

# TOOLS AND PLUG-INS TO MAKE WEB CONTENT HYPER-RELEVANT

Increasingly, publishers are having to show not just that they can attract clicks on their website but to prove real *engagement*: that readers spend a significant amount of time with an article, that they come back on a regular basis, and that they read several pieces in one visit.

There's no substitute for high-quality writing, but let's assume you've already got that down. The next problem has come to be known as "discovery" — the process of making sure that website visitors actually know about all the great stuff you have to offer.

There are two rules for improving discovery and getting that coveted second click, but many methods of achieving them.

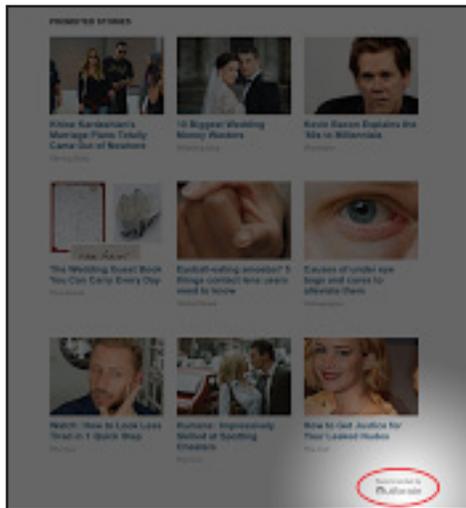
The first rule is: if someone is reading something they love on your site, the best way to keep them around is to suggest more on the same topic. Reading about cat bowties? Here are 10 more articles about cat fashion.

The second rule is: people love knowing what's popular, and what others are enjoying. We're social animals, and we flock together. So when a lot of people are reading, sharing and enjoying something on your site, other visitors want to know about it—even if it's nothing like what they're looking at now.

If you can show people more of the same, or your most popular stuff, you're more likely to keep them around. Here are some easy tools that can help you keep your visitors engaged and happy on your website—and coming back again and again.

## [Outbrain](#)

Outbrain provides a "recommendation widget" for online publishers. You've probably seen one today already. Look for it at the end of online articles:



That grid of images and headlines is often Outbrain. Often it's three or four tiles; NYMag.com dials it all the way up to nine. Publishers choose it for three reasons:

1. It can be integrated into a site fairly easily by copying and pasting a small snippet of code.
2. It "just works" — The widget automatically starts recommending related and popular content with minimal configuration.
3. Outbrain says publishers should expect 4–10% rise in pageviews with its widget enabled.

Outbrain is able to provide its base service for free because of its business model: the widget recommends content from your own site, but in many cases Outbrain sells a tile or two to advertisers who want to drive traffic to their own sites. It's possible, however, to turn this "sponsored content" off and recommend only your own articles. Canadian publishers should do this; the sponsored links tend to be of the dubious "one weird trick" variety. And Outbrain's revenue-sharing scheme on those ads only kicks in if you have 10 million pageviews from within the U.S. per month.

As alternatives, check out Taboola and Contextly, both of which provide very similar functionality.

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## [Facebook](#)

Facebook's recommendation widget has an advantage over some of the other types because it will show your website visitors if their Facebook friends have already read and liked or shared articles on your site. (If none of their friends have liked anything on your site, the widget will merely show the number of people who have.) Any tool noted here can point the way to `_popular_ content`; only Facebook can show visitors endorsements from their friends and colleagues.

This widget is relatively quick and easy to install, although you will have to set up a "Facebook App" to use it (which is really just Facebook's way of identifying your website with an ID number). From there it's a simple job to cut-and-paste the snippet of code into your site. Be aware this widget offers very few customization options; it's always going to look the way Facebook wants it to look.

## [AddThis](#)

For a long time, AddThis was known for providing share buttons that allowed people to Tweet, Like, Pin, or share web pages through dozens of other social networks. Starting this year it's added recommended content widgets as well.

AddThis offers a free tier of service with more elaborate related content options if you pay \$99 a year. It's cheap and relatively easy to integrate into your site—like the others, it requires you to copy-and-paste small code snippets into your site. But once it's integrated, it offers some easy customization options and a wide variety of different widgets. For instance, it offers a widget that looks a lot like Outbrain's, but it also has variants like the "Toaster" — a box that pops up at the bottom of the screen when you get to the end of the article.

AddThis only recently got into this space, but it has three things going for it: a more attractive, ad-free design sensibility; its widgets are strongly focused on being smartphone- and tablet-friendly; and since it's a paid product, its business model is built around you, not its advertisers.

## [YARPP](#)

You want total control? Then "Yet Another Related Posts Plugin" might be for you. Since YARPP is an open-source Wordpress plugin, everything about it can be customized—if you know how to do so. And since all the code and all the functionality stays on your site, none of your data—or your readers' data—is being shared with a third party. Its design is also totally customizable, and carries no branding, unlike some of the other options here. It's also begun offering a paid "Pro" package that provides some extra functionality and Outbrain-like ad units.

The free version of YARPP works very well out-of-the-box, but needs some configuration to really sing. Since it bases a lot of its assumptions about what's "related" on your site based on the way you've already tagged your content, it can be pretty approximate if you haven't been diligent and consistent in your tagging. And it's Wordpress-only, so if you're on another CMS, you'll need to keep looking.



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