

Publishers: What's Next After Facebook?

Alternative Channels that Can Fill the Social Void to Drive Engagement & Revenue



A Romance on the Rocks

When Facebook launched its News Feed feature in 2006, it sparked a revolution in online engagement. Suddenly, users of the fast-growing social network could see—in real time—what their friends were saying, thinking and doing.

Of course, it wasn't long until news outlets and lifestyle publishers picked up on how well this real-time newsfeed fit so perfectly into their own style of content distribution and began leveraging the social network to extend their audience reach. By posting links to their content on the social network, publishers were able to drive a new source of traffic directly to their own site to deliver more clicks and impressions to their advertising partners.

Now with some 2.2 billion monthly active users, and still growing, Facebook remains the king of social media, and many publishers have invested heavily in the platform. Not only with direct ad buys aimed at acquiring subscribers but most have also carefully cultivated their own high-value, highly-engaged communities by leveraging the platform's popularity and power.

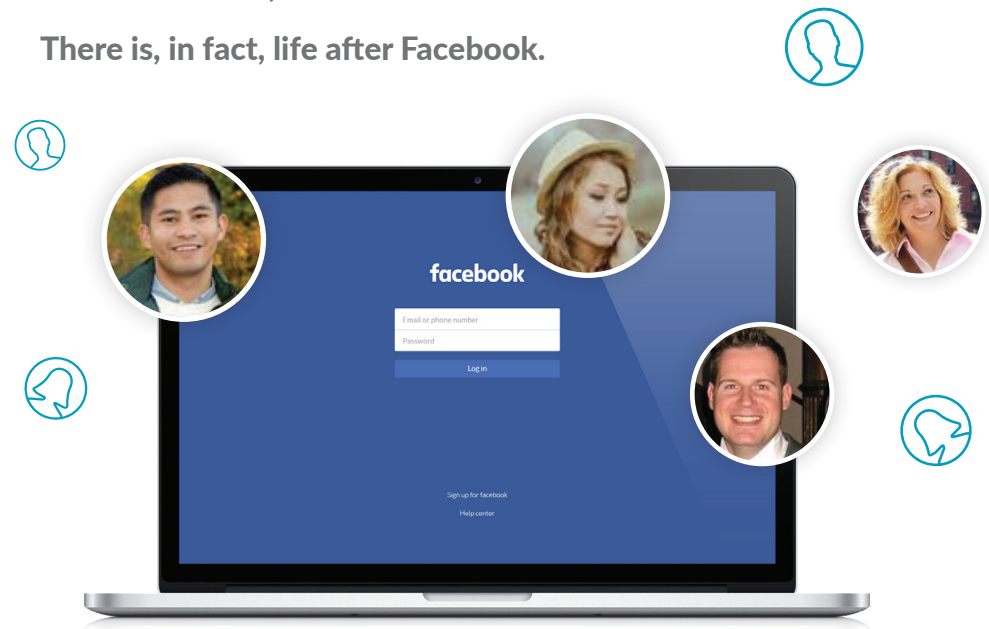
And, therein lies the problem. Facebook's power and control over how brand and media content is displayed has left many publishers scrambling to stay afloat. The love affair many publishers once had with the social media giant is fading. Many feel betrayed, while others have failed completely.

“Outsourcing control and access to your audience is the most dangerous thing a publisher can do,” says Nick Friese, CEO of Digiday Media. “There are plenty of media companies who are no longer in business because they outsourced their audience to Facebook.”

The survivors are looking for alternatives, new avenues to drive comparable traffic, engagement and monetization to fill the void left by Facebook's shifting News Feed priorities.

Fortunately, hope is not lost. Several tried-and-true, as well as new channels are emerging as alternatives, ripe with engagement and monetization opportunities that put publishers in control of their own destiny.

There is, in fact, life after Facebook.



Facebook Fails Publishers

On the surface, it may seem publishers have a Facebook problem. But the reality is they have a trust problem.

According to the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, audiences are growing increasingly skeptical of media content, with 7 out of 10 fearing fake news and earning media the unfortunate distinction as the least trusted institution in the world.

The problem isn't that consumers don't trust journalism—in fact, confidence in journalism is increasing. It's the platforms that are suspicious: while 65 percent of people consume media through platforms such as Facebook, their trust in those platforms is declining.

There's no doubt that Facebook hasn't helped its cause. Allowing its platform to be played like a fine fiddle by fake news factories during the most recent US presidential election and its negligence in playing fast and loose with users' personal information are solid reasons for skepticism.

Worse yet, most people don't make the distinction between content and platforms, lumping them together as "media." And, that's where things get complicated for publishers. No matter how valid, trustworthy, relevant or valuable their content is, when it appears on platforms (like Facebook), it could be viewed through a lens of skepticism and suspicion.

Trying to regain its footing, Facebook has waged an epic battle against fake news and media distrust, with sweeping changes to its algorithms that have pushed publishers' content off of its News Feed. For many, this has cut off traffic substantially, if not completely. Some publishers have lost as much as 90 percent of their organic traffic, while others—such as [LittleThings](#)—have lost it all, closing up shop completely.

*“It wasn't like it was
your audience.”*

[Chuck Creekmur](#), founder of All Hip Hop

“Facebook is not a channel where you can reliably reach an audience, even once you've built up an audience of people who've liked your page,” says Substack CEO Chris Best in [AdAge](#). “There's no way that we could reliably deliver that to them in one of the social media apps they already use.”



Why? For years, it's been a relative mystery as to how to reliably get your content to appear in the News Feed. Is it how much you spend on advertising? The level of engagement in your posts? It's been anybody's guess as companies simply rode the wave of Facebook's whims. And now that user-generated content is the the priority, many publishers are losing audiences that they may have actually paid for through sponsored content, leaving them feeling cheated and betrayed.

Not only has Facebook controlled the distribution of content, but many times the monetization as well, by keeping the second click. Instead of linking users directly to publishers' websites (where eyes land on advertisers' content), the link goes to another Facebook page...complete with ad units whose buyers now benefit from that traffic instead of the publisher.

The bottom line is that Facebook has failed publishers in two big ways: it's lost users' trust and it wields too much control over how and who sees publishers' content. While many publishers have done a great job of playing the game to capitalize on the platform's meteoric audience rise, it hasn't changed the fact that publishers were still at the mercy of Facebook's master plan.

What do publishers need instead? Engagement platforms users trust and that publishers can control.

Alternative Sources Fill the Void

Seeking a better way to distribute and monetize their own content, publishers are beginning to turn to other channels that put them in control and provide greater engagement and monetization opportunities.


By gaining dominion over the distribution channel, publishers can not only control the timing, but also the targeting, distributing relevant content and ads to users whose profile is rich with past behavior data, known preferences and vital details for more precise personalization.

This provides much greater flexibility in monetization capacity and gives publishers the ability to change things up on the fly. If content or ads aren't performing as expected, they can be changed immediately.

“A media brand’s most valuable asset is owning their data and the connection to a reader at all times because that’s the gold to building your business.”

Nick Friese, CEO of Digiday Media


And, the best part is, these are existing platforms—no new technology to build or convince audiences to adopt and no big investment in a standalone app. And, they’re tools consumers already know and trust, so publishers can win on that front, too.



The 20 Best Summer Resorts in Asia
Travel Now



10 baby clothing trends
Baby.com



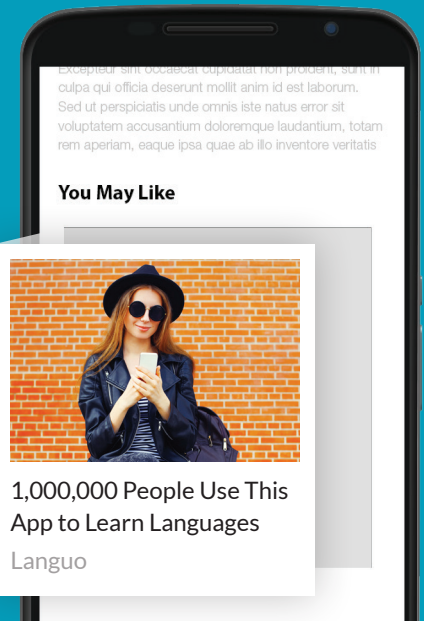
Install the Game That Everyone’s Addicted to
Game.com



5 Reasons Why Fashion Should be Bought Online
Fun Fashion



1,000,000 People Use This App to Learn Languages
Languo



Email: Long Trusted, New Capabilities

Email has been a staple of the publishers' engagement playbook for years. But, as social media rose to prominence, email became regarded as blasé and "old school," and some even claimed that email was dead.

Now, this trusted, tried-and-true channel is experiencing a renaissance. Publishers have come to once again recognize the innate value of their opt-in subscribers who have raised their hands and said, "market to me!" The data gathered by publishers to build deep subscriber profiles allows for a level of personalization that can hardly be matched by any other channel, and that targeted personalization has proven to increase customer engagement, driving up click-thru rates by 14%, conversions by 10% and up to 6X higher transaction rates.

"Anytime we see even basic personalization, like gender or age group, we see lifts of sometimes [200 percent] and 300 percent on conversion," says Marc Shull, senior VP for social and disruptive marketing strategies at Chicago's Yes Lifecycle Marketing in AdAge.

And, monetizing email works. Revenue from advertising in emails can generate more than 20% of total ad revenue for some publishers. Using native ads, exclusive-sponsored emails and sponsored content, publishers can easily monetize emails on a CPC basis, just like the online display and native ads on their web properties.

"The most important thing media owners can do today is grow direct connections through data collection and email."

Nick Friese, CEO of Digiday Media.



Why does email work so well?



IT'S TRUSTED.

Consumers guard their email address to avoid spam, which means they only subscribe to publishers' lists whom they trust.



IT'S EASILY PERSONALIZED

The rich data publishers collect based on subscribers click behavior allows for a much deeper level of personalization to deliver deeply relevant ads, which in turn drive subscribers to action.



EMAIL TARGETING IS MORE ACCURATE THAN OTHER METHODS.

The problem with browser-based cookies and device targeting is that they're device-specific. And, when that device is shared among family members, for example, those same cookies or device-based techniques may not apply to all users. But, email is unique to the individual, making it much more precise for targeting relevant ads.



EMAIL SPANS MULTIPLE DEVICES.

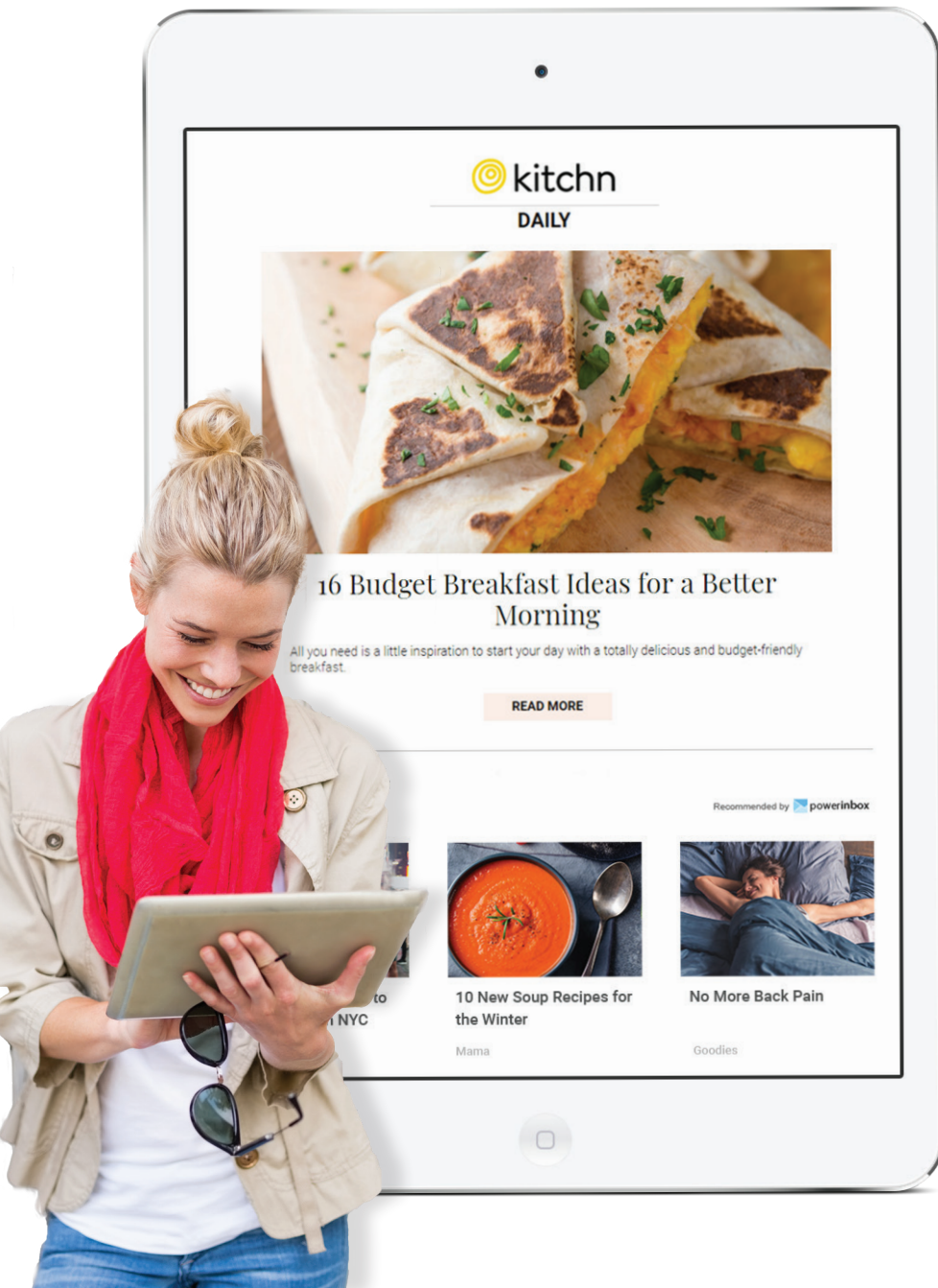
Email reaches a subscriber on every device—desktop, tablet or mobile phone—enabling publishers to track and aggregate subscriber behavior across multiple devices.



IT'S WITHIN PUBLISHERS' CONTROL.

Publishers can reliably deliver content and ads to subscribers with the precise timing and confidence in knowing that it WILL get through to the intended audience and that click-thrus will deliver audiences EXACTLY to where publishers want them to land.

Email is trusted, dependable and precise. And, it should be the center of any publishers' life-after-Facebook strategy.



Web: Still Effective When Done Right

Once the bastion of monetization for publishers, web advertising suffered a series of blows at the hands of pop-up blockers and browser-based ad blockers as consumers grew weary and annoyed with display and pop-ups ads.

However, a new type of web monetization—native ads—is breathing new life into publishers’ online monetization strategies. Rather than distract from content and annoy viewers, native ads blend seamlessly into native content, featuring brand sponsorship that feels natural and adds value.

This natural fit drives viewers to spend almost as much time on native ads as they do on editorial content, and they’re viewed 53% more frequently than display. Even better, almost a third of audience members would share native ads with friends and family, while less than 20% would share traditional ads.

“Native advertising has been so well accepted by internet users because it feels natural to the readers. Compared with traditional banners and pop-up ads, native ads are much less disruptive and they don’t give the feeling that the page is cluttered.”

Graeme Donnelly, founder of professional business profile company Quality Formations

When precisely personalized to deliver relevant messages, native ads can be powerful engagement and monetization tools. But how those ads are personalized also matters to deliver the most accurate relevancy.

“The macro factor of an overabundant (endless) supply of content — with little differentiation among it — has made it nearly impossible to garner the attention and recognition of audiences,” says Rich Ullman, former VP of Marketing at Outbrain. “There’s just far too much competition for the same number of eyeballs (and brains) from content sources that are both media and non-media alike, and the move to buying audiences based on profiles rather than qualitative values, makes it even harder for them to differentiate and monetize at scale.”

For example, traditional browser-based cookies and device-based targeting aren’t as accurate as one might assume, since many devices are shared among household members. This explains why the kids see ads for retirement villas and mom and dad get ads for the latest in middle school fashion.

Instead, publishers who leverage email-based targeting techniques can deliver much more precise personalization. Email addresses are rarely shared, and consumers guard their email closely to avoid spam. So, when they do offer it to publishers, the data and profile that can be built around it has tremendous value when it comes to targeting and personalization. And, using the email address

as a unique unifying identifier allows publishers to target across multiple channels—web, email and social—for true cross-channel personalization.

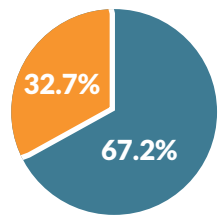


Native web ads also give publishers a tremendous amount of control, which helps to fine-tune audience engagement and monetization strategy. Unlike conventional display, which uses real-time-bidding and conventional display networks for placement, native ads allow publishers to choose the brands and content their subscribers see.

All of these factors make native advertising extremely effective, and advertisers are taking notice. Native ads have been shown to increase brand lift 82%, with conversion rates that climb as high as 60% when rich media is included. CTR for native ads reaches 60%, compared to just 0.7% for conventional display.

As a result, the industry is expected to reach \$21 billion this year, and comprise nearly 60% of display spending in the U.S. Given this opportunity, native ads can clearly offset a large chunk of the engagement and monetization lost to the Facebook failure, and publishers must implement strategies to get in on this growing spend, by working with platforms and brands that can deliver native ads with precision and relevance.

WHAT ARE INTERNET USERS INCLINED TO CLICK ON?



Are you more willing to click on sponsored articles or banner ads?

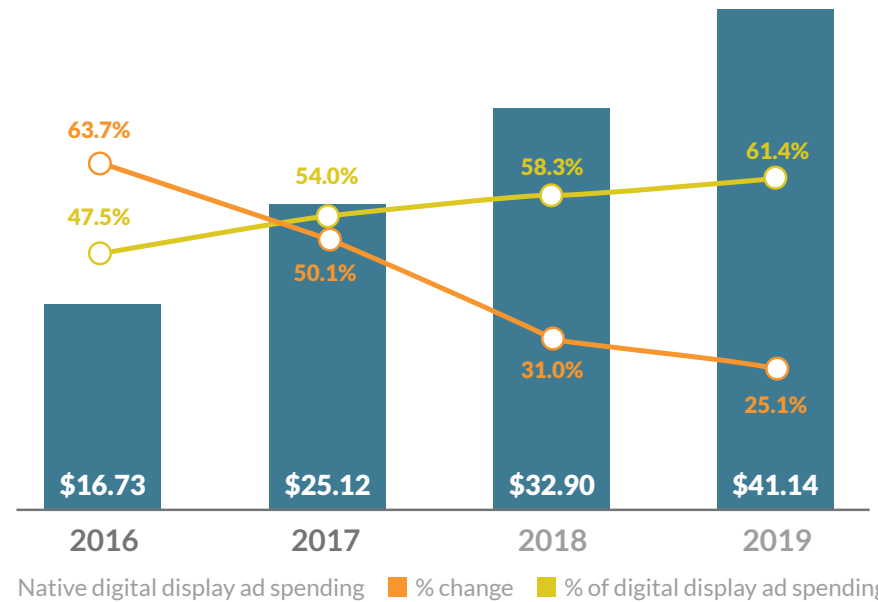
- Sponsored articles
- Banner ads

“Native advertising has been so well accepted by internet users because it feels natural to the readers. Compared with traditional banners and pop-up ads, native ads are much less disruptive and they don’t give the feeling that the page is cluttered.”

Graeme Donnelly, founder of professional business profile company Quality Formations

US NATIVE DIGITAL DISPLAY AD SPENDING, 2016-2019

Billions, % change and % of digital display ad spending



Push Notifications: The Evolution of Email

Push notifications emerged on the mobile platform with apps pushing real-time content to users' home screens. Now, that capability has also moved into the browser, allowing even publishers who can't or aren't ready to invest in their own app to leverage this same real-time connection with subscribers.

Like email, push is proven to drive engagement. In fact, according to [some sources](#) push notifications can drive higher open rates than email, [averaging over 90%](#). In many ways, push notifications are the next evolution in email, working extremely well for publishers for all the same reasons email does.

- **It's opt-in**, affording a higher level of subscriber trust and therefore a more valuable engagement and/or monetization opportunity.
- **It puts publishers in control of distribution and timing**, able to deliver content when it works best for engagement.
- **It's easily personalized and precisely targeted**, based on known subscriber data.

For subscribers, push is personalized, convenient and simple, which drives its appeal. "It's the perfect way to receive personalized, relevant content delivered just when subscribers want it most," says Joseph Tripp, CRO at Pushnami. One of the

leading providers of push engagement technology, Pushnami delivers over 65 million notifications per day over 3,000 enterprise-level websites. "Consumers expect personalization, and our machine learning algorithms enable clients to engage and delight subscribers with rich interactive content specifically targeted by their interest."

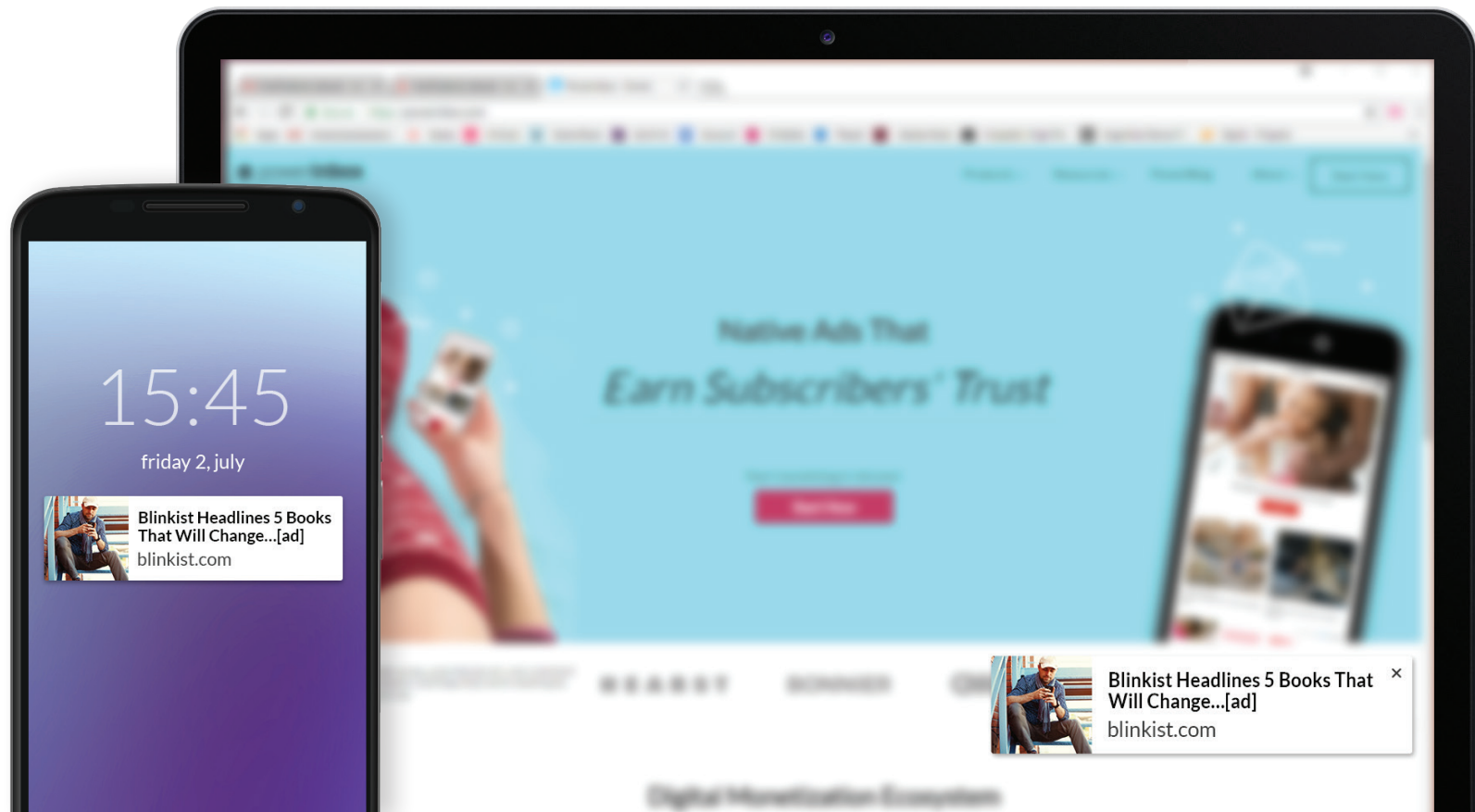
Push notifications have helped some companies drive opt-in rates as high as 60%, with an engagement level 3X higher than email, thanks to 100% deliverability at the next active user session. Plus, push notifications don't have to compete with other marketers—subscribers see only your notifications, instead of a flurry of other clutter.

For publishers, push notifications can not only engage traffic left behind by Facebook, but they're also ripe for monetization. By offering true 1-to1 engagement, with native ads delivered in both desktop and mobile notifications can deliver 100% audience impression monetization with precise ad targeting in a cross-channel solution, reaching subscribers on both web and mobile.

Through careful audience segmentation, scheduling and expiry management, and triggered campaigns, push notifications can provide an extremely valuable new revenue stream with a dual-impression monetization—first in the notification itself, and again on the website landing page—driving up to 25X ROI in just a few months through Pushnami.

“Our results with push ads has been phenomenal. It’s a powerful extra revenue source that is delivering well over double what we were hoping. We’re looking into ways to expand our use of this lucrative new monetization tool.”

Shaun Connell, ConservativeInstitute.org



Mobile News Readers: New Option to Capture Growing Audience

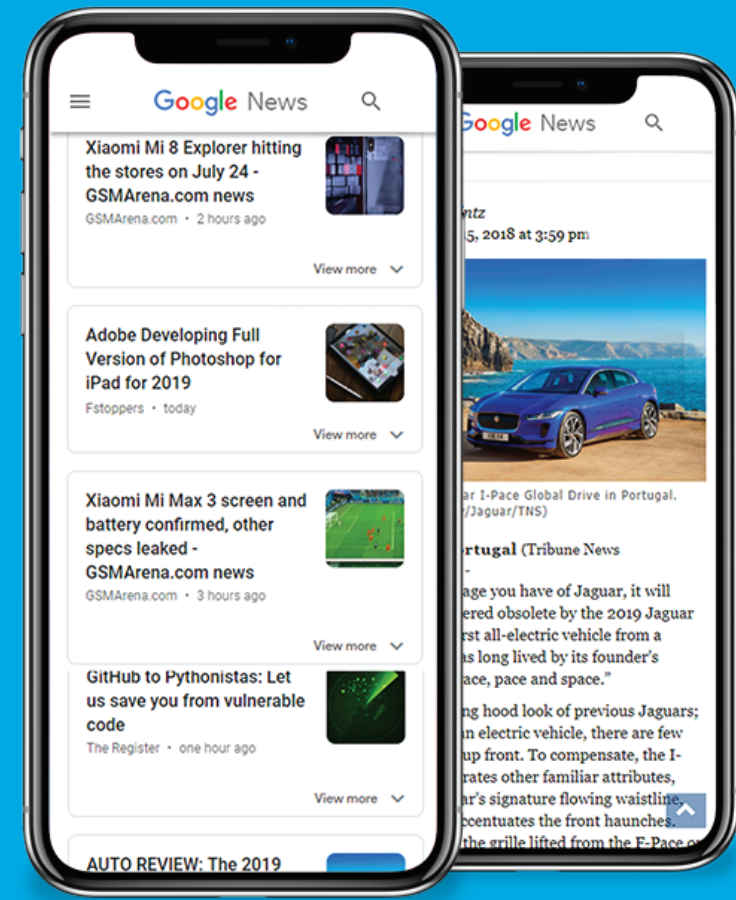
Mobile news consumption is growing fast: 85% of U.S. adults now consume news on a mobile device, up nearly 10% from last year. This provides a tremendous opportunity for publishers to take advantage of mobile news aggregators that deliver relevant stories to audiences in an easy-to-consume format.

Apple News and Google Play Newsstand are the bellwethers in the business, both boasting partnerships with virtually every major media company. Google's integrated recommendation system gets smarter with use, delivering more targeted stories based on users' consumption habits, and—in an unusually non-territorial move—the Google app is available for both Android and iOS.

While both platforms are free for publishers to integrate and deliver content through, it's a bit complicated and resource intensive, which may keep some smaller publishers from getting onboard.

But, the opportunity is ripe for integration and monetization. By delivering targeted sponsored content through mobile news aggregators, publishers can not only reach a massive new audience, but also deliver new impressions to their brand partners.

At the moment, it's a relatively untapped opportunity, partly because of the technical complexity of integrating native ads with news stories. But with the right partner, publishers can leverage this innovative approach over a relatively new channel to recoup the traffic and revenue lost from Facebook's fickle news feed.



Emerging Channel that Engages on Two Fronts

Live chat boxes have given publishers a highly effective, real-time channel to communicate with subscribers. Even with automated responders to handle the top-line queries, chat boxes give subscribers the feeling of a personalized, one-on-one interaction—exactly what they’re demanding.

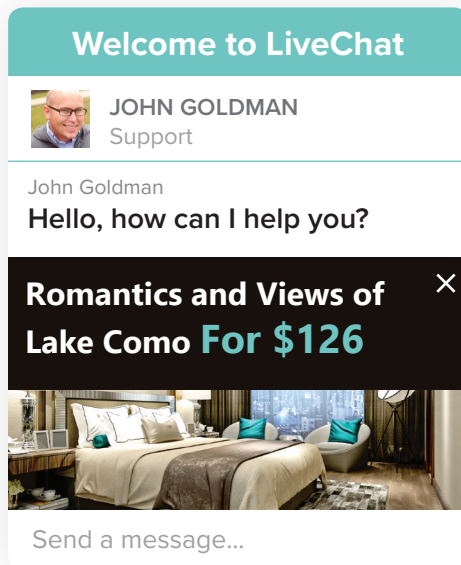
By leveraging this channel to distribute content, publishers can begin the conversation with subscribers and non-subscribers alike to drive engagement and monetization. Similar to push notifications and email, this strategy delivers relevant content to site visitors based on their known preferences and behavior.

For example, we’ve all seen the sales-driven chat boxes that pop up on business sites, asking if we need help or if we have

questions. Publishers can take this same approach with an automatic chat pop up that prompts visitors to check out relevant content. Add a monetization feature and this strategy becomes not only a way to engage audiences but also help advertiser partners to reach new audiences in a new, novel way.

And, because so many consumers are engaging on mobile, the content and sponsorships can be easily geo-targeted based on the site visitor’s location.

While this strategy is still very much new and emerging, it holds strong potential as audiences continue to look for those one-to-one, personalized interactions with the publishers they love and trust.





Email at the Center of it All

For years, publishers have struggled to deliver cross-channel personalization. The inability to match an email subscriber to his/her Facebook or Instagram account or visit to a YouTube channel has eluded the industry, making it impossible to reliably deliver the same relevant personalization across every channel.

Email has emerged as the unique unifying identifier for subscribers that allows publishers to achieve this cross-channel personalization. Because virtually every channel requires an email account to sign up, we now have the technology to recognize that address on each channel and aggregate user behavior across all channels into a deep, rich profile, all tied to the email address.

By using the email address to target content and ads across all channels, including new and emerging ones like push notifications, news readers and chat, publishers can deliver the one-to-one personalization subscribers expect. This precision relevancy also drives subscribers to take action, clicking and converting on advertisers' placements.

Together, these alternative channels can help publishers grow engagement, increase revenue and have much more control over their distribution and their destiny, even as Facebook shuts them out.

Getting started

As new platforms emerge to serve these new channels, managing it all can be complex, requiring publishers to become experts in not only the platform functions, but also in managing placements in multiple platforms.

This can be time-consuming and costly in personnel time, which can shut out smaller publishers who may not have the resources to take on the burden. Not to mention, the complexity of reporting and billing to advertisers adds another layer of administration that may be impossible for some publishers to bear.

Fortunately, there are solutions emerging that can aggregate this management, combining the ad placement, reporting and billing across multiple channels all into one dashboard, through partnerships with channel platform providers. Some even offer their own ad network, relieving publishers of the burden of direct sales, filling spots with targeted, high-quality ads from trusted brands—or supporting a combination of both to ensure unsold inventory is filled and monetization takes place across every channel.

These solutions provide a one-stop-shop for publishers looking to move away from their dependence on Facebook and an opportunity to grow traffic and revenue with a novel approach that demonstrates innovation and forward-thinking to audiences.

Get in touch today!

