

Paywall Resistance Softens When Content Is Right

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Users more likely to pay for entertainment-focused content

Most consumers expect free access to all forms of digital content, but April 2012 findings from DigiCareers suggest they are not as adverse to paywalls as once thought. And not all types of content are created equal when it comes to consumers opening their wallets for access.

Though just over half of US digital media professionals (52%) said they immediately leave a site after encountering a paywall, a significant portion (42%) took the time to research pricing and make a purchase decision, signifying a solid opportunity for publishers to convert casual visitors into paying customers.

Though paywalls scared away over half of all respondents, the data showed just 25% of US digital media professionals developed a negative brand perception after encountering this type of barrier to entry.

That number surely depends on where in the site experience a user encounters a paywall. The vast majority of respondents (90%) expected some free access to content prior to meeting a paywall—most likely because respondents expected to see a critical sampling of a site’s material before deciding if entering the paywall was worth the cost.

Publishers whose site monetization relies on a combination of advertising and paid subscriptions should note a good portion (38%) of respondents were not averse to finding ads behind a paywall.

Though the survey did not expand on that sentiment, the amount of ads encountered beyond the paywall, the intrusiveness of such ads and the message relevancy to the viewer are likely factors in how paying subscribers react to ads.

Entertainment-focused content such as movies, music and magazines were purchased by the greatest number of US digital media professionals. In fact, 47% of respondents paid for movies, 36% for digital magazine access and 35% for music. In contrast, just 13% paid for news and newspapers, a likely byproduct of widespread access to free news and information across a plethora of portals, hyperlocal sites, blogs, social networks and other webpages.

Findings from a March 2012 study conducted by global management consultant company Accenture offered insight into what online video viewers worldwide were willing to open their wallets for: 35% were willing to pay more for higher-quality video content and the same percentage said they would pay more for reduced advertising. Access to premium content—such as new or popular movie releases—was also a draw for 32% of respondents.

That just 28% of respondents were unwilling to pay more for content signals a growing acceptance that entertainment-driven digital content such as movies and music may sometimes have to be purchased. Whether such expectations will trickle down to other digital content such as news, sports or career-based information remains to be seen.

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