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Advisory Board

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Introduction

Subscription websites are playing a huge part in modern publishing. In fact, some refer to them as the Holy Grail. And although subscription websites have been a significant website model for more than a decade, publishers are showing a renewed interest in marketing digital subscription products—a development that has been triggered by tangible signs of vigorous customer response. With 250 digital magazines premiering on the Apple iPad platform and several million iPads already sold, we're experiencing nothing short of a publishing revolution. And subscription websites are at its core.

Perhaps even more important, the iPad is successfully promoting the notion that premium content *costs money*. Consumers are responding by opening their online checkbooks—and not only on the iPad platform. Book, magazine, newspaper, and newsletter publishers are creating applications that will certainly drive reader demand for all the new eReader devices.

So consumer attitudes are changing, with millions of users acquiring digital reading devices and purchasing incalculable amounts of editorial content. Subscription websites are becoming the digital nexus for a universal subscription access that users are reaching through a variety of mediums and devices. And all this spells *o-p-p-o-r-t-u-n-i-t-y* for publishers.

So what is a subscription website? At its purest level, a subscription website is simply any site that withholds access to some or all of its content for registration; many also require payment for access to the primary user benefit—or the minimum information unit (MIU).

In the beginning, which really goes back only about 10-15 years, most publisher websites were developed as retail or transactional sites, with little content other than what was required to market subscriptions, books, videos, event tickets, and other products sold through an online store but delivered offline.

In the interim, that online publishing strategy has evolved to the point where the Mequoda System now recognizes 16 unique website models, of which nine are considered "subscription website" archetypes. Each subscription website model, whether paid or free, is designed to fulfill a discrete purpose.

A premium, or paid, subscription website is primarily used to generate revenue from paid subscribers. In order to access the content behind the firewall, the user must register and also purchase a subscription or membership. The fee may be one-time or for a certain period of time (hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or an annual subscription).

The Mequoda System identifies six premium (paid) subscription website archetypes:

- Newsletter
- Club
- Magazine
- Periodical
- Application
- Reference

An affinity, or free, subscription website has historically been used to build an audience. Today, this archetype is also used to anchor a subscription website. It requires user registration—generally an email address, along with a username and password—in order to access content behind the firewall. The site owner uses that contact information to build a database, often to create an email newsletter mailing list, and perhaps to establish an online community.

The Mequoda System identifies three affinity (free) subscription website archetypes:

- Blog
- Portal
- Social media

Subscription website users are typically seeking specific information from the publisher or access to a community of likeminded people with whom the user can then communicate. In fact, some of the most successful subscription websites depend upon user interactions to generate the vast majority of the site content. That encourages return visits to the website, which helps build an active community, add pages of content, and improve organic marketing efforts.

Publishers, on the other hand, are using subscription websites to acquire and retain an audience and/or sell products and generate ad revenue by providing valuable information and creating a community setting for the target audience.

Subscription websites are relatively expensive to build compared to other website models. If they are designed with user friendly, topic-based navigation and have a good content management system, they can become an excellent new source of revenue and profit. In order to succeed, however, a subscription website must meet the goals of both the publisher and the users.

In this report, we will expand on the definitions of, and differences among, each of the six premium and the three free subscription website archetypes identified in the Mequoda System, as well as two hybrid models, with examples of each.

The Nine Subscription Website Models

Quality content and easy site navigation are both crucial elements in successful subscription websites, since these models depend on user interest and buy-in; many subscription websites accept little or no advertising. A subscription website also requires a significant amount of content—perhaps a minimum of 5,000 to 8,000 pages at launch, depending on the depth of the topic and the nature of the minimum information unit (the basic building block for the website's information architecture).

Publishers customarily offer up to 15% of their overall content to unregistered visitors, with the remainder accessible only by subscribers. The decision on what and how much content to open to all and what is available only to registered users or paid subscribers depends on the publisher's strategy and the scope and intent of the website.

For example, the publisher of TheFool.com, a financial information site, has decided that news is free, but advice costs money. And WSJ.com, *The Wall St. Journal*'s website, puts about 15% of its content outside the firewall so people can find and use it before they bump into the 85% of content that requires payment.

When unregistered visitors arrive at a subscription website's firewall, they should be presented with conversion architecture with an offer to register and/or pay for access to the premium content. Registered users, of course, should be recognized or presented with architecture that allows them to log in and immediately access the premium information. Depending on the price and perceived value of the paid premium content, anywhere from one to five percent of the visitors will choose to become paid subscribers.

Six Premium (Paid) Subscription Website Archetypes

1. Newsletter

A newsletter subscription website archetype is set up to build subscriptions for a related print or digital newsletter and to provide access to issues of the newsletter.

A newsletter subscription website is commerce-based, with an overall objective of increasing product sales and providing customer service to existing subscribers. The MIU and the primary product sold through the website is a single issue of the newsletter. The website is organized by the newsletter's issue date.

A newsletter subscription website generally has a free area, with content that focuses on the benefits of becoming a subscriber to the related publication and conversion architecture where a visitor can purchase a subscription. It also has a password-protected private area, where paid subscribers can view an HTML version of the current issue of the print or digital newsletter or download it in PDF format, as well as access and/or download back issues and other premium content.

Newsletter publishers, particularly those on the B-to-B side but also those with consumer titles in the finance and health fields, were among the first to embrace subscription websites. Perhaps that's because the newsletter subscription website archetype is the easiest type of subscription website to build. The file size of newsletters is generally manageable, whether the newsletter is 8, 12, 16, 32, or more pages, since it is mostly text and often limited to black-and-white or two-color.

Fool.com and GolfOdyssey.com are benchmark websites for the newsletter subscription website archetype. Both require registration and payment for full access to the site.

Fool.com is a very robust website published by The Motley Fool, with hundreds of articles posted monthly and given away free. The Motley Fool also publishes seven print newsletters that each have a related subscriber-access-only newsletter subscription website, where nonsubscribers can purchase a newsletter subscription and subscribers can log in and download a PDF version. The primary organization of the content on the individual newsletter sites is issue-based. The newsletters are published monthly, but some of the other features (e.g., the user forum) are updated continuously.

GolfOdyssey.com serves subscribers of and promotes subscriptions to *Golf Odyssey*, a monthly, paid-circulation newsletter that is delivered to subscribers online. The newsletter covers golf destination information: where to play, where to stay, where to eat, and other activities in a particular location. Subscribers log into the website for full access to the content. Visitors arrive on a landing page with a sales letter and cannot access any of the content until they subscribe or, at the very least, take out a free trial subscription.

2. Club

A club subscription website archetype provides paid members with a library of information on a specific topic of interest or a cluster of topics and creates a community of individuals who share a common interest.

A club subscription website is user-driven and content-based. And unlike a newsletter subscription website, whose minimum information unit is an issue of the publication, a club subscription website is a destination in and of itself. Its business goal is to generate revenue from user-access fees by acquiring and retaining members; it accepts little or no advertising

Also unlike the newsletter model, the club subscription website archetype is a very complicated model. It may be structured as a pure-play site, which does not depend on a primary relationship to, or experience with, an online or offline product. Or it may be structured as a companion website, which does relate to an online or offline product.

Either way, members (subscribers) register and pay to access information that is organized by topic or to research information and find answers to a question. Some club subscription websites require payment by the donor; others require payment by the member.

People also join a club subscription website to connect with other people and build relationships. Possibly the quintessential example on the consumer side would be a dating website where the registered member—along with all the information shared through that

member's profiles, forum posts, file uploads, links, and other data—is the MIU and the source of content. On the B-to-B side, a good example is a job website, where employers and potential employees find each other and connect.

TheLadders.com, Match.com, and SSWUG.org are benchmark examples of the membership website archetype. All three require registration and payment for full access to the site.

TheLadders.com is a job search and career management website, where employers post job descriptions and registered job seekers post resumes. The purpose of the site is to bring appropriate employers and job candidates together. A basic membership is free; premium membership, which requires a fee, includes access to hand-screened jobs and a resume critique. Members can filter the information in the database by geography, job title, and industry sector in order to customize the search results. The publisher generates some information on the site, but users post the bulk of the content on the site. The website is updated constantly with new jobs and new resumes.


On Match.com, it's nearly impossible to browse the website without having a registration screen either pop up or block access to the page. Nearly all the content is behind a firewall. Match.com, of course, is a dating site—a service to assist single adults looking to meet each other online. All members must register by answering a comprehensive set

of questions requesting details about their personal lives, background, lifestyle, likes and dislikes, and so forth. Free members have limited access to the search options, whereas premium members who pay for their membership can perform as many searches as they like and can communicate directly with their "matches" via email.

SSWUG.org, a BtoB club subscription website, currently serves more than half a million registered database professionals—database developers and administrators—with the most current industry news and happenings available. Some free content is available to visitors and "registered guests," but most of the content—archived articles, videos, and a script library—is behind a firewall and reserved for paid members. The primary member benefit is the community forum, through which members share information and help each other solve problems. The site content is updated daily and organized by date. It is searchable by topic or keyword.
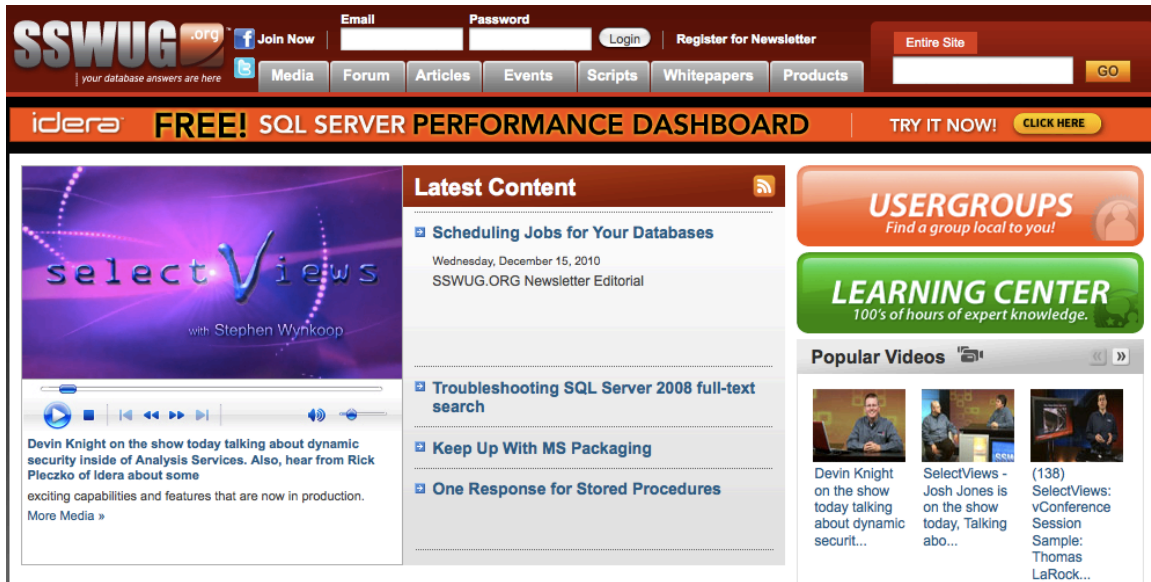
3. Periodical

A periodical subscription website archetype offers regularly updated news content that is intended to be consumed online, primarily in HTML, rather than downloaded.

A periodical subscription website is an on-demand reference source that is experienced randomly and selectively—a filing and retrieval system that allows users to quickly locate the information they seek. Every page of every article is tagged with keywords, topics, authors, and dates in order to facilitate successful content retrieval.

Periodical subscription websites may also be called news sites, online newspapers, online magazines, online newsletters, or online journals. The MIU is an individual news post, and the content is organized by date and keyword topic (category). Adding photos, audio, video, or other documents enriches the post.

WSJ.com and TheEconomist.com are benchmark sites for the periodical subscription website archetype. Both require registration and payment for full access to the site.

WSJ.com is, perhaps, the most impressive periodical subscription website success story. While the newspaper industry has generally adopted a free, advertising-supported, subscription website model—though still requiring registration—WSJ.com dug in its heels and, for more than a decade, has been a premium paid-subscription website. The content, or news cycle, on WSJ.com actually updates every 30 minutes, making it a high-frequency periodical. A new home page pops up on a very frequent basis.

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The Economist calls itself a newspaper, because each issue covers the week's business and political news and is available in most main cities of the world the day after it is printed; nevertheless, because it looks like one, most people still think of the printed publication as a magazine. Economist.com, the companion website, publishes all articles from the print edition and also has a searchable archive. Visitors may view five print edition articles for free on the website; to read more, they must subscribe. Access to the blogs, debates, audio, and video is also available to nonsubscribers, but users must register to post their views about the articles or comment on the blogs. Registration is free, and there's no obligation to subscribe to the magazine. Registered members can also sign up for free email letters and alerts. .

4. Application

An application subscription website archetype allows access to specialized online software (an "app") that allows users to input information, use calculators and/or search a proprietary database, and access results.

Application subscription websites combine user data and publisher data to provide added value for the subscriber. The software application(s) on an application subscription website—similar to standalone applications that a user might purchase and load onto a personal computer—is the MIU. And thanks to Apple, "app" has become a familiar word in and of itself.

Hoovers.com, for example, is a massive database of businesses that subscribers can search in depth and print out the profiles, if they wish. Other examples would be tax preparation websites such as TurboTax.com, where users can prepare their taxes and, for a fee, print out and submit tax forms. And there are any number of application service provider websites that allow subscribers to manage their stock portfolios, keep track of inventory, track and manage credit scores, or other activities that not only require the user to provide content but require the provider to interact with that content and provide added value.

Morningstar.com and the HR.BLR.com are benchmark sites for the application subscription website archetype. Both require registration and payment for full access to the site.

Morningstar.com, one of the early stars among the multitude of online investment information sites, has a well-articulated dividing line between its free and paid content. Interactive tools (applications) and alerts that are available only to premium (paid) members include Portfolio X-Ray, Portfolio Monitor, Personalized Analyst Research, Premium Stock & Fund Screeners, and Analyst Picks & Red Flags.

HR.BLR.com, one of five subscription-based websites published by BLR® (Business and Legal Resources) provides compliance and training tools for business professionals, including online-only applications such as Job Description Manager, Policy and Handbook Manager, Newsletter Wizard, and National Employee Attitude Survey. Visitors may view quite a bit of free content in the form of news articles and introductions to articles or topics of interest, as well as community forums. Access to the applications, however, is reserved for paid subscribers.

5. Magazine

A magazine subscription website archetype is set up to build subscriptions for a related print or digital magazine and to provide access to issues of the magazine.

A magazine website is only a magazine website if the user can view or download an issue of a magazine—one that is linear and periodic, has pages and a regular frequency, and can be viewed in HTML or downloaded as a PDF or stored in a CDF (Closed Document Format) format such as Texterity's Cover Leaf. The MIU of the magazine subscription website is a single issue of the publication.

Many people refer to any website that carries a legacy magazine brand and magazine content as a magazine subscription website; however, if the content is not organized in a magazine format and issues cannot be viewed or downloaded, it does not meet the basic criteria of being a magazine subscription website. It is, instead, a periodical subscription website.

Consumer magazine subscription websites are as diverse in both content and execution as the magazines they represent. Some offer robust content and interactive functionality; others are mere customer-service portals for the print or digital companion publication.

The magazine subscription website model is poised to explode, as Apple makes it clear to magazine publishers who offer an online digital version of their publications that their subscribers will be able to access it on an iPad. That means potential access to millions of additional subscribers if publishers simply offer an app that delivers a digital version of

the publication. At least a dozen other eReaders are also available, have been announced, or are under development. The numbers are staggering. The potential is enormous.

Smart magazine publishers understand that being printed on paper is not an essential characteristic of a magazine. Rather, a magazine's appeal is all about the user experience. Tablet computers do not diminish the user experience, because they don't diminish any of a magazine's unique qualities:

- A magazine is linear, with covers and a table of contents, arranged in a series of articles, and designed to be read from front to back.
- A magazine is finite with a beginning and an end.
- A magazine is periodic, with weekly, monthly, or quarterly issues.
- A magazine is cohesive; it has been edited and curated so that the most interesting and most relevant content is placed into context for the reader.
- A magazine is portable.
- A magazine is textural; its readers most enjoy the written word, so it's text first and photographs are ancillary.
- A magazine is collectible; people like to own and save magazines.

Publishers that have been waiting for the right time to go digital are now getting on board by creating magazine subscription websites. In fact, every magazine publisher should build a magazine subscription website that allows the user to purchase and download individual issues or a 12-month subscription. That will become the nexus for all the other platforms.

LEDsmagazine.com and Makezine.com are benchmark sites for the magazine subscription website archetype. Both require registration for full access to the site.

LEDs Magazine, published by Pennwell, is a bimonthly, controlled circulation information source for the LED (light-emitting diode) market. Qualified subscribers download their free issues of the magazine in PDF format, including the archives, from the website, LEDsmagazine.com. Visitors may access articles and other resources on the website.

Make, a quarterly consumer magazine published by O'Reilly Media, is targeted to do-it-yourself enthusiasts. On Makezine.com, visitors can subscribe to the magazine and subscribers can download a digital version of each issue published within the term of the subscription. "Premier Makers," which is available to subscribers who opt for automatic renewal, allows access to the archives of all previous issues.

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6. Reference

A reference subscription website archetype allows paid subscribers continued access to a library of content that is updated constantly with new information.

Reference subscription websites are the online replacement for printed reference books, print directories, catalogues, and loose-leaf binders that used to be updated quarterly or annually. For a reference subscription website, however, the flow of new and updated information is constant. The paid subscriber—and, for the BtoB audience, the subscription can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars—can search or browse through the library of data to access the information or listings and find answers to questions.

The MIU of a reference subscription website may be an article or a book, report, document, lesson, or episode. It could be something as small as a baseball card factoid or as comprehensive as a training video. While simple sites may rely solely on HTML and PDF files, more robust sites also incorporate still photos, audio, and video into the MIU.

ConsumerReports.com and Lynda.com are benchmark sites for the reference subscription website archetype. Both require registration and payment for full access to the site.

On ConsumerReports.com, the content is more equivalent to the *Consumer Reports Buying Guide*, which is a reference book that is published annually, than to the *Consumer Reports* magazine, where subscribers are looking for enlightenment on how to be a better

consumer. The website is a shopping resource with unbiased product ratings, reviews, specifications, comparisons, and buying advice about specific kinds of products.
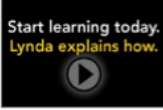

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Three Affinity (Free) Subscription Website Archetypes

1. Blog

A blog subscription website archetype blends publisher- and user-generated content that is updated frequently (daily, weekly, monthly) and consistently with articles posted by one or more authors and corresponding reader comments.

A blog subscription website is generally (but not always) a personal platform, the product of a single author with a particular interest in or point of view on a specific subject. The articles or essays are brief—ideally no more than a single page—and reflect the author's personality. Readers who register become part of a community and are welcome to post comments.

The tone of a blog is primarily op-ed style and often a first-person voice; the author of the blog post is generally writing opinion about what he or she feels, believes, or thinks about issues on which the blog focuses—politics, the environment, celebrities, marketing, finance, technology, etc. Many authors also use their personally branded blogs as a device to boost their own visibility and create ancillary opportunities such as book deals, speaking engagements, consulting clients, editorial work in other publications, and so forth.

Blogs have become ubiquitous primarily because, from an execution standpoint, anyone—serious journalists or experts in a particular domain, as well as those who are less serious or less expert—can simply download a copy of WordPress or sign up at BlogSpot.com and easily launch a single-author blog at virtually no cost other than their time. None of the historical requirements for launching a publication, whether print or digital, apply. Consequently, there are millions of blogs.

On the other hand, blogs have evolved into something much larger than personal soapboxes. Publishers and other businesses have increasingly incorporated blogs into their online strategies as a method of getting messages out quickly and publicly, introducing a new product, sharing company news and information, and announcing upcoming events.

Successful blogs have a topic-based navigation system that relies on topic pages, content tags, recency, and user ratings to help users find the information they seek. Appropriate information architecture allows users to find that content by browsing, which is the method used more than 80 percent of the time. Usability studies actually indicate that users who locate content by browsing rate the site as faster than users who resort to an internal search engine to find content. Further, users who successfully browse through content are six times more likely to make a purchase than users who search—which becomes important if the blogger is selling a book or other items.

DaringFireball.net, Vida y Salud, and HuffingtonPost.com are benchmark examples of blog websites.

John Gruber's blog site, DaringFireball.net, is the quintessential blog. It's a column written by a single author in a first-person voice, and it's only about what he believes or thinks about Apple technology and related subjects. He's pushing out affinity content to build his personal brand and create ancillary opportunities. The blog is a tool that provides revenue by selling exclusive weekly sponsorships, but it also creates visibility that generates revenue-producing opportunities such as book deals, columns for other publications, speaking fees, and consulting fees.

VidaySalud.com is a Spanish-language health-information website for consumers that is comprised of 18 topic-specific, sponsor-driven health blogs. Both original and syndicated content is added daily. With as many as 600 health topics and the need to refresh the content frequently, the company sought online partnerships with companies and organizations such as Clorox, Mayo Clinic, General Mills, Procter & Gamble, and the American Dental Association that provide opportunities for developing content, increasing distribution, and generating advertising and sales revenue.

2. Portal

A portal subscription website aggregates content from outside sources. Portals are intended to build and feed an audience; they are specifically designed for SEO, email marketing, list building, and lead generation.

A portal subscription website is the Mequoda System nexus for audience development. It's designed to attract search engine traffic and links from other websites and, basically, build a paid registration base. The target portal user is passionate about the special-interest topic or topics covered by the portal and may initially encounter the site through paid search-engine results, links from other websites, email passed along by a registered user, paid ads or earned mentions in other media, word of mouth, or any of several other sources of targeted website traffic

A portal site requires a stable of content providers that want to be associated with the portal. Often those people will want to be paid as contributing editors. Sometimes they'll write for the portal site for links back to their own blog sites; sometimes it will be syndicated content that has already been published elsewhere.

Then there are levels of portal breadth or sophistication. For example, Yahoo.com is a huge general-interest portal with dozens of subsections with information syndicated by other websites, magazines, newspapers, and other sources. It's clearly an aggregation play. However, most publishers interested in launching a portal subscription website are not looking to create anything remotely near the size of Yahoo.com. Rather, they tend to post bylined content derived from the publisher's own publications and other inside sources to supplement bits of relevant content pulled or syndicated from outside sources,

including contributors and other subscription websites. The outside sources may receive compensation from the publisher or may simply be looking to generate increased traffic through links back to their own websites.

A portal is also designed to maximize online advertising inventory. To do that, the most successful portals treat registered and unregistered users differently. For the unregistered user, a significant potion of the website page template is allocated to converting visitors into registered users. Once a user has registered, the portal morphs to display content that is personalized for the user. Personalized content enhances user satisfaction and increases page views and time spent—the key advertising conversion rates that drive website revenue for the many information marketers who use their advertising inventory to sell their own products. State-of-the-art portal subscription websites offer users email newsletters, blogs, email alerts and RSS feeds that are all designed to directly and indirectly generate more page views and website revenue.

So portal subscription websites generate value from both the users and the sponsors. Users pay—not with money (all website content is free) but with time and information. They spend time viewing web pages, emails and RSS feeds, thus creating advertising inventory that can be used to sell the publisher's products (internal advertising) and/or sold to third party sponsors (external advertising) on a CPM (cost per thousand), CPC (cost per click) or CPA (cost per action) basis.

Yahoo.com, Forbes.com, and InvestingDaily.com are benchmark examples of large, mid-size, and small portal websites, respectively. HuffingtonPost.com, which does not have a companion print product, has grown from small to large in a very short period of time and represents the dramatic change in the way readers prefer to get their news.

Yahoo.com is one of the largest web search and news portals—if not *the* largest portal—and provides access to email, news, shopping, web search, music, fantasy sports, and more than a dozen other online applications and services for consumers and businesses worldwide. The content is syndicated from outside sources but branded with the Yahoo! name (e.g., Yahoo! Autos, Yahoo! Movies, Yahoo! Horoscopes, Yahoo! Travel. The My Yahoo! function allows users to personalize their start pages and arrange modules that suit their interests. Revenue derives from advertising and sponsorships.
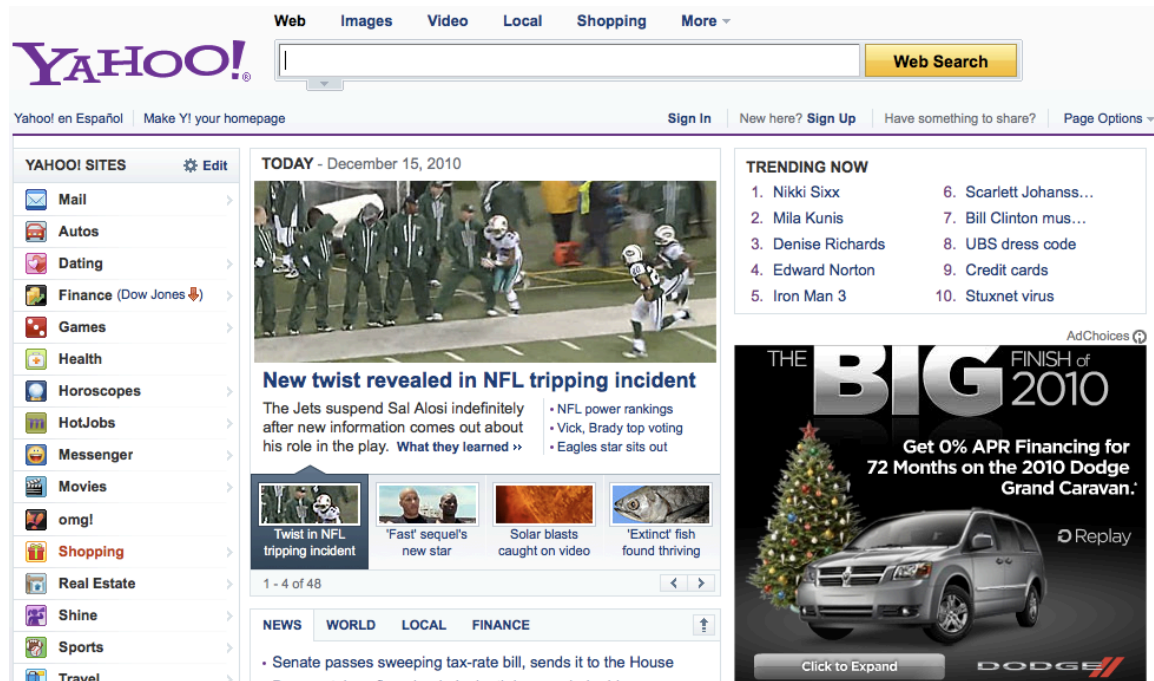
Forbes.com is a mid-size, very successful website portal that offers news analysis, stock updates, interactive tools and community, and real-time reporting for business executives and consumers alike. Forbes has picked its niche—business—and produces more than a thousand pages of content per day that is available to the user for free, making the website wide open to search engines. About 20 percent of the website content is produced by an online editorial team, including articles published in *Forbes* magazine, and the remaining 80 percent comes from other sources. The publisher understood early on that there is a market for interactive features that print simply cannot offer and that the website provides more opportunity for editorial capacity and marketing creativity than was available through the magazine. In fact, the magazine articles generate the least viewership on the website. At the same time, the website is the magazine's greatest source of new subscriptions.

InvestingDaily.com is a small portal that produces its own content but also pulls bylined content from other subscription websites in its own publishing family. The portal has a full-time editor who writes a branded ezine in a blog format, called "Stocks To Watch," and then supplements that with material from eight sister sites. The publisher's strategy is to use the website to build an email list and up-sell paid products, which include two legacy print newsletters and various online services. The site carries some display ads for its house products; the publisher is exploring monetizing the site with third-party ads as the number of registered users increase.

HuffingtonPost.com is a popular online news website that aggregates columns from a stable of bloggers—both staff writers and outside contributors—and articles from other sources on a multitude of topics. Started about six years ago by writer and pundit Adriana Huffington, "HuffPo" is currently one of the top 10 news websites. Visitors are looking for the blogger's opinions of the news and related articles; only registered users can post comments. Most of the home page lends itself to content browsing, which is ultimately the key task of the website. The opportunity to connect via social networks is also strong throughout the site, which leads to new and repeat visitors. Content is updated continually throughout the day. Revenue is advertisement-driven.

3. Social Network

A social network subscription website is a powerful networking tool that relies primarily on user-generated content.

Social network subscription websites are used to create a setting where people with similar interests can use the virtual world to make real connections—whether purely social relationships or specifically BtoB networks. It's the online version of meet and greet.

Social networking sites have a member-based navigation system that relies on member attributes to find the content (member) the user desires. The MIU is the individual, along with all the information that person or member decides to share via his or her member profile, forum posts, file uploads, links, and other data. Registration is typically required, and most social networks do not require payment.

To drive traffic, social networking sites rely on users to invite other users to join the network, as well as "buzz marketing" (word of mouth)—both virtually cost-free traffic sources. These sites can become very large very quickly, drawing millions of unique monthly users with little or no marketing spending. The low quality of the content,

however, results in very low revenue per thousand impressions—one of the two key metrics for websites that rely on external advertising sponsors for revenue generation.

There are three types of social networking sites:

1. *Profile-based sites (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook) sometimes have blogs as part of the profiles. Users become known by their profiles, their own blogs, and their comments on the blogs of other users.*

LinkedIn.com is a best-practice social network for B2B professionals to create new business opportunities and to support and produce contacts on a global scale. It is a networking platform that is used to start and maintain relationships—a sale for finding a new job, a new employee, supplier, partner, or expertise. As a social media strategy, LinkedIn can generate free, organic traffic to a website. Recently, this popular social networking site has attempted to incorporate more activity from businesses (and not just business professionals) by adding product and service recommendations to company pages.

2. *Community-based sites (e.g., Digg, Reddit) allow users to become noticed by posting links, voting on links, and making comments on links that other people have posted.*

Digg.com is a content-sharing site. Members can use Digg.com in two ways. They can submit articles to Digg.com every day manually or add a "digg this" button on their own website so that their readers can easily submit articles themselves. Submitting an article to Digg.com is like distributing an online press release. It drives a great amount of traffic to a member's website and offers inbound links that boost search engine optimization. Adding a button is a hands-off approach but still works very well for many publishers.

3. *Review/favorites-based sites (e.g., del.icio.us, Yelp) are often built around a search engine that is fed by bookmarks. Users post links as bookmarks for themselves and to share with others. They tag their bookmarks with keywords to help the search engine determine the relevance of particular links.*

Del.icio.us.com is a social bookmarking site that allows users to save their own bookmarks online, share their bookmarks with other people, and discover new and interesting sites that other people have bookmarked.

lcio.us
What you need, when you need it

Make this your homepage | Bookmark this page

Related Searches

Photo Sharing

Create Website

Help Desk Software

Anti Virus Software

Domain Name

Create A Web Site

Stock Trading

Online Bank

Build Website Online

Popular Categories

Travel	Finance	Home
Airline Tickets	Free Credit Report	Foreclosures
Hotels	Online Payment	Houses For Sale
Car Rental	Credit Card Application	Mortgage
Flights	Car Insurance	People Search
South Beach Hotels	Health Insurance	Real Estate Training

Search: [＿＿＿＿＿＿] (Search)

Hybrid subscription website models

Most "real-world" subscription websites combine two or more of the above archetype characteristics, whether free or paid, on a single interface to create successful hybrid subscription website models with expanded functionality. For example, a magazine publisher's website that allows the subscriber to read all the magazine articles in HTML and also download a digital issue of the magazine is really a periodical/magazine hybrid subscription website.

When done well, hybrid subscription websites leverage the mix of functionality to create user benefits that equal more than the sum of their various parts. In fact, we expect hybrid models to become much more common for magazine, newsletter, and even newspaper publishers due to the current eReader revolution and the growing interest in digital editions.

Basically, hybrid strategies fall into two broad categories:

1. *Centralized brand hybrid strategy—a publisher combines one or more premium subscription areas under one strong, centralized brand.*

WSJ.com has merged a free portal and a periodical subscription website to create a portal/periodical hybrid archetype. Nonsubscribers can enter through the portal and browse free content, read premium article blurbs, or sign up for a subscription.

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Paid subscribers to *The Wall Street Journal* can log in for full access to the premium content behind the firewall.

Visitors to WSJ.com can also access any of 15 separate websites that comprise *The Wall Street Journal* Digital Network by clicking on a tab at the top of the home page.

PON.Harvard.edu is the blog/portal/newsletter hybrid website published by Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. It offers an abundance of free content and free reports, plus a plethora of paid products that include newsletters and events. Pages on the site have been designed for maximum search engine visibility, as well as to maximize the conversion of website visitors into email subscribers. In particular, a daily blog increases website traffic and page views. The "Research at PON" portal brings together all PON research projects on one page; each project link brings users to a unique website satellite with associated information and articles related to the project. And subscribers to *Negotiation*, a monthly newsletter, can download their monthly issues.

2. *Website network hybrid strategy—a publisher combines several decentralized or independent brands into one website network.*

Investing Daily is a portal/newsletter hybrid archetype with InvestingDaily.com serving as the hub surrounded by ten paid product satellite sites. Each of the paid sites acts as an independent brand, although the Investing Daily umbrella brand is growing more prominent. Six of the paid products have a related free e-letter, and InvestingDaily.com publishes two additional free e-letters. The e-letter articles plus the 12-month old paid articles serve as the primary InvestingDaily.com content.

All SEO and email-conversion efforts are focused on the hub, InvestingDaily.com. As traffic arrives at InvestingDaily.com, it is ultimately pushed via links and email out to the most relevant paid product satellite sites.

Interweave Press's KnittingDaily.com website takes this strategy a step or two further by creating a periodical/blog/portal/community hybrid. KnittingDaily.com pulls content from the three knitting and crochet magazines among the 16 unique subscription magazines for art and craft enthusiasts and approximately 30 special issues that Interweave publishes each year. Site visitors can purchase subscriptions or individual copies of the various magazines (the periodical archetype), find knitting tips and news on any of several blogs (the blog archetype), join a community (the social network archetype), and access patterns and other relevant content drawn from various sources within the Interweave family, as well as from outside authors (the portal archetype).

5 Components of Successful Subscription Websites

These aspects will help your subscription website grow an audience and remain relevant to those consumers

Although there are different types of subscription websites, certain components belong in each of the separate archetypes to assure the correct result from the subscription website.

Now that subscription websites are turning into the core of online publishing companies, it's important to create a subscription website that resonates with your target audience. It has to be filled with a great deal of valuable content that is updated regularly, and it has to show its reputability on the subject matter.

There's no point in having a subscription if no one bothers to subscribe to it. The following components are necessary to the success of subscription websites.

Five components of subscription websites

Subscription website component #1: Strategic Intent: Website users are typically looking for information that interests them or an answer to a question that plagues them. Publishers on the other hand are strategically looking to sell products, generate ad revenue or build an email marketing list while supplying their target audience with valuable information.

To succeed in strategic intent, a website must meet the goals of both the publisher and the user.

Subscription website component #2: Email Capture: An email capture is the first step in building a relationship with your audience members. Offering free access to a website or a free product in exchange for an email address is a typical practice online publishers engage in.

Websites that aggressively offer email captures typically build email marketing lists quicker than websites that don't offer, or hide, their email capture forms.

Subscription website component #3: Community Building: Some of the most successful websites let their users generate the vast majority of their content. User generated content encourages users to continuously come back to the website. It also helps the website in organic marketing as it typically builds pages for each post generated by a user. An excess of community members also shows new

visitors how active the community base is.

Websites that clearly engage their audience members and ask them to be active end up being the most successful subscription websites.

Subscription website component #4: Readability: Your print publication communicates with your audience through organized, uncluttered means; A successful subscription website should do the same. A good use of images, white-space and font size will help your website achieve a strong sense of readability. Keep these components in mind while developing mobile websites and apps as well.

Subscription website component #5: Content Freshness: One of the most desirable aspects of a subscription website is when the user gets what they pay for, and more. Continuously adding fresh content to a subscription website will encourage users to keep their subscription active. If a website does not have updated content it will likely bore visitors and drive them to a competitor. Furthermore, updated content means more repeat traffic to a website. Adding content daily is a good idea; adding fresh content hourly is an even better idea.

Subscription websites are playing a huge part in modern publishing. It's becoming the digital nexus for a universal subscription access that users can get through a variety of mediums and devices. Now is the time to put some serious consideration into developing a subscription website.

10 Tips for Building an Effective Subscription Website

The goal of an effective subscription website is to serve both pre-login (free) visitors and active (paid) subscribers. If a subscription website meets that goal, it is built and operating correctly. Phil Ash, publisher of InvestingDaily.com and Business ManagementDaily.com suggests the following 10 steps when developing new subscription websites:

1. Determine the site purpose. An effective website can only be developed by clearly understanding the specific purpose of the site.

2. Find an example site. Check competing websites or sites with products that appeal to a similar audience for site design ideas and for features or elements to avoid.

3. Use a website wireframe. A website wireframe is a basic visual guide for the site structure and relationship of the pages that is used as a working model to define navigation, ensure design consistency, and structure user interactions.

4. Develop taxonomy. Taxonomy, or the site's hierarchical structure, focuses on the information included within the website and how its used throughout the site. Correct taxonomy development is especially important if the site offers downloadable products.

5. Build the Site. Once the above aspects are finalized, building the site may begin.

6. Monitor quality assurance. Systematic monitoring of the website will help determine whether the site fulfills its intended purpose, errors are discovered and eliminated, and users are able to navigate smoothly and effectively through the content.

7. Perform a usability study. This evaluation technique of the real user experience helps find any problematic areas within the website.

8. Make final edits and launch. Always have a "separate set of eyes" review the website content and the navigational elements prior to launch.

9. Get audience feedback. A subscriber survey is an inexpensive way to identify the effectiveness of the website and areas for improvement, as well as to gather new and innovative ideas.

10. Review performance data. Take into account all test results and audience survey responses and make appropriate adjustments.

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