



Data Promotes Change and Is Great for Business

How data about soccer fans inspired a 252-year-old publisher's pivot to personalization

NORDJYSKEMEDIER

Regional powerhouse NORDJYSKE Medier (NM) is a 252-year-old newspaper company with deep roots in print journalism. Thanks to its virtual monopoly in northern Jutland in Denmark, its print subscriber base has little churn and regional advertising revenue is steady. So when the company re-launched its digital presence in 2009, no one expected it to become a major revenue stream.

But about five years ago, after years of declining print subscriptions, the company realized its digital media properties had to earn their keep. Digital advertising provided modest results, but to get their model right, they would need more data and a new technology platform. Since then, they've estab-

lished a data-fluent newsroom, a two-stream revenue model and uncovered key data that revealed several valuable segments, among them an unexpected one—soccer fans.

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Jesper Johansen

Online Marketing Manager, NORDJYSKE Medier



No free lunches. Well, not anymore.

Like many news sites, NM's launched largely unmonetized. "Back then, we just deployed most of our news for free and nobody knew it would grow to be a revenue channel to be reckoned with," said online marketing manager Jesper Johansen. Direct sellers didn't speak the language of digital media, so the company allied itself with programmatic ad exchanges that delivered modest results.

But when print subs started to decline, that free online content started to look very much like a free lunch. To understand who among their readers would pay for content, and what they would pay for, NM needed data. It engaged Cxense to deploy analytics and personalization tools that could uncover who was reading their stories and which behavior and categories drove consumption.



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That important first step led to a far-reaching discovery: 15 percent of their site visitors were driving 65 percent of their page views. To build a successful subscription business, the company would have to design an experience tailored to its core audience. "Ever since that day, we have been fanatically driven to secure loyal readers. We're not out there 'just' building reach. We would much rather build engagement," Johansen said.

The company began by moving a quarter of its content behind a freemium paywall, then started test-

ing ways to move readers down the funnel from fly-by to frequent readers, then to subscribers. Cxense Conversion Engine provided the data and flexibility that allowed the company to see which appeals worked best. After more than a year of testing and learning, they have the tools they need to create a personalized experience that resonates with their core readers and ensures continuous growth.

Today, the company has moved approximately 70 percent of its content behind a paywall. And the number of digital subscribers has grown by more than 50 percent. As their test and learn cycle continues, the business model and paywall strategy will continue to evolve.

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"Because we had firsthand contact with the data scientists and developers at Cxense, we could really get an in-depth understanding of how to get value out of personalization," Johansen said. "Working with Cxense has been an eye-opener. We have learned so much."

Tailored messages drive subscription revenue

In 2014, when Aalborg's soccer team AaB won the national championship, the newsroom delivered scores of headlines about the team and its victory. Not surprisingly, the content scored with soccer fans but fell mostly flat with readers uninterested in sport.

"A lot of people are just not interested in soccer," said Johansen. The observation led the company to a new subscription tactic, personalizing subscription offers and messages based on a segment's topic of interest. Soccer fans, for example, were more likely to subscribe when prompted to keep on top of every match. "Many of them are die-hard fans.

They are far less interested in other parts of our paid content." Messages and offers for other verticals, like business, travel, and more, are now crafted to address those readers' passions.

Next, NM plans to move beyond its freemium paywall to a dynamic paywall that segments customers based on behavior and interest and sells to them accordingly. "We have no problem giving you sport articles for free if we know that you are not interested in sport," he said. "On the other hand, if you have a high interest in cars, then we ask you to pay for all our self-created car content."

NORDJYSKE Medier's success in numbers

Digital subscriptions grown by **50%**

Additional inventory worth **6 digits** released

CTR increased by **300%** on average

Data promotes real change

Since integrating Cxense solutions, NORDJYSKE Medier has transformed not just its editorial and subscriptions, but also its advertising operations. This is an important part of the company's strategy to solidify and balance their two-stream revenue model of subscription and advertising revenues. To start, journalists that thought print-first have expanded their cross-media approach. Cxense data gives the team a better understanding of which content drives conversions, data also that plays a role in deciding which content is gated and which is available gratis.

Secondly, to mitigate the decline in page views that comes with any paywall, advertising is now more strategically deployed to increase quality and effectiveness for advertisers. NM qualifies users by segment then targets ads accordingly. "We now have a lot of structured first-party data, so we can get pretty close to who is interested in, say, a car, their potential buying intent, and also which car or class of car they are interested in," he said. The tactic has increased click-through rates by 300 percent on average.

Finally, Cxense has allowed NORDJYSKE Medier to identify its most valuable inventory, ensuring that house ads aren't siphoning off large chunks of revenue. "When advertising for own initiatives, we usually used our own platform to market the various things we did. This, of course, took a huge chunk of programmatic advertising in periods. Cxense helped us identify inventory worth six digits that can be released back into the market." The company is now able to serve those ads in a targeted way and gets top dollar for its inventory.

"Cxense has grown to become the heart of our architecture today. They really understand and support the journey that we are on," Johansen said. "Conversion Engine has had a very positive impact on our organization. It has removed a lot of bottlenecks from our day-to-day operations and made our decision-making quicker and more agile."

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