

12 KEYS TO MAXIMIZING REVENUE FROM PAID CONTENT

Start with a Strategy. What are your business objectives? Beyond the bottom-line objective of increasing revenue, paid content begins with the big picture. Do you want to add value to your print edition with online resources? Extend your brand with specialized online products? Grow the value of subscribers, non-subscribers and/or registered users?

Size up Your Competitive Edge. Who are your competitors and what are they offering on the Web? Success comes from offering timely, high-quality content that is not available elsewhere – and helping readers solve problems, make more money and succeed at what they do.

Know Your Readers. Successful online publishers know that users will pay for the three C's: content, community and commerce. What works is relevant, targeted, timely and differentiated content, which can include fast-changing news, insightful blogs, newsletters personalized according to user interests, online communities, searchable guides, directories and lists — and more.

Design for Usability. Content that is easy to find makes your site more valuable, so design your site for usability, not for pretty pictures. Consider using an outside consultant to review your current site or a site in development. Is the navigation simple and intuitive? Is all content searchable by keywords most relevant to your readers?

Relate Your Site Elements. When your content, your community and your commerce are integrated with an underlying taxonomy (metadata), every aspect of your site can revolve around the user. Presenting additional content or purchase opportunities relevant to what the user is viewing increases stickiness – and is the most direct path to increasing revenue.

Test, Test and Re-test. Your content does not stand still, and neither should the way you package, deliver and charge for that content. Experiment with different tiers of free, registered and paid content. Look for ways to increase the viral nature of content, e.g., with an “email to a friend” link and a number of “Share” options. Timed access or purchase by the drink? Every market and every consumer is different.

Repurpose, Repurpose, Repurpose. Adopt the multichannel delivery mindset of your readers. With a unified content repository, you can create content once and re-use it endlessly in multiple delivery formats. If you're publishing on the Web, you can also publish – and generate revenue from – print editions, email newsletters, PDFs, digital editions, wireless delivery, RSS feeds, Webinars and deep archives.

Also important, you may uncover opportunities to generate additional revenue by providing content to emerging reader interest groups. If your content is structured properly, today's technologies make it fast, simple and easy to pursue new markets.

Ease Into It. If your readers are used to getting your content for no charge, you will need to plan a slow, steady transition to paid content. Start by requiring registration for users who want to see in-depth information. Over time, you can restrict access to some parts of your site to paid users. Along the way, you need to motivate users to register and, ultimately, subscribe or otherwise pay for content. For instance, offer free news alerts email – but require a paid subscription for access to complete articles or for articles posted more than 24 hours previously.

Stay Calm When Page Views Vary. Predictably, the conversion to paid content can lead to a short-term decline in page views – a concern for every online publisher. However, with high quality promotion and search engine optimization, page views typically will rise again over time and the readers you lose along the way may not be the ones you and your advertisers really want to reach. Successful online publishers have found that paid users tend to be more serious than casual browsers in their quest for information, products and services, and there's nothing advertisers like more than a qualified lead.

Commit to Ongoing Search Engine Optimization Best Practices. Search engine methods for indexing and ranking pages are constantly evolving, so revisit your optimization strategies several times per year. Otherwise, you miss opportunities to drive search engine users to your content – and you miss opportunities for content sales.

Also, be sure that ALL of your content is indexed: Contrary to popular belief, you can give search engine "spiders" access to paid content without giving away your content – thus enabling users to locate your valuable content via a search engine and motivating them to visit your site.

Promote Your Content! Don't forget to promote your Web content in your print publications. One way is to promote "Web Extras" or "Web Exclusives" in your print publications to drive traffic to your Web sites. A related tactic: send email alerts featuring news summaries to preview print editions, and to link readers back to the rest of the story.

Use Your Data – and Act Accordingly. With user registration and Web tracking software, you can – and should – monitor user behavior on your site. Your site data will show which content elements are or are not popular, and where users are spending the most time. Also important, you can see whether users are getting lost on your site and where they are giving up in despair. With these insights you can determine where content should be modified, where navigation should be improved and where new paid content opportunities might be; and you can provide the kind of detailed ROI data that motivates advertisers to increase their investment in your site.

For more information, please contact Lou Bahin at
lbahin@ePublishing.com or by phone at 312.768.6868.
312.768.6800 • ePublishing.com



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