

RENOVATING THE PAYWALL

Ever since magazine brands have been putting content online, publishers have been looking for ways to make money from it. One such attempt—paywalls, where the audience must pay to access online content—would seem to have failed. The online audience, publishers argue, want content for free and will simply click elsewhere, making paywalls a no-go.

But according to Bill Mickey, editorial director for *Folio*, the Norwalk, CT-based brand serving American magazine publishing professionals, things aren't so clear cut. "There are pockets of success," says Mickey, "and it really depends on the content mix, the audience and how the publisher and the brand are packaging the material in a way that makes sense for the audience."

Here are some of Mickey's insights on making digital content pay.

CONSIDER YOUR CONTENT AND CONTEXT

B2B publications are generally more successful than consumer publications at making audiences pay. "In a B2B model, you have content that is inherently more valuable to the audience," Mickey explains. "When it's good, it helps them do their jobs better or be more successful at what they do." That is not to say that all consumer publications are left out in the pay-for-content cold. "On the consumer side, it would be more in the niche world where it's an enthusiast publication," he says. "It's almost instructional and inspirational in its approach to content."

IT'S NOT ALL OR NOTHING

American publishers are experimenting with different pay models that are more reminiscent of subscriptions than paywalls. "They're playing with different **content bundles** where they might include print, web and tablet, for example, or even wrap in events," he says. "So it's almost camouflaging the paid element for the digital side where a paywall is right in your face to access digital content."

Taking that a step further, many publishers are finding success with [tiered subscription models](#), charging prices for different product mixes. "So you might pay one price for a print subscription along with digital web site access and tablet," says Mickey. "You might pay a little less for just online access and tablet, and you might pay a lot more for digital, print, tablet and discounts to an event."

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Sure, you can probably rhyme off circ numbers and key demographics about your overall readership, but Mickey encourages to also look at segments of your audience and their interests, needs and passions. "Maybe there is a certain segment of your audience that values certain parts of your content offering more than the rest of it," he says. "So that could be an opportunity to set up a mini-paywall for one content vertical within your broader market coverage."

MEASURE, BUNDLE, REPURPOSE, SPIN—FOR A PRICE

You've probably had this experience: you're checking a story online on a newspaper's web site and get a message telling you that you've used up your 10 free stories for the month. Access to the story you want is going to cost you. That [metered paywall](#), says Mickey, can work really well for publishers who produce a high volume of content. "But," he cautions, "many publishers are putting up just three to five stories a day, so there isn't a high enough volume that might justify the metered model."

But depending on what content you have—and what format it's in—there are other options. For example:

- **Video:** "A publisher might have a really good video library that has really high engagement and is unique in their market," says Mickey. "That could justify a paywall or some sort of paid model"
- **Archives:** "If you have many decades of content that you've made available in a digital format, that [content] can really work well behind a paywall," says Mickey. "You could come up with different packages where you could track a theme over the course of a few decades." Then it's a matter of repackaging your that material and selling it as a **stand-alone package**.

 [DOWNLOAD MORE HOTSHEETS AT magazinescanada.ca/cultural/hotsheets](https://magazinescanada.ca/cultural/hotsheets)



NOT JUST FOR THE BIG GUYS

Even very small publishers can benefit by customizing paywall lessons to suit their businesses and budgets. Mickey suggests small publishers work with their fulfillment companies to create a **registration wall**: readers don't have to pay to access content, but they do have to enter basic demographic information, such as name, email address and age, for instance—much the way they do with [contests](#). “That would provide the publisher with more details about who their digital audience is,” says Mickey, “which could be monetized later through more targeted advertising.” It's also a way to find out if a segment of their audience is interested in a specific area of content. “They could come up with a **new product** that serves that market segment,” says Mickey.

THE BOTTOM LINE ON PAYWALLS?

While they aren't the blanket solution many had hoped they'd be, paywalls are at least worth looking at if you have a solid understanding of your market, audience and content. Says Mickey: “There are situations where you can implement some form of digital paywall or tiered subscription model.” It's up to individual publishers to determine what strategy fits their content.

 [DOWNLOAD MORE HOTSHEETS AT magazinescanada.ca/cultural/hotsheets](https://magazinescanada.ca/cultural/hotsheets)

