marketers: **retention and retargeting**.

With less friction comes reduced user frustration and a better overall experience, helping to keep retention rates high. Deep links also help keep users locked into a single mobile ecosystem, as every touch can be made to point back to the app for continued use.
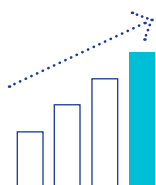
Deep linking provides easy activation of lapsed users. Provided the user hasn't uninstalled the app, an advertisement can take a user to a reward straight away, re-engaging the user for at least a few more sessions.

Ultimately, deep linking provides a versatile method of directing users through your ecosystem, creating a better user experience which can increase your sales, conversions and retention rates.
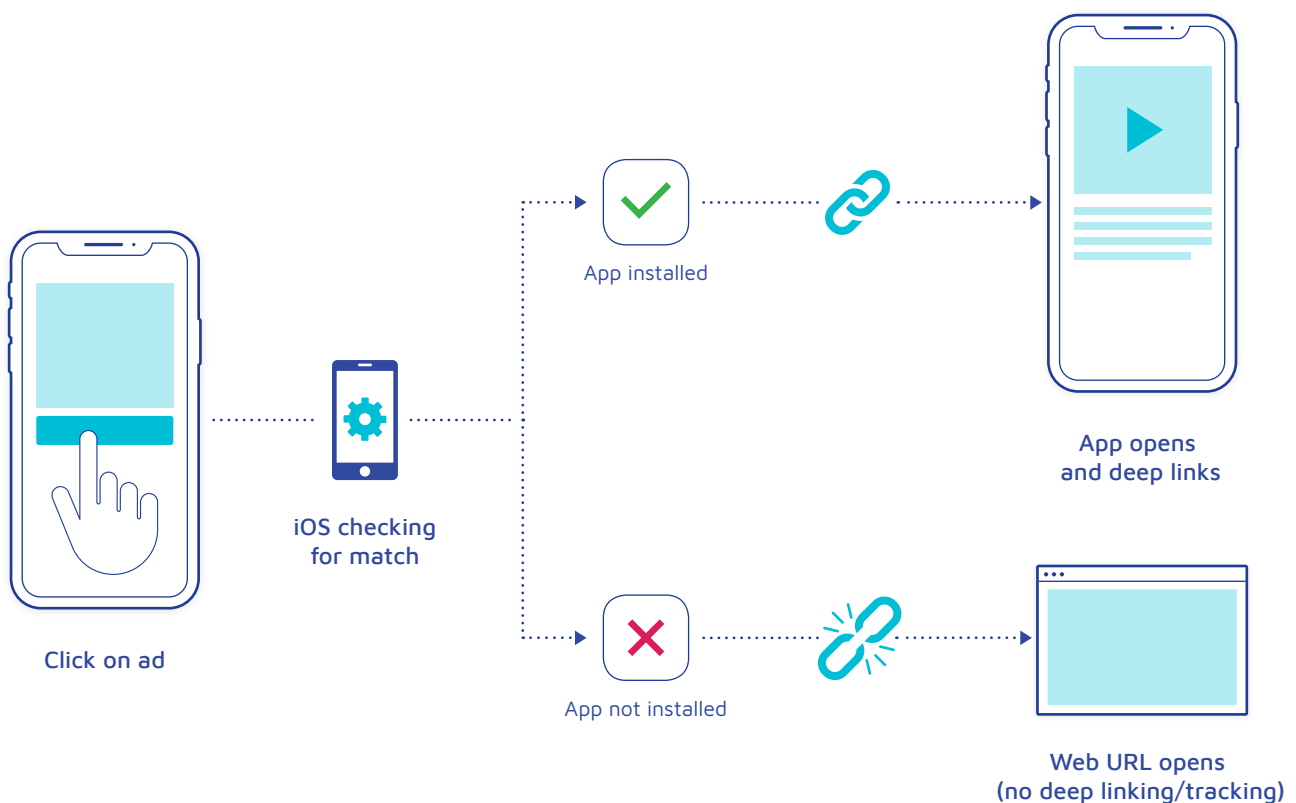
Universal Links

Universal Links are a type of deep link that are exclusive to iOS, allowing iPhone and iPad users the ability to launch apps. Universal Links are standard web links that point to both a web page and a piece of content inside an app. A Universal Link could look like this: https://www.myapp.com/ulink/product?product_id=342

Deep links utilizing URI schemes go to a "Cannot Open Page" error if the user does not have the app installed when the link is clicked. Apple's Universal Links solve this problem. Universal links allow routing within the operating system as opposed to introducing JavaScript.

When a user taps a Universal Link, iOS sees if any installed device isregistered for that domain. If there's a match, the app is launched immediately without loading the web page. If not, Safari loads the web URL.

App installed

Click on ad

iOS checking for match

App opens and deep links

App not installed

Web URL opens (no deep linking/tracking)

There are several issues with Universal Links beyond a multitude of edge cases. Here are two examples of instances that affect many marketers who work with Universal Links:

1   If a user within an app clicks a Universal Link but does not have the app installed, the link directs the user to a web-view page instead of the App Store.

2   Few major applications support the use of Apple's Universal Links. Companies such as Facebook and Pinterest would otherwise lose attribution data, so they avoid working together.

There are ways to solve these issues, though problems are rarely universal. As such, contact our support team if you have an issue. If you'd like to know about universal links in more detail, our post on the differences can be a good starting point. There, we have many pieces of documentation, specifically on the implementation of deep linking, our iOS SDK readme, and Apple's official documentation.

Adjust deep links

Adjust offers an effective solution that allows marketers to track deep links for existing users, defer deep links for new app users, conditionally redirect users to app stores, and more.

Adding deep links to Adjust campaigns

If you have deep links registered in your app and would like to use them while tracking user behavior and acquisition with Adjust, you can add the deep link to the **"deep_link" parameter** of your tracker URL:

> https://app.adjust.com/abc123?**deep_link=myapp**://

For more on how to append parameters to your links, check out Adjust's guide to tracker generation in the documentation here.

With this setup, if a user clicks a deep link and the app:

### ✓ is installed, we will

- send the user into your app with the deep link

- reattribute the user onto the abc123 tracker when certain criteria is met

- track any future activity from that user on abc123

✕ is not installed, we will

- send the user to the App Store

- attribute or reattribute the user onto the abc123 tracker and track any future activity

- defer the deep link to open product id=1234 after the install

For more on setup, click this link to be taken to our docs. Click here for more background from our Help Center.

Deep link tips
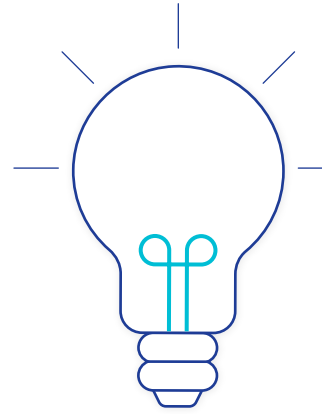
1. Keep track of your click-to-conversion rates

Drop-offs are a pain.

Your mobile app is where conversions happen. [Criteo has found that consumers purchase at 3X the rate of the mobile web in a native app](#). Therefore, losing customers hurts in the long-run, especially when churn is preventable.

The way to get people to convert is deep linking. However, a poor setup can harm this user journey. If a user faces an error, they are very unlikely to take a step back to resume their journey, but rather bounce entirely.

So, track these drop-offs closely. Deep links are fiddly to set up, but if you don't see smooth conversions, you're potentially losing revenue.

For example, say you're seeing less than half of your users who click a link making it to your landing page. Drop-offs could happen thanks to slow loading times, unintended clicks or a broken deep link. The last should be a major concern.

The answer to any broken links is to test your setup to make sure that all links work before kicking off a campaign. A quick test could be the difference between high churn, or high conversion.

2. Be aware of bigger platforms

Apps such as Facebook and Instagram handle external links by loading the content in an internal webview. These views keep users within the app and require another level of complexity to route users off the platform onto your app. This situation can lead to loss of tracking, fudging critical metrics.

As a workaround, developers and marketers using legacy deep links on social platforms must build out methods that can handle edge cases. If you lack a unified approach to deep linking, the number of errors from edge cases becomes overwhelming, leading to frustrated developers and broken customer experiences that can be tremendously difficult to be repair.

3. Capitalize on your users wherever they are

Motivating audiences to engage in-app as opposed to on the mobile web is tough. Are dramatically more effective than the mobile web at driving conversions, so how do you get audiences to use your app if you don't know where their next engagement point will be?

Below are a handful of examples of how you can capitalize on context and make the most of every audience touchpoint:

- Turn your mobile website into an app growth machine by capturing high-intent users who land on your mobile website via organic search with interstitials that prompt them to download the app (or open the app if it's already installed), delivering them to the right in-app content at the right time.

- Maximize every email. Email is still one of the most effective channels out there, and 70% of emails are opened on mobile devices. The faster you move email recipients from inbox to native app, the more revenue you'll drive.

- Create more opportunities with owned assets that are contextually friendly, in order to capitalize on cross-channel campaigns. Website real-estate can be dedicated almost entirely to pushing the users back to the app, especially when tied with real-time offers.

Great minds link alike

Deep links are at the crux of the mobile experience. As more platforms and channels emerge – such as Voice, TV and Game Consoles – deep linking will develop in line to service these platforms' ongoing interactions with each other. Even cars will be subject to deep linking technology.

Crucial to this is the ability to track between platforms. Adjust offers the ability to track across devices, and many other attribution providers have followed suit with their versions of the tool.

Contact us if you'd like to know more about our deep link solution, we'd be happy to help you learn.

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ABOUT ADJUST

Adjust is a global app marketing analytics platform committed to ensuring the highest privacy and performance standards. Adjust's solutions include attribution and measurement, fraud prevention, cybersecurity, as well as automation tools. The company's mission is to make mobile marketing simpler, smarter and more secure for the more than 50,000 apps working with Adjust.

Want to learn how we can help you? Contact us now to find out how we can fit your specific use case.

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