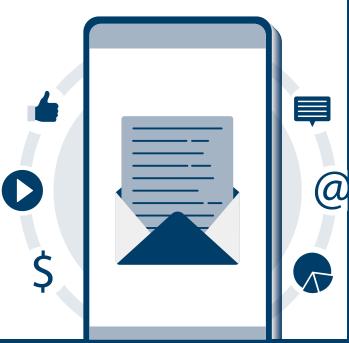






ACCELERATING DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION TRANSFORMATION

SEPTEMBER 2019





FTI Consulting has developed the Digital Subscriptions Playbook in conjunction with the Google News Initiative and Local Media Association to build a framework for accelerating publishers' digital subscription transformations. In this playbook, we will try to answer five key questions that we believe are critical to a successful transformation.



Why should it be my top priority?



What is the revenue opportunity?



How does my publication's current state compare?



How do I start making progress?



How do I know I'm on the right path?

DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS AS MY TOP PRIORITY

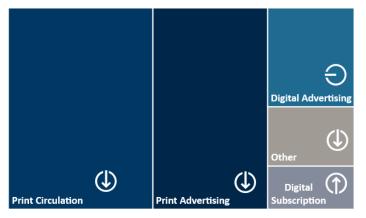
EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

Digital subscriptions should be the single most important priority for every local news publisher today. In examining the revenue mix of a representative selection of newspaper publishers, FTI found that **while digital subscriptions contribute just 3%** of total revenue, the **two-year compound annual growth rate ("CAGR")** of digital subscription revenue exceeded 60%. All other revenue categories were **relatively flat or had significant declines.**

UNSUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL WITHOUT DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Digital subscriptions offer a significant growth opportunity essential to offsetting declines in print-oriented revenue streams. Print advertising continues to experience double-digit secular declines. Recent print circulation revenue gains are projected to shift to declines as price increases, which have offset volume declines in recent years, begin to plateau. We believe that a sustainable newspaper business model must aggressively embrace digital subscriptions.

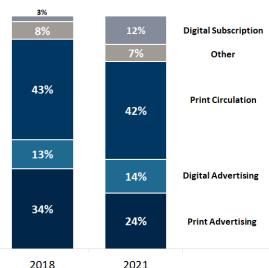
Exhibit 1: News Publishing Industry Revenue Mix and Growth Trends



CHANGING REVENUE MIX

Meanwhile, digital advertising revenue has been a challenging area for publishers to find meaningful growth. FTI found that digital advertising revenue trends have ranged from double-digit declines to single-digit growth for a select group of newspaper publishers. Strategies to grow and optimize digital advertising revenue should remain a publisher focus; however, significant competitive challenges remain, and digital advertising alone cannot support the future business model.

Exhibit 2: Forecasted Change in Revenue Mix: 2018 to 2021

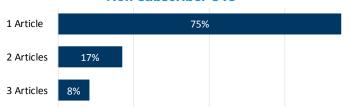


Forecasted revenue mix is based on historical three-year CAGR for digital subscriptions and FTI's view of revenue outlook for all other segments.

TRADE-OFF BETWEEN ADVERTISING VS. CONSUMER REVENUE

From paywall mechanics to organizational investment and priorities, publishers are constantly faced with operational decisions to evaluate the strategic prioritization of digital advertising vs. consumer revenue models. Analyzing visitor behavior patterns can frame those choices and help publishers better understand trade-offs. For example, consider the decision on whether to tighten a paywall from three articles to two. Using article count distribution for nonsubscriber unique visitors (UVs), we can see the potential impact that tightening a paywall might have on visitor traffic and page views (see Exhibit 3 below). From there, we can use data around advertising revenue per page view and paid stop conversion rates to determine whether the trade-off will be worthwhile (see Table 1 below).

Exhibit 3: Article Count Distribution of Non-subscriber UVs



Source: Sample Data

WILL DIGITAL SUBSCRIBER REVENUE SIGNIFICANTLY OFFSET DIGITAL ADVERTISING LOSS?

In tightening a paywall meter from three to two, the article-count distribution shows us that 8% of unique visitors would be impacted (see Exhibit 3 at left). Using an average paid stop conversion rate* and annual ARPU** of \$96, we can estimate the incremental annualized subscription revenue impact of \$19,200 per month during which the meter change is in effect. To estimate the potential offset of lost advertising revenue, we multiply advertising revenue per page view by the number of lost page views (see Table 1 below).



This trade-off analysis based on FTI benchmark data indicates that, in this select data set, tightening the meter would result in a net economic benefit. While the underlying metrics may vary, publishers should use frameworks like the one below to better understand strategic revenue priorities and tradeoffs.

Table 1: Trade-off Example: Analysis of Paywall Meter Tightening

Monthly Unique Visitors	1,000,000	(A)
Percentage of UVs Affected by Paywall Change	8%	(B)
UVs Impacted	80,000	$(C) = (A) \times (B)$
Paid Stop Conversion Rate	0.25%	(D)
Number of Subs Added per Month	200	$(E) = (C) \times (D)$
Annual Revenue of Sub with ARPU of \$8/month	\$96.00	(F)
Annual Subscription Revenue Impact	\$19,200	$(G) = (E) \times (F)$
Page Views Lost (1 per UV)	80,000	(C)
Advertising Revenue Per PV	\$0.050	(H)
Advertising Revenue Lost	\$4,000	$(J) = (C) \times (H)$
Net Revenue Benefit of Tightening Paywall	\$15,200	(G - J)

^{*}Paid stop conversion rate: Paywall conversions/Paywall unique visitors.

^{**} ARPU: Average revenue per user.

DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS REVENUE OPPORTUNITY

MARKET OPPORTUNITY: INFORMING INVESTMENT AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

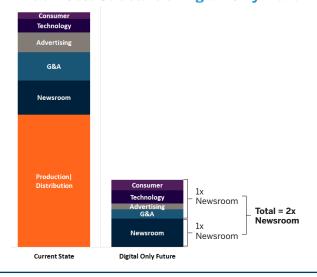
Capital allocation and organizational investment decisions require understanding of both the total market opportunity and the cost structure of a digital subscriptions business. While a digital-only future presents opportunities to reduce cost structure, growing digital subscriptions

requires investment in the form of marketing/data and analytics/technology personnel, technology systems, and content creation. Understanding the digital subscription revenue potential for your local market is critical to making the business case for increased investment.

NEWSROOM COST AS PROXY FOR REQUIRED REVENUE

One common framework that publishers can use to estimate the digital subscription revenue required to achieve long-term sustainability is the multiple of cost required to operate the newsroom. The rationale for connecting the cost structure to newsroom expense is that local publishers are inherently journalism businesses that will still need to cover content creation, distribution and marketing expenses in a digital-only world. The chart below measures the incremental expenses (G&A, ad sales costs, technology, marketing) that are likely required to operate a digital-only publication. Accordingly, **FTI recommends considering a multiple of the newsroom budget, such as 2x or greater,** to better gauge the feasibility of digital subscription revenue fueling long-term sustainability and profitability.

Exhibit 4: Cost Structure of Digital-Only Model



ESTIMATING REVENUE OPPORTUNITY THROUGH MARKET BENCHMARKING

A bottoms-up approach to estimating a publisher's digital subscription revenue potential uses local market size and industry-based benchmarks to gauge opportunity.



In-Market Households x UVs Per HH x Subscriber Penetration x ARPU = Digital Sub Revenue

Using in-market households at the foundational level will determine local market potential, while the benchmark range encompasses influential factors, such as out-of-market appeal, pricing power and relative market size (see Exhibit 5 below).

Exhibit 5: **Benchmarks to Estimate Revenue Opportunity**

Metric	Benchmark Range	What Does It Measure?
In-Market Households (MSA and CSA)	Market- Dependent	Market- Specific Audience Potential
Monthly Unique Visitors In-Market Households	3.0x-5.0x	Unique Visitor Opportunity
Digital-Only Subs Monthly Unique Visitors	2.0% – 4.0%	Digital Subscription Penetration of Audience
Annual Digital Subs Rev. Digital-Only Subs	\$120 - \$200	Average Effective Rate per Digital Subscriber

MARKET SIZING: ACCOUNTING FOR MARKET-SPECIFIC FACTORS

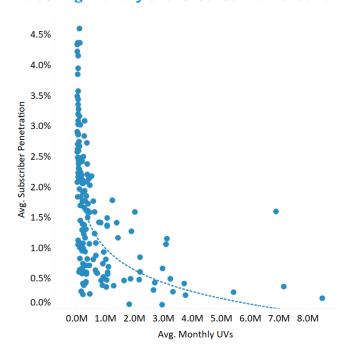
Specific market factors will influence which end of the benchmark range to use (see Table 2 below). For example, large markets tend to realize higher unique visitors per household, as these markets can drive more out-of-market traffic. However, smaller local markets can often achieve higher subscriber penetration rates that may be driven by a more locally focused audience and reduced competition (see Exhibit 6 below).

The subscriber penetration calculations reflect a point-in-time or cumulative metric; thus, more mature digital publishers would see higher penetration rates. The final market-specific nuance to anchor revenue projections relates to market-adjusting ARPU based on median household income compared to national averages.

Table 2: Example: Market-Sizing
Calculation

Metric	Small	Large
In-Market households	250,000	2,000,000
Unique Visitors per household	4.0x	5.0x
Avg. Monthly Unique Visitors	1,000,000	10,000,000
Subscriber Penetration	4.0%	2.0%
Digital Subscribers	40,000	200,00
ARPU	\$150	\$250
Revenue Opportunity	\$6 million	\$50 million

Exhibit 6: Avg. Monthly UVs vs. Subscriber Penetration



*Chart above does NOT include national publishers.

Source: FTI Industry data

DETERMINING MY CURRENT STATE

KEY ENABLERS OF DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION SUCCESS

The foundational elements to build a successful subscription business can be segmented into people, process and technology. People refers to individual skillsets and capabilities that may be applied to growing digital subscriptions; process encompasses the frameworks and disciplined approaches used to ensure constant progress toward subscriptions growth; and technology

is the centerpiece of user experience, product, customer relationship management, and data and analytics capabilities. The table below summarizes FTI's view of the foundational people, process and technology elements required to implement strategies, refine tactics and sustainably grow digital subscription businesses.



People

- Executive Strategic Prioritization
- Consumer Marketing Proficiency
- Newsroom/Editorial Digital Focus
- Product/CX Capabilities
- IT/Engineering Expertise



Process

- Cross-functional Coordination
- QA/Market Testing
- Resource Allocation
- Product Development
- A/B Testing Willingness to Experiment
- Corporate and Local Resource Sharing
- Align around North Star Metrics



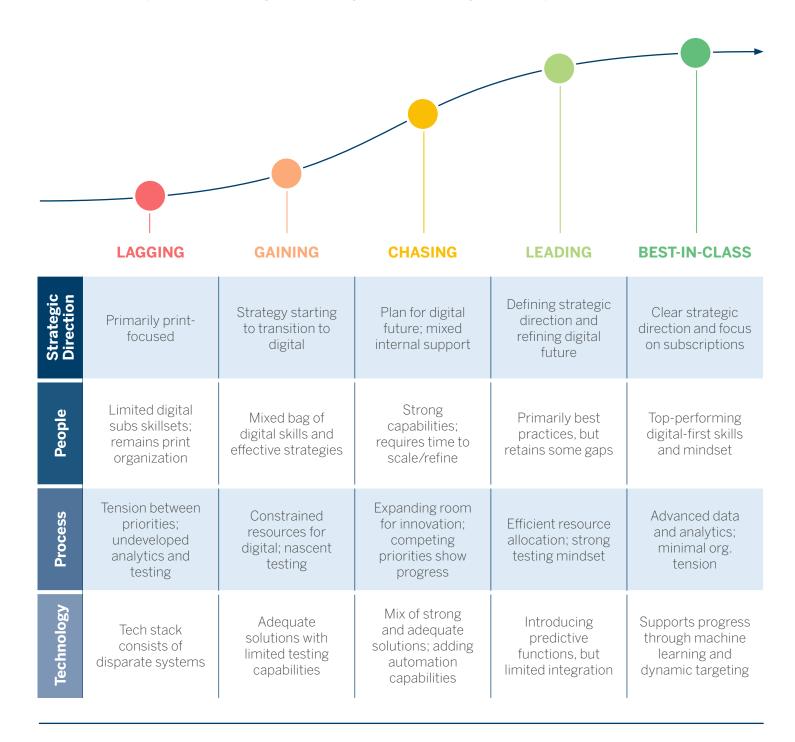
Technology

- User Registration/Identity
 Management
- Content Management
- Subscription Management and Payment Platforms
- Paywall Platform
- Testing Toolkit
- Marketing Technology
- Data and Analytics

MATURITY CURVE

While most daily local publishers have developed a digital subscription product, significant gaps exist in organizational commitment to digital subscriptions, leading to sharply inconsistent levels of success. The digital subscription maturity curve groups publishers into one of five stages, with more mature publishers exhibiting a clear strategic

direction, prioritization, and commitment to investing in the fundamentals of people, processes and technology. Improving maturity requires clear executive strategic focus on digital subscriptions and resolving tensions of organizational commitment between print/digital and advertising/consumer priorities.



TRACKING PERFORMANCE ACROSS THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

While the foundational elements enables the building of digital subscriptions, a quantitative approach can best measure success. With the vast amount of data available, it can be overwhelming to prioritize the metrics to track. To ensure comprehensive understanding of the customer lifecycle, FTI recommends connecting metrics to important steps along the customer journey. Similar to the conversion

funnel, the customer journey follows a linear progression from total audience to existing subscribers, with the goal to move a maximum number of users down the funnel. Charting progress on metrics and measuring the effects of tactical changes help guide the organization in understanding which areas are performing well and which need additional support to further digital subscription goals.

	Metric	Target
Audience Penetration	UVs per Household	3.0x – 5.0x
Visit Frequency/ Site Depth	Visits per UV Article Count Distribution Page Speed	2.0+/Month Varies by Paywall D: 50+/M: 25+ ¹
Registration	% of "Known" UVs Emails per UV Unique Click/Open Rate	5% + 5% + 30%+/10%+
Purchase Intent	Payflow Efficiency	75% +
Paid Subscriber Conversion	Meter Stop Rate Paid Stop Conversion Rate Starts/New Sub Growth per UV	5% - 7% 0.5% + 0.1%/0.08%
Monetization/ Engagement	Effective ARPU Digital Revenue per UV Digital Activation Rate	\$10 - \$15/Month Market Dependent 75% +
Retention	Monthly Churn	< 3%

¹ Based on Google's Page Speed Insights: https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/. Please see Appendix: Benchmarking Glossary on Page 16.

MAKING PROGRESS

SHORT- AND LONG-TERM TRANSFORMATION ROADMAPS

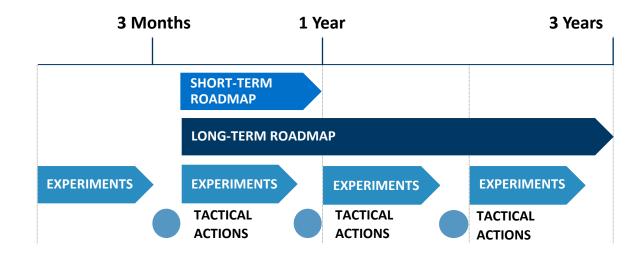
After assessing the current state of digital subscription maturity and identifying gaps in performance, publishers need to prioritize where to focus attention and resources. FTI recommends classifying and prioritizing improvement opportunities into short- and long-term roadmaps:

- The **short-term roadmap** includes smaller, more incremental changes with immediate impact. These opportunities can be tested over a one- to three-month period through experiments and rolled out over one year.
 - Ex: Adjusting the number of free articles and duration allowed under the meter
- The **long-term roadmap** includes larger opportunities that require material organizational resources and time to

implement. These opportunities are realized over a one-to three-year horizon.

 Ex: Adding dynamic targeting and personalized content locking to the meter

To successfully embark on both roadmaps, publishers should develop a culture of experimentation, with a bias toward action. Long-term roadmaps should include one or more North Star metrics with a specific performance/timeline to focus the organization. Whether the North Star metric is broad, such as the monthly starts total, or more operational, such as emails captured, embedding this mindset ensures all decisions are ultimately made by asking, "Does this bring us closer to our North Star metric goals?"



DEVELOPING A TESTING MINDSET

Digital subscriptions facilitate an environment in which changes to the product, CX, marketing, pricing, etc., can be effectively tested and evaluated. The goal of embedding an experimentation mindset is to develop hypotheses, organize disciplined tests, and develop insights that can be utilized to grow or improve the digital subscription business. FTI recommends segmenting the design of the experiment into three phases to add organizational rigor to the process. Additional best practices involve designating a portion of traffic as a "sandbox" to test before expanding to a wider audience, and tracking experiment "batting average" to measure success across a series of experiments. The exhibit below illustrates a sample experiment, a 30-day onboarding email campaign, designed to improve engagement and retention of new subscribers.

PHASES

Planning and Implementation:

- What's The Objective?
- Who Is Involved?
- What Are The Key Considerations/Potential Consequences?

Execution and Testing:

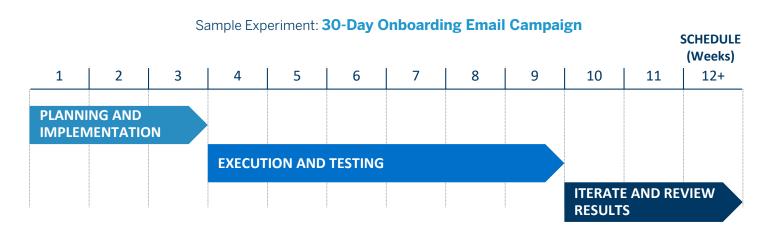
- How Do We Execute?

ITERATE AND REVIEW RESULTS

- Who Is The Test Group?

Iterate and Review Results:

- How Do We Measure Success?



PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

What's the Objective?

 Build visit frequency and engagement habits with newly converted subscribers to increase long-term retention

Who Is Involved?

- Newsroom
- Product/UX
- Subscription Marketing/Design

Considerations:

- Unsubscribe rates
- Duplicative prompts for newsletters and app downloads

How Do We Execute?

- Create standardized onboarding email campaign with the following communications:
- Day 1: Welcome and confirmation $\,$
- Day 5: Newsletter signup
- Day 10: Download the native app $\,$
- Day 20: Onsite nurture
- Day 30: Follow-up newsletter signup

Who Is The Test Group?

- All new digital-only and full-access subscribers
- Run for 6 weeks

EXECUTION AND TESTING

How Do We Measure Success?

- Compare the following metrics before and after implementation:
- Monthly churn rates [stops/ subscribers]
- Retention rates [at 4, 8, 12, 16 weeks]

MENU OF EXPERIMENTS

The following page provides a list of tactical experiments that can be plugged into the testing framework to drive improvement across various roadmap items.

RECOMMENDED ROADMAP ITEMS AND TACTICAL EXPERIMENTS SHOULD INCLUDE:

	Roadmap Items	Tactical Experiments	
Audience Penetration	– Audience Optimization – Content Distribution	– Free Trial Offers – Define Ideal Customer Journey	Paid-Site Article Recirculation Options on Free SiteMobile-Friendly Platforms (AMP, FBIA)
Visit Frequency/ Site Depth	User EngagementCustomer ExperiencePage Speed	 Mobile/Desktop Push Alerts (Sign-ups, Content, Frequency, Timing) Article Recirculation (Inline, Up Next, Top Stories, Right- Hand Side) 	 Content Widgets (Recommendations, Models, Toasters) Sticky Widgets Segmented Experiences (Device, Geography, Referral)
Registration	Lead Generation/Email CaptureRegistrationNewsletter	 Unlock with Email Hard/Soft Registration Wall Time-Based Registration First Article Newsletter Model Additional Newsletter Options 	Inline/Home Page Newsletter AssetsSubscriber-Only NewslettersPersonalized Newsletters
Purchase Intent	Checkout Flow OptimizationValue Proposition FramingPricing	Payment/Log-in GatewaysReduce Data EntryIncrease Page SpeedEliminate Scrolling/Additional Pages	Email Capture FirstOffer PresentationPrice Framing/AnchoringExit Intent Promo Offers
Paid Subscriber Conversion	– Pay Model– Content Verticals– Product Offerings	 Meter Setting (Articles/ Duration) Close Paywall Exclusions Individual Month vs. Calendar Month vs. Rolling 30 Days Hybrid/Premium Hardwall Print Content 	 Segmented Meter (Geography, Referral Source, Propensity to Subscribe) Native App Edition-Based Products Paid Newsletters
Monetization/ Engagement	– Pricing Strategy– ARPU– Membership	Intro Offers/Seasonal PromotionsQuicker Step-up to Full RateTest Higher Price Point	Two vs. Three Price TiersIncrease Rate on Existing SubsNewsroom Access/Events/ Members-Only Content
Retention	– Retention	– 30-, 60-, 90-Day Email Onboarding Campaign – Involuntary Churn Optimization	Subscriber-Only NewsletterLikelihood to Churn Modeling (with Targeted Marketing)

GETTING ON THE RIGHT PATH

LEVERAGING DASHBOARDS TO TRACK PERFORMANCE OVER TIME

Dashboards are an effective way to track progress against benchmarks over time and visualize the performance of KPIs. Certain metrics, such as meter stop rate or paid stop conversion rate, lend themselves to regular monitoring, while other milestone metrics, such as subscriber penetration, should be viewed periodically to track progress toward goals.



BEST PRACTICE

Effectively tracking digital subscription performance often requires compiling data from disparate analytics, subscriptions, emails and financial systems. Build an integrated dashboard with a prioritized set of metrics that incorporates this data into one single place, even if that means starting small, possibly with a spreadsheet report.

INSIGHTS FROM GNI SUBSCRIPTIONS LAB

The GNI Subscriptions Lab frames seven fundamental themes to accelerate growth and drive success.

1	Strategic Direction	Set a vision for the future sustainable model and frame decisions around that vision.
2	Organization Alignment	Optimize resource alignment around newsroom, product, marketing and tech.
3	Print/Digital	Clarify priorities between print and digital subscriber acquisition. Focus on digital engagement of full-access subscribers.
4	CX/Value Proposition	Improve customer experience: page speed, ad experience, calls-to-action, checkout flow, confirmation emails.
5	Digital Audience Management	Build the funnel and nurture the audience through newsletters, registration, recirculation and personalization.
6	Marketing Engine	Allocate resources to highest ROI channels, test pricing/offer positions, and use segment-based marketing tactics.
7	Data/Tech Stack	Understand/leverage tech stack capabilities. Focus data strategy on tracking the customer journey.

CONCLUSION

Executing a comprehensive business model transformation is a significant challenge that is often exacerbated by competing priorities in a resource-constrained environment. However, getting started — and doing so quickly — is critical to successfully completing the transition.

TO BEGIN THE TRANSFORMATION, PUBLISHERS MUST:



Commit fully to a digital transformation strategy.

Framing the long-term business model (including print segments) and developing the business case are the first steps towards transformation.



Resolve the print/digital and advertising/consumer trade-offs.

Setting strategic priorities and investing resources in people, process, and technology can accelerate growth. Clear strategic direction must be set from the top to unlock the transformation potential.



Track progress with a key set of metrics.

Map the outcome of each customer journey, calculate benchmarks, identify areas for improvement, and track progress over time.



Embed a bias toward action and an experimentation mindset.

Develop hypotheses, design tests, measure results, and adjust tactics accordingly.



Formalize planning with short- and long-term roadmaps.

Track progress against these roadmaps and refine them based on experiment findings and additional hypotheses.

APPENDIX: BENCHMARKING GLOSSARY

All traffic, conversion, and newsletter metrics referenced in the following formulas are calculated on a monthly basis (visits, unique visitors, starts, stops, sends, unique opens, unique clicks).

Unique Visitors Per Household

Monthly Churn

*In-Market Households calculated using Metropolitan Statistical Area or Combined Statistical Area.

*Monthly Churn is calculated using the digital-only subscriber total at the beginning of the month.

Visit Frequency

Meter Stop Rate

Unique Visitors

% "Known" **Unique Visitors**

*Paywall refers to the mechanism for restricting non-subscriber access to content, often in the form of a modal, interstitial, or inline wall. Paywalls are commonly set at specific monthly article thresholds and present the user with a subscription offer.

*"Known" Unique Visitors include print subscribers, digital-only subscribers, registered users, and email capture visitors.

Paid Stop **Conversion Rate**

Article Count Distribution — percentage of unique visitors (including both subscribers and non-subscribers) that read one article per month, two articles, three articles, etc. This can be tracked for subscribers, non-subscribers. or combined.

Payflow Efficiency

Unique Visitors Start Payflow

Digital Activation Rate

Digitally Activated Print Subscribers Total Print Subscribers

*Payflow refers to the web portal(s) through which non-subscribers purchase subscriptions; these typically include subscription selection, personal info capture, and billing info capture.

*Digitally Activated indicates print subscribers that have successfully created digital accounts and linked their existing print subscription.

Starts Per _	Digital-Only Starts	Unique Click- Through Rate	Unique Newsletter Click-Throughs
Unique Visitor =	Unique Visitors		Newsletter Sends
Net Subscribers Per Unique Visitor	(Digital-Only Starts) – (Digital-Only Stops) Unique Visitors	Effective Average Revenue Per User (ARPU)	Digital-Only Consumer Revenue Digital-Only Subscribers
Emails Per = Unique Visitor =	Email Database Size Unique Visitors	Digital Revenue = Per UV	(Digital-Only Consumer Revenue) + (Digital Ad Revenue) Unique Visitors
Unique Open Rate	Unique Newsletter Opens Newsletter Sends	Subscriber Penetration	Digital-Only Subscribers Unique Visitors

^{*}Subscriber Penetration is a cumulative metric which reflects the number of total digital-only subscribers at a specific point in time.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ken Harding

Global Publishing Lead Senior Managing Director FTI Consulting

Pete Doucette

Managing Director FTI Consulting

Justin Eisenband

Senior Director FTI Consulting

John DeFriest

Senior Consultant FTI Consulting

SPONSORS

Ben Monnie

Director of Global Partnerships Solutions, News Google

Nikhil Joshi

Global Strategy & Operations Lead Google

PARTNERS

Nancy Lane

President Local Media Association

Jed Williams

Chief Strategy Officer Local Media Association



About FTI Consulting

FTI Consulting is an independent global business advisory firm dedicated to helping organizations manage change, mitigate risk and resolve disputes: financial, legal, operational, political & regulatory, reputational and transactional. FTI Consulting professionals, located in all major business centers throughout the world, work closely with clients to anticipate, illuminate and overcome complex business challenges and opportunities. For more information, visit www.fticonsulting.com and connect with us on Twitter (@FTIConsulting), Facebook and LinkedIn.

The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and not necessarily the views of FTI Consulting, Inc., its management, its subsidiaries, its affiliates, or its other professionals.

About GNI

The Google News Initiative is a global \$300 million initiative to work with the news industry to help journalism thrive in the digital age.

About LMA

The LMA is a non-profit trade association representing more than 2,800 U.S. media companies.