

How Revolut generates virality with referral marketing.



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1. Revolut company overview

Revolut is one of the first Fintech companies that disrupted the banking industry, and it may be the largest in the market.

It started as a solution to the hefty fees one must pay when traveling and transferring money internationally. However, their current product offerings include many more solutions such as commission-free trading, cryptocurrency investing, and budgeting tools.

As of 2019, they offer bank-only products like credit after getting an official bank license in the European Central Bank. In terms of growth and marketing, they are a prime example of hyper-growth with minimal to no paid advertising based around Word-of-Mouth and referral marketing—from which we can learn a lot.

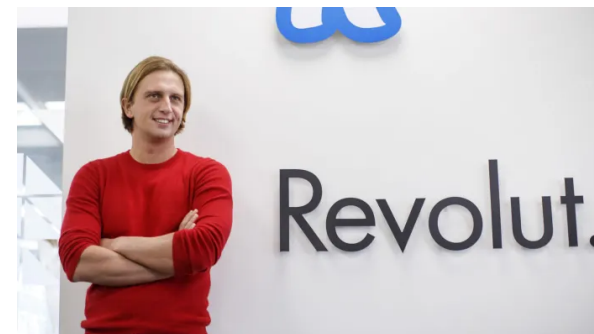
1.1. Founding story

The founder Nikolay Storonsky, came up with the idea while working as a financial trader for Lehman Brothers. His job embraced the expat lifestyle, which required him to travel a lot and live in many different countries—where he got familiar with spending and transferring money abroad.

During his travels, he grew frustrated with the fees he had to pay for every transaction. His financial knowledge made him realize that he was being overcharged, which he tried to solve by opening multiple accounts on large bank groups like HSBC—it didn't work.

In 2015 he decided to build a product to travel without spending a fortune on banking fees—the outcome was Revolut. They managed to create the prototype with a small team within two months, later describing it as “childish and buggy”. However, as the company grew, they started identifying more problems on the banking system that gave them ideas for the features they offer today. According to Nikolay, the goal was to “offer a complete set of products that are 10x better and 10x cheaper than what's offered by (regular) banks”.

After that, the ambition is to become a global bank that allows anyone to open a bank account within 1 minute.



2. Marketing strategy

Their overall marketing strategy is centered around their product, with the aim to provide something so good that customers will do the marketing for them—aka word-of-mouth.

"If you build a great product that actually solves real painful problems customers will come along, our job is to make it easier for them to recommend it to their friends, family and colleagues"

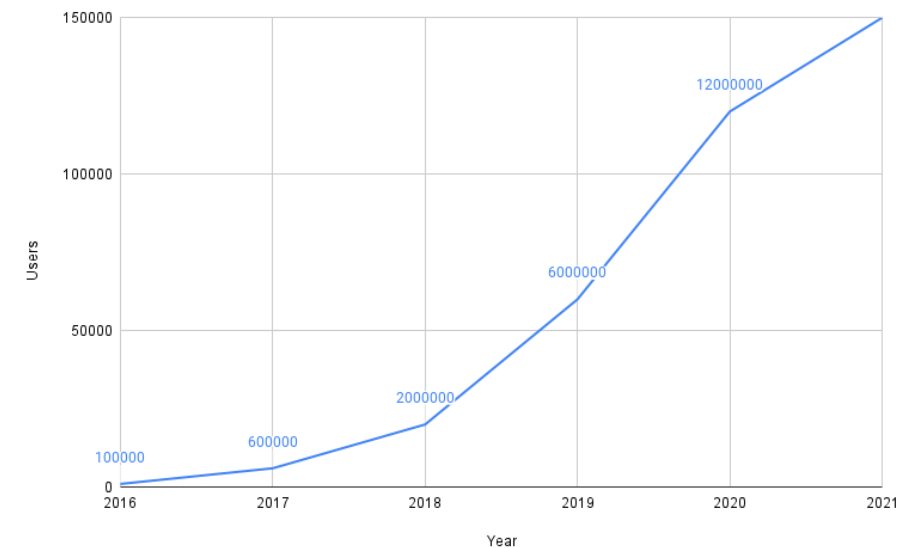
Revolut's ex-Head of Growth, Val Scholz

As a strategy, it proved to be beyond effective as most of their growth until 2018 was done with no paid advertising. To achieve such growth through word of mouth, Revolut's plan uses two tactics:

- Product with built-in virality
- Referral marketing campaigns

The focus of this case study is the latter—how Revolut grows through referral marketing. But since virality works as a catalyst of referral marketing, let's see some examples of how their product embraces this.

Users vs. Year



2.1. Creating a viral loop

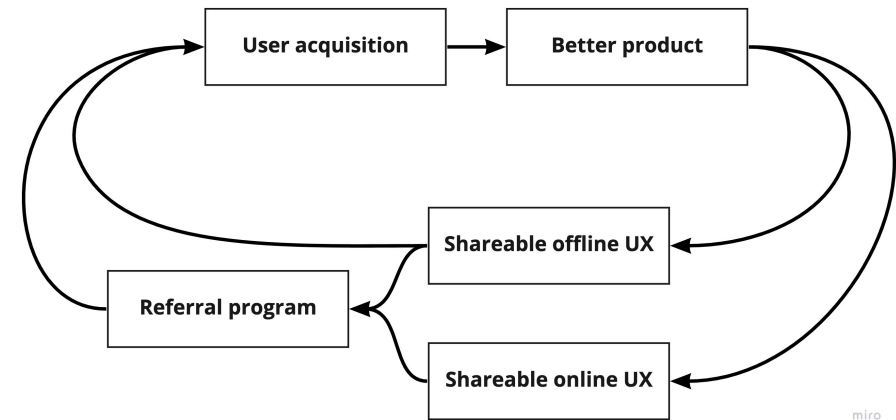
Being a banking solution, Revolut's customers interact with the company on an online and offline basis. One might use their digital card to buy a guitar online, their trading platform to hold crypto, but they will also use their physical card to buy coffee at their local cafe. With that, Revolut's marketing focuses on creating an **offline/online viral loop**, where both physical and digital aspects of the product bring new users.

→ A better product with more users (network effects)

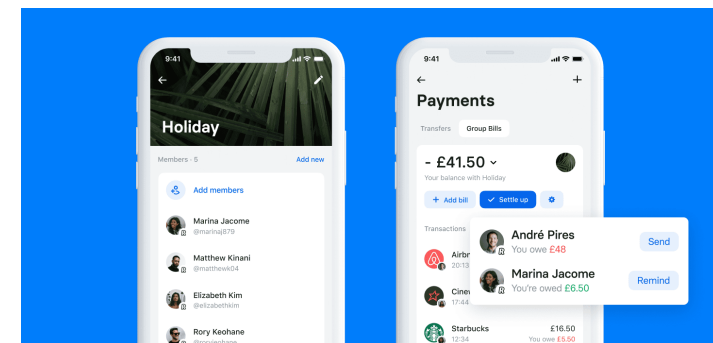
The first example of Revolut's product virality is that the user experience improves if their friends are also on the platform.

Two features that illustrate that are the Bill-Splitting and Group expenses. Imagine a couple of friends, most of whom using Revolut, eating together at a table. In the end, the bill arrives, and it's time for everyone to pay their share.

The Revolut users of the table can quickly settle their expenses by sending payment requests to each other within the platform. The rest, however, who have to settle the bill in an old-school way, will see the convenience of using Revolut, and they'll want to take part too.



That's where the referral program comes into play. With the motivation to join the platform, the non-users only need one little push to make the leap and sign up. The existing users then have the incentive to get them to sign up as soon as possible since they'll get a monetary reward in return.



→ Shareable offline experiences

The physical side of Revolut's product is their cards. They realize the importance of design in creating sharable experiences, and that reflects in their product.

The first interaction with the card is when the user receives one in the mail. The packaging of the card is something unique and playful—it has an interesting sliding mechanism that's like no other packaging out there—the card slides out the left as you pull to the right.

Besides that, it also has a very slick design that is nothing like that of a traditional bank. It's an interesting item that makes one much more likely to share it with a friend and play around with it.



3. Referral marketing & word-of-mouth

In doing this research, it appeared that Revolut has a very controlled and targeted referral marketing strategy where different campaigns are targeted at different customers, different times, and in different countries. Thus, the cases discussed below may differ from where you're reading this.

Revolut has word of mouth as the center focus of their marketing—as their ex-Head of Growth said, “...customers will come along, our job is to make it easier for them to recommend it to their friends...”.

65-70% of Revolut's traffic is through word of mouth

Let's see how they accomplish that.

Over the years, the company has used referral programs in many different ways to accomplish various different goals, so it's more than a single referral campaign that we'll discuss.

The overarching objective of every referral campaign is, of course, user acquisition. To better understand the strategy, we can categorize Revolut's referral programs by these (sub) goals:

Feature unlock, launch in a new market, acquire similar customers.

Overview of campaigns:

3.1. Goal: Acquire similar customers

3.1.1. Invite friends and get 60€ (Refer-a-friend)

3.1.2. Give a card (Refer-a-friend)

3.2. Goal: Promote a new feature

3.2.1. Get a free premium card (Milestone referral)

3.2.2. Crypto exchange feature unlock (Milestone referral)

3.3. Goal: Launch in a new market

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3.1. Goal: Acquire similar customers

Acquiring more of your best customers is the most straightforward objective behind a referral marketing campaign—incentivize your best customers to invite their friends, who will most likely be similar customers to your best ones.

3.1.1. Revolut campaign: Invite friends and get 60€

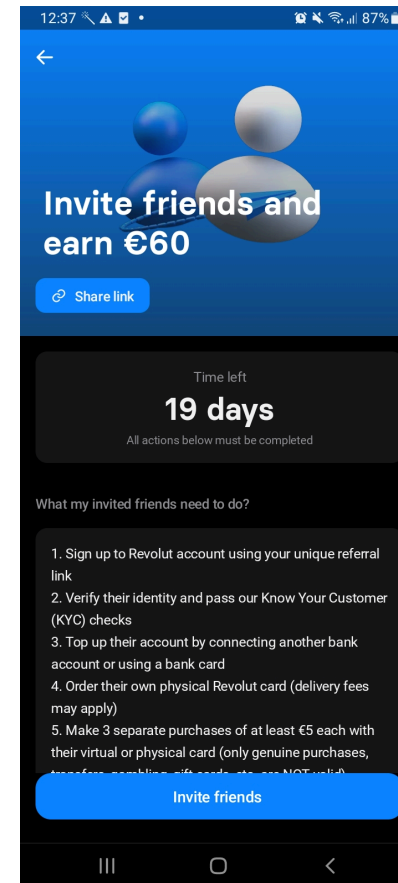
→ How it works

Revolut offers a referral link to their customers, which they can share with their friends, family & colleagues. If the referred person, also called *invitee*, signs up through that link and performs certain actions, it is registered as a successful referral. In this case, the person who invited the new customer gets their reward.

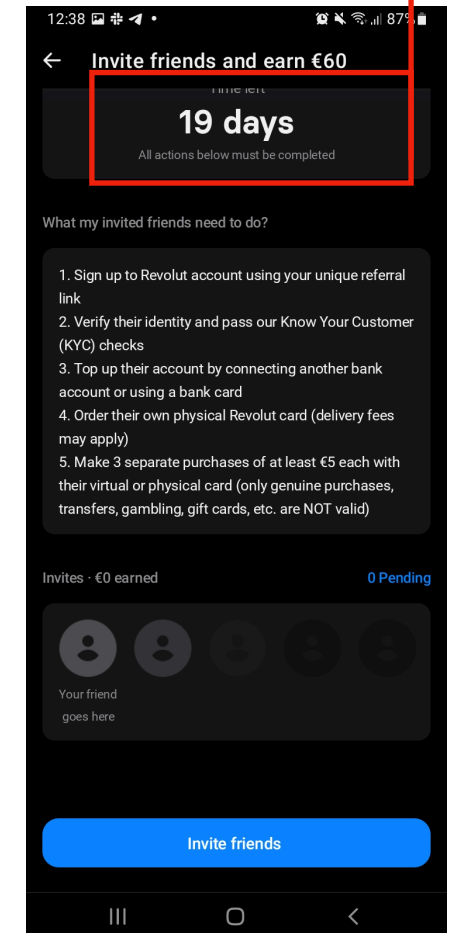
→ Incentive

Revolut offers 60€ in a 1-sided referral campaign, where the reward is only given to the inviter—the invitees, those who sign up through the referral links, receive nothing tangible for joining.

Time pressure



Refer a friend and get 60€



→ Requirements

For the referrer: Their friends have to successfully sign up through the referral link to receive 60€ per referral

For the invitee: Revolut has a fairly tedious task list to be done by the invitee before the referral is considered successful:

1. Sign up to Revolut using the unique referral link.
2. Verify their identity (KYC checks).
3. Add money to their account.
4. Order a physical Revolut card (they have to pay for delivery fees).
5. Make 3 separate purchases of at least 5€ with the digital or physical cards.

→ Strategic twists

We identified three creative ways or growth hacks that Revolut uses to further boost the performance of this referral campaign.

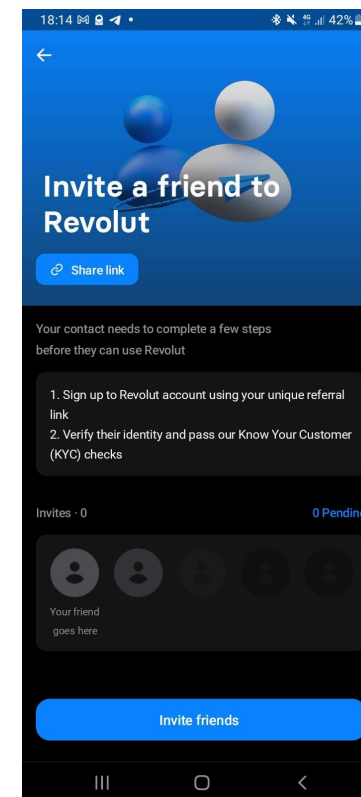
- **Time pressure:** Users have a time limit in which they can invite friends and get rewards. This FOMO-creating hack should increase their successful referral rate by putting pressure on users to convince their friends to sign up and perform the required tasks quickly.
- **Controlled eligibility:** In the T&C of their referral program, it is mentioned that such promotions are only available for selected users at a time. Indeed, during some of these referral campaigns, only paying users were given the option to get rewards for inviting friends.

Am I eligible for the Referral Campaign?

If you receive an email invitation or an in-app push notification, or both, from Revolut, you're eligible for that promotion.

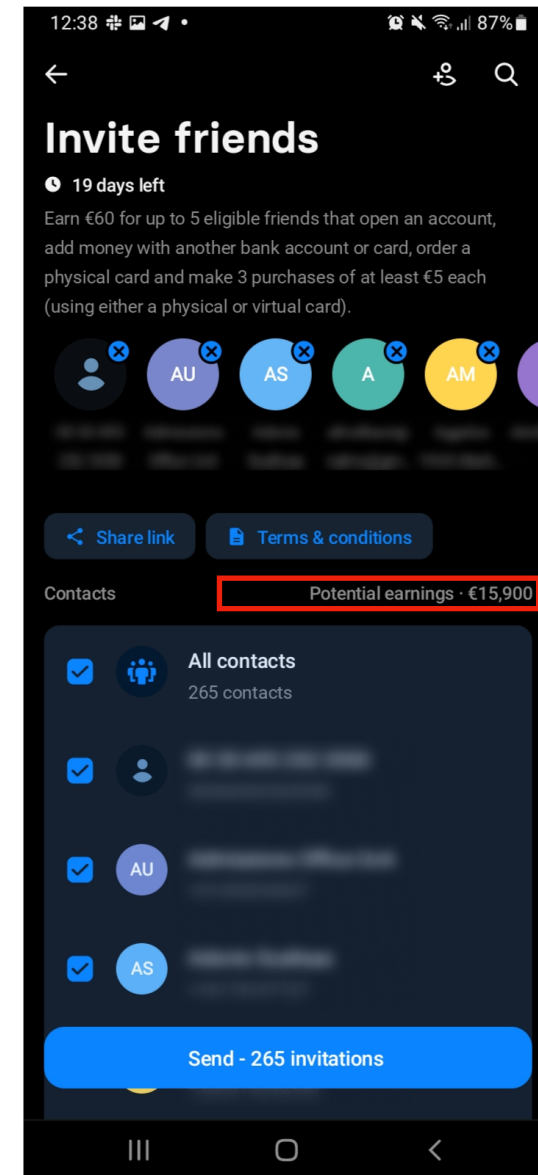
Unfortunately, promotions are only available for selected users at a time, but don't worry if you didn't get it. We'll be releasing more promotions in the future for which you may be eligible!

Revolut's referral program Term & Conditions



Example referral campaign with no reward in a free account

- **Potential earnings:** If the user proceeds on the screen where they can invite their contacts, they will see an estimate of how much they can earn if they invite the selected contacts. Such a tactic, though a tiny detail, can intrigue and further motivate users to invite more people to Revolut, thus fuelling the growth loop.

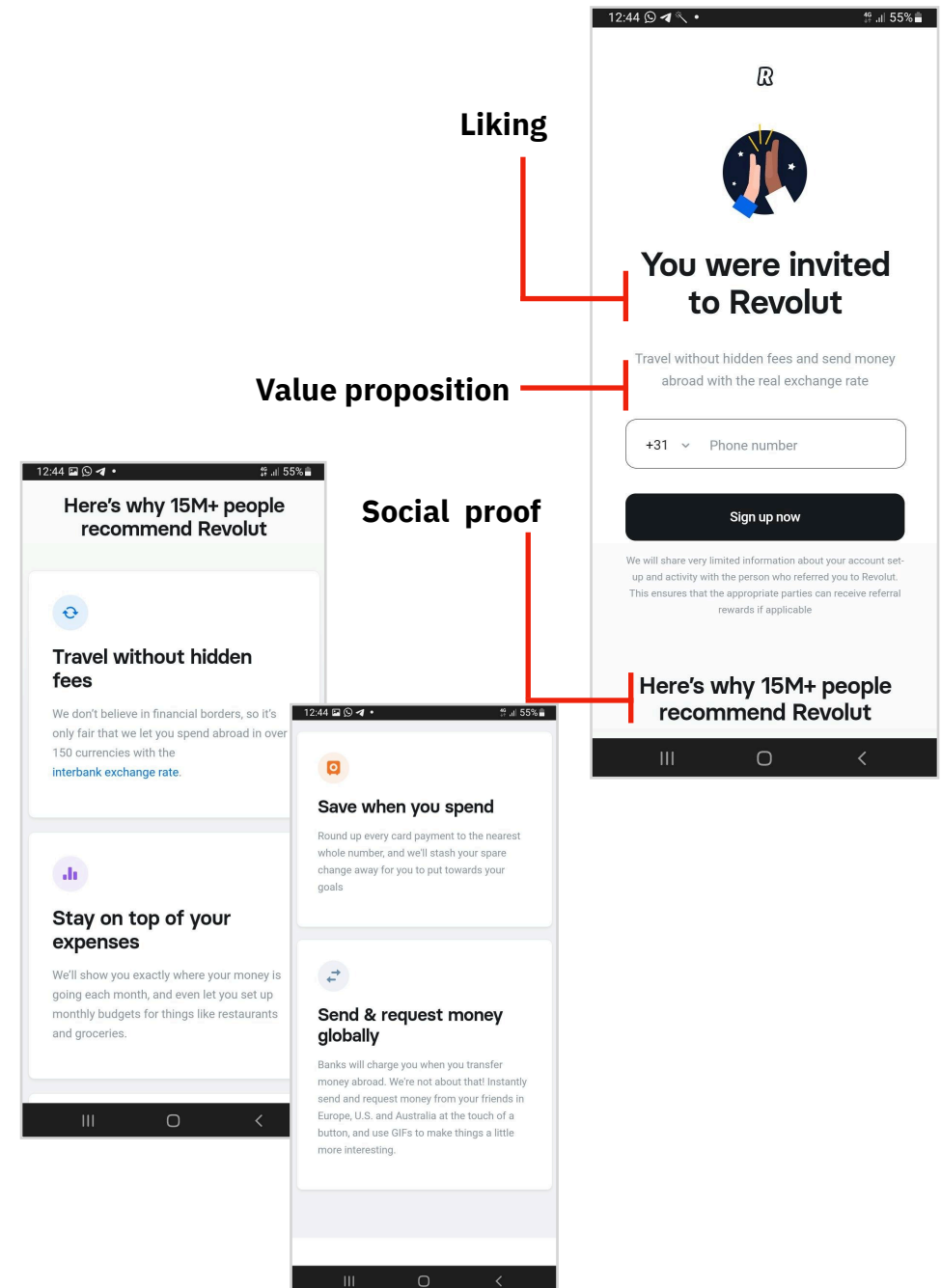


→ The invitee page

After clicking the referral link, the invitee is taken to a simple page where they can sign up. Revolut effectively informs the invitee about the core value they'll get by signing up, and it establishes trust through social proof. All without cluttering the page with tons of information on all their features.

We can break down the page into four attributes that fuel conversion:

- **Liking:** The main headline, “You were invited to Revolut” reminds people that their friend trusts Revolut and invited them to join. Also, the phrasing gives a feeling of exclusivity like that of being invited to a private club.
- **Social proof:** Without scrolling, the invitee is reminded through clever copy, above the fold, that more than 15 million people use Revolut.
- **Value:** Right below the main headline, Revolut promotes its main value proposition with subtle gray typography. Then with a single scroll, one can see the four main reasons people join Revolut for.
- **Simple CTA:** The only thing needed is the invitee's phone number, thus offering an effortless signup process. No name, no email.



3.1.2. Revolut campaign: Give a card

Around 2019 Revolut was running the referral program with a unique reward system that proved to work wonders for their daily user acquisition numbers:

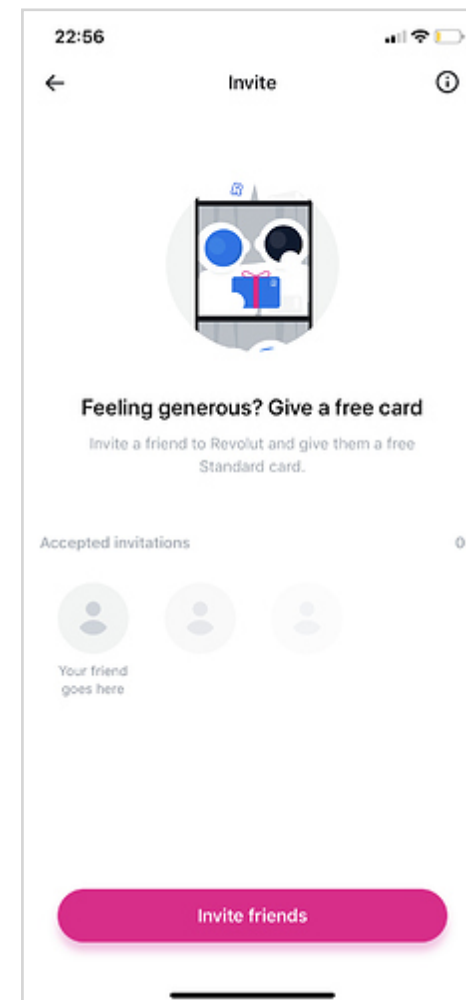
2-3X daily user acquisition numbers

→ How it worked

Similar to the campaign discussed above, **Revolut offered a referral link to their customers so they could share it with their friends, family & colleagues.** If the *invitee* signed up through that link and performed certain actions, a successful referral is registered. The twist in this campaign is that the invitee receives the reward while the *inviter* gets nothing tangible.

→ Incentive

Revolut offered a *physical card* in a 1-sided referral campaign, where the reward is given only to the invitee—the inviters get nothing tangible in return.



→ **The requirements**

This campaign seemed to be more lenient without requiring the invitee to perform any purchasing actions—all they had to do was follow the conventional onboarding:

- Sign up through the link
- Verify their identity
- Add funds to their account
- Order the free card

→ **Strategic twist**

Such a rewarding schema where the referrer *offers* something instead of *receiving* is fairly uncommon. It shows the importance of having a product so valuable that a brand's ambassadors expect nothing for their work.

Revolut presents the campaign with clever copy that makes users feel positive about themselves—"Feeling generous?" frames the act of referring a friend as something a generous person would do, a trait most people want to be associated with.

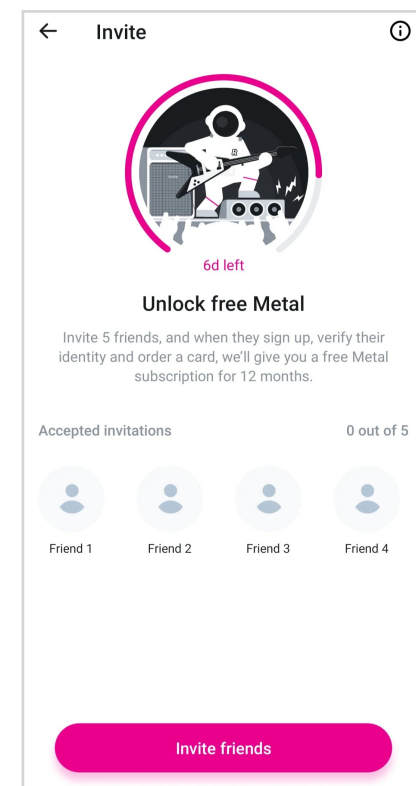
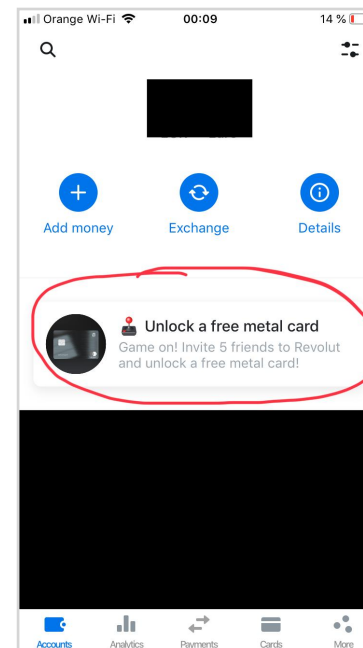
3.2. Goal: Promote a new feature

Another strategic use for referral marketing is when releasing a new feature. Not only do you acquire more users, the overarching goal of a referral campaign, but also you increase the adoption of that feature. As a tactic, it allows a firm to get insights on how much demand exists (and *from whom*) for a given feature before further investments are made.

3.2.1. Revolut campaign: Get a free premium card

Back in 2018, Revolut released their premium subscription “Revolut Metal”. It offered a high-quality metal bank card along with many premium features, like higher cash-back, airport lounge access, and more. It was quite a big deal at the time, as more challenger banks, like N26, had started offering premium models packaged in metal cards.

To boost adoption, Revolut deployed a referral campaign to upsell existing users into the premium tier by offering them a free metal card if they invited friends.



→ How it worked

Once again, **Revolut offered a referral link to users so they could share it with their friends.** If that friend signed up through the link and performed the required actions, the referrer would get the reward—a free metal card subscription.

→ Incentive

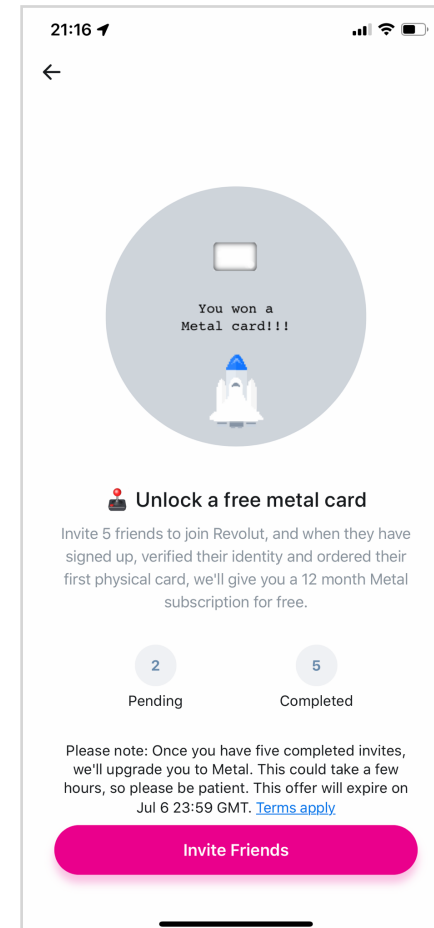
Revolut offered a 1-sided referral campaign, rewarding a free 12-month Metal subscription along with a free metal card (€135 in value) to the referrer. The invitee would get nothing tangible for signing up.

→ The requirements

For the referrer: They had to successfully refer 5 friends to get the 12-month free premium reward.

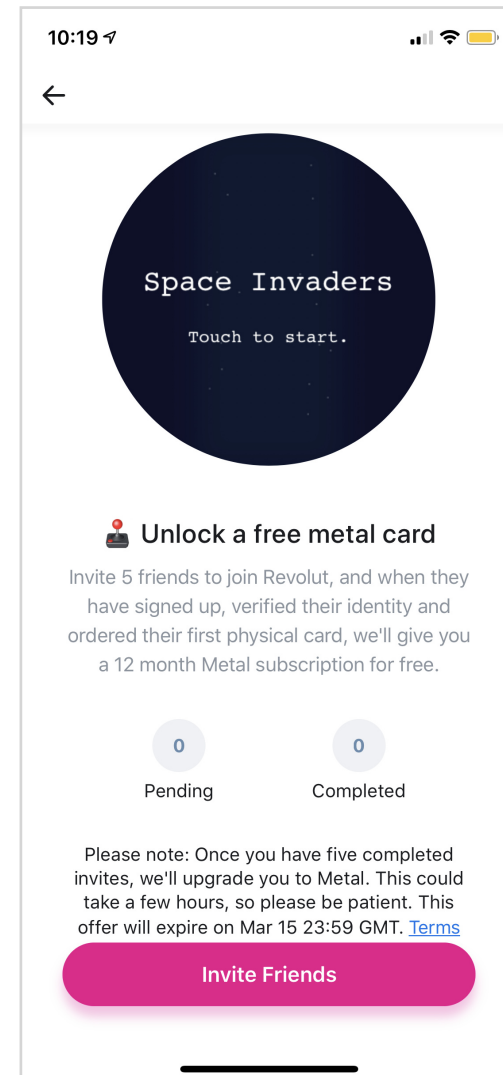
For the inviter: To qualify as a successful, the invitee had to follow the regular onboarding process—it was not necessary to perform any purchasing actions:

- Sign up through the link
- Verify their identity
- Order a physical card



→ Strategic twists

- **Aggressive-ish promotion:** The referral program was promoted on the app's home screen with a large banner, informing users that they can get a free metal card by inviting friends. Usually, Revolut houses its referral program inside the user's account page. It seems they wanted to get timely feedback and data on the demand for their new feature.
- **Gamification:** An interesting touch of this campaign is that Revolut added a space invaders game inside their *referral dashboard*, which users had to complete before receiving the reward. Such a tactic, alien to banking products, was aligned with Revolut's playful branding at the time and made the product itself more approachable by the younger generation which is their target customer.



3.2.2 Revolut campaign: Cryptocurrency exchange feature unlock

For Revolut, 2018 was an incredibly productive year since they also launched their cryptocurrency exchange. With it, users can trade crypto easily without or at very low fees right from inside their banking app—a much-anticipated feature and timed perfectly with 2018’s hype on cryptocurrencies.

Similar to the Metal subscription release, Revolut’s strategy wasn’t to make the feature available to as many users as possible right away. Instead, they opted for a controlled release to premium users—regular users could get access by upgrading or by inviting friends.



→ How it worked

In classic Revolut fashion, **users got a unique referral link that they could share with their friends and family.** If the invitees signed up through that link and performed the required actions, thus completing a successful referral, the referrer got access to the cryptocurrency exchange.

→ Incentive

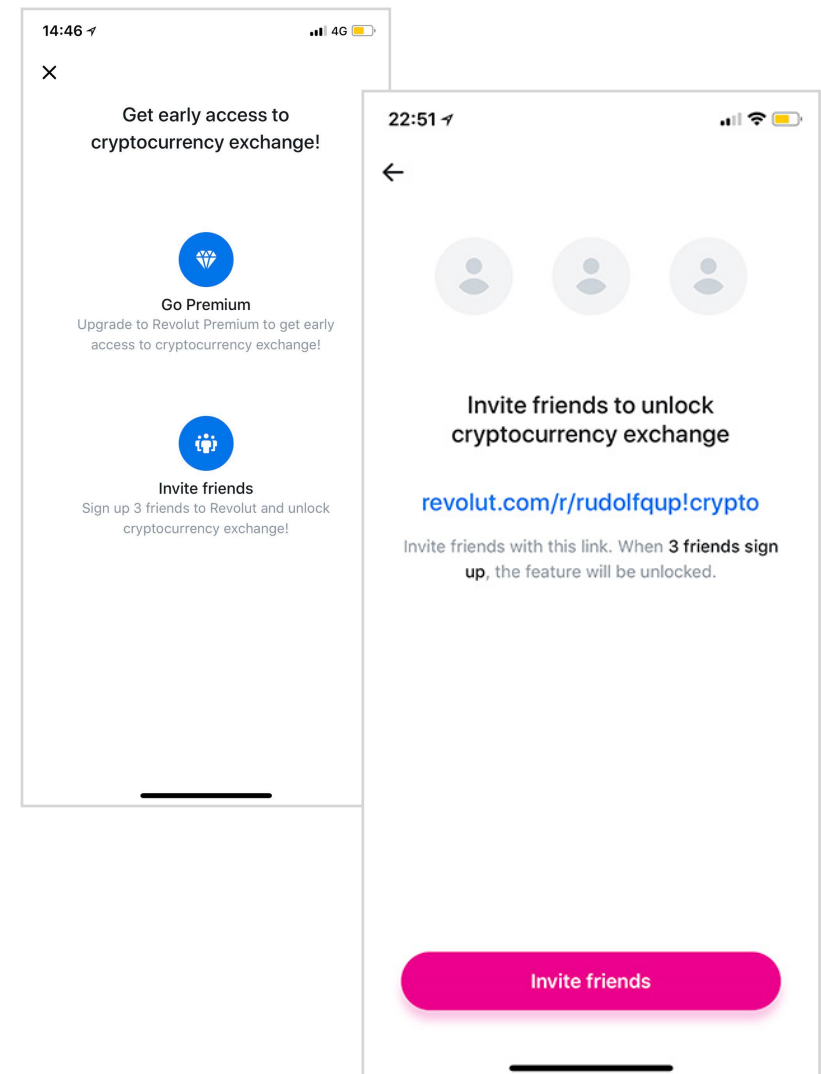
This campaign was a 1-sided referral program, where the inviter would get access to the cryptocurrency exchange feature. The invitee would get nothing tangible for signing up.

→ Requirements

For the referrer: To get access to the cryptocurrency exchange, one had to successfully refer 3 friends successfully.

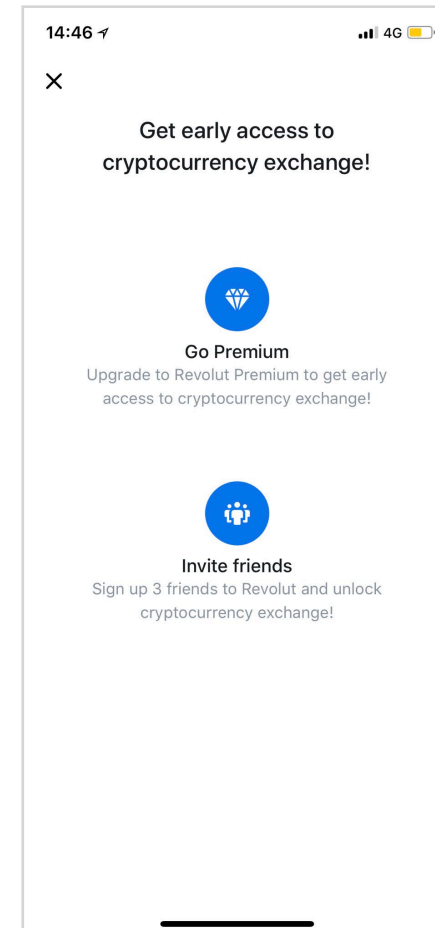
For the invitee: In the referral dashboard, there was no list of tasks needed for an invite to count as a successful referral—only the requirement to **sign up through the unique link.** However, drawing from Revolut's referral program T&C we suspect that some of the following were also required:

- Verify your identity
- Order a card
- Add funds to your account



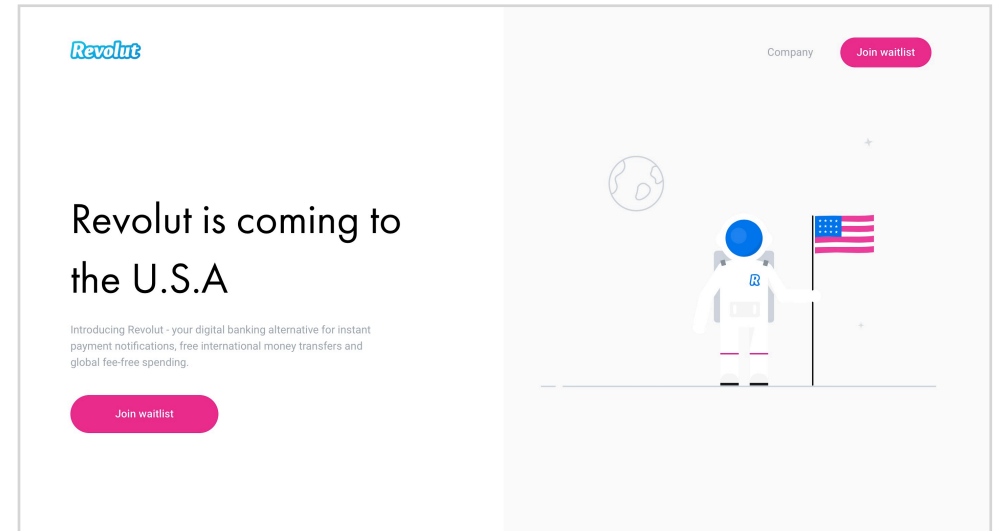
→ Strategic twist

An incentive to upgrade subscription: If you were a premium customer, you could get direct access to the new product, but if you were a standard user, you had to upgrade to premium or invite three friends to get it. This way, Revolut might have been able to upsell many customers to their premium offering since the act of upgrading requires less effort and time than referring friends, yet it's not as accessible.



3.3. Goal: Launch in a new market

When launching in new markets, an extremely effective strategy used in the Fintech sector is that of a prelaunch campaign— a.k.a. a waitlist. The goal is to create hype and anticipation around the upcoming product while acquiring useful customer data. Let's see how Revolut, founded in the UK, did it when it launched for the US market.



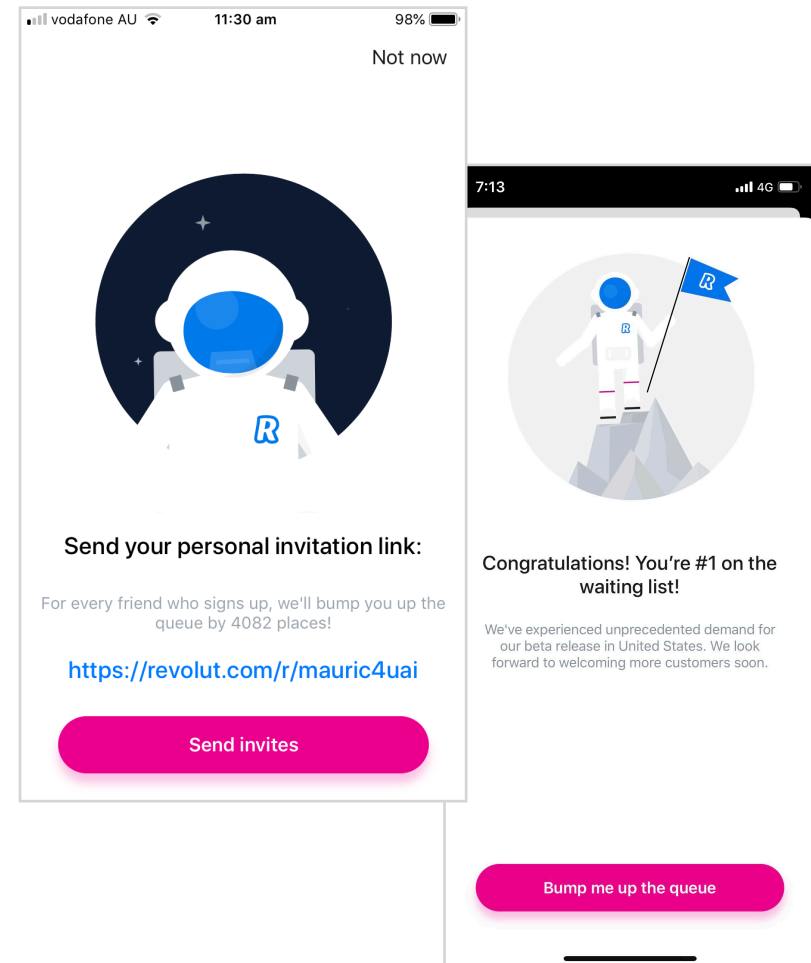
3.3.1. Revolut campaign: Prelaunch waitlist in the U.S.A

In March of 2020, Revolut launched its banking app in the United States of America. However, that was not their first interaction with the new market. In the months coming up to the launch, Revolut created a *prelaunch waitlist campaign* that grew to **30,000-40,000 participants in the first month**. This allowed Revolut to run a beta program prior to launch and create a community ready to use their product even before it was ready.

→ How it worked

The goal was to create a soft launch where Revolut would slowly onboard users from the waitlist into the beta version of the American app.

The primary touchpoint of this campaign was the website, through which one could join the waitlist. After providing their phone number and email (the first steps of Revolut's signup flow), they would be part of the waitlist. From there, they could see their position in the queue, which they could increase by inviting friends to the waitlist using the unique referral link provided by Revolut.



→ Incentive

While there was no tangible incentive for the referrer or the invitee, this was a 1-sided referral campaign. The referrer would climb higher in the waitlist queue for every successful referral, giving them early access sooner.

→ Requirements

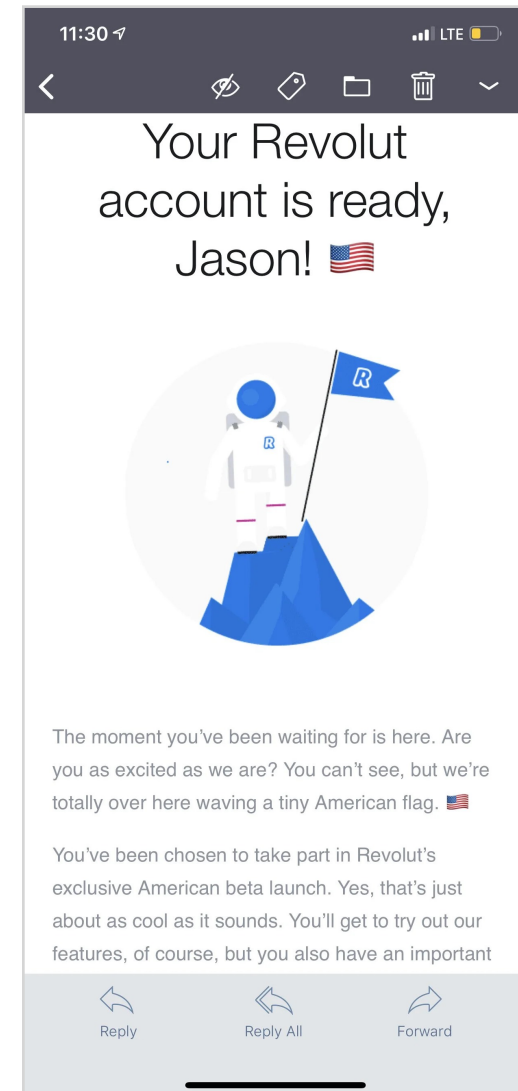
For the referrer: One had to successfully refer friends to the waitlist to climb higher in the queue and get early access sooner.

For the invitee: Join the waitlist through the referral link.

→ Strategic twist

Revolut didn't release their app to all waitlist participants at once, instead they slowly onboarded the top participants until the waitlist was exhausted—a beta program. This tactic has two benefits:

- It allows for controlled adoption to avoid overloading the tech infrastructure and get a deeper understanding of the upcoming users.
- It created a feeling of exclusivity among the beta program participants as they were the first to use the anticipated product—thus creating passionate fans before the launch.



Conclusion

Revolut understood that word of mouth could be their most powerful tool for growth. So, like most successful startups, they fuelled word of mouth by putting most of their effort into the product to make something so good that customers are happy to share with friends.

Their growth team ensured that all aspects of their product, both offline and online, create unique and shareable experiences. From creative packaging to network effects embedded in its core features, Revolut's product is made to be shared.

Revolut utilizes referral programs for many of its strategic goals to facilitate that sharing desire and ignite word of mouth.

- They incentivize their best customers to refer friends in exchange for generous rewards to grow their customer base with more of their quality users.
- They increase the adoption rate of their new features by offering them for free in exchange for referrals.
- They acquire early adopters of their product in new markets before they even launch by creating tempting waitlists with the ability to climb in the queue if you refer friends.