Consumers are used to finding information on the internet for free. But is there a way to use paywalls and pay meters for a good effect?

Tony Silber from Folio.com led a panel at MCMA's March education meeting about subscription revenue and how to move beyond the idea of relying entirely on driving organic or social traffic and making money off ads.

Panelists included:

- **Shahzad Abbas, Define Media Group**

- **Jay Kirsch, ALM Media**

- **Beth Ulman, NPS Media Group**

- **Jalaine Johnson, Hearst.**

The assumption is that there's not enough readership to go around to justify paywalls, but there are ways to move forward and get premium content to work for you.

DOWNSIDES OF PAYWALLS

It's true that paywalls can create barriers to readership. Requiring visitors to pay in order to access content can turn them off, and it can reduce the traffic to your website.

However, regardless of whether you use a paywall or not, you still need quality content. Being able to provide useful content is necessary.

Additionally, while a subscription or pay-per-article arrangement might turn some readers off, the good news is that there isn't punishment from Google for having a paywall in place. With the right code, Google can still crawl it, even though consumers have to pay.

> *Publishers have not had an organic search hit from the implementation. … Google gives you the tools to do that without being penalized.*
>
> *— Shahzad Abbas*

You can alternatively use a metering system, in which non-paying visitors can read a set amount of articles for free. Once they reach their limit, though, they need to pay to access other content.

If you decide to implement a paywall, make sure you do it right. Double-check Google guidance to implement it correctly so you aren't penalized for adding subscriptions or premium content.

IMPLEMENTING A SUCCESSFUL PAYWALL

In order to implement a successful paywall, it's important to understand the audience and which content is appropriate for premium. There are different models for implementing paywalls or metering:

- Subscription to get most content

- Offer a lot of free content, but then offer premium content (videos, tutorials, in-depth reports) for a subscription

- Allow a limited number of free articles each month and only provide snippets once the limit has been reached — unless someone pays

- "Rope off" certain content, such as from a certain author or for a certain part of the website

- Special paid sections for professionals

- Metered not through paying money, but simply by requesting registration to collect emails for a list

Understand the content model and what does brand stands for at a high level. Some brands give, and others are based around providing premium information.

> **"[We need to be] able to offer more value to our members as they subscribe."**
>
> — *Jalaine Johnson*

It's possible to combine strategies based on what visitors need. Understand why people visit your website and create a content strategy that meets the different needs of consumers.

The key is providing the kind of experience that your visitors want. It takes some tinkering to see what works best. There's still a demand for free content, but some consumers recognize that premium content is worth paying for.

Finally, with the right paywall implementation, it's possible to improve your quality leads. Members or subscribers are more likely to take action, and using premium content as part of the funnel can be a useful way to complement ads and search visitors.
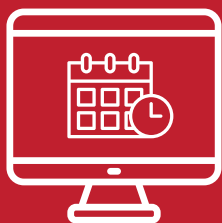
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