



THE INFORMATION TRUST EXCHANGE

**Trust, identity, personalization,
content and user sharing for the news industry**

**TASK GROUP ON
CONTENT DESCRIPTION, TAGGING, SHARING AND SELLING**

MEETING,

Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2015
8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. / ROOM 346
Univ. of Oregon Turnbull Center,
750 NW Couch St., Portland, Oregon

[THE AGENDA \(link\)](#)

Participants: Bill Buzenberg, Jeb Bladine, Ryan Cavis, Brad Degraf, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, Kelly Leach, Linda Miller, Graf Mouen, Babara Palsler, Christian Panson, Greg Swanson, Mizell Stewart, Bill Densmore <http://newshare.com/portland/bios-portland.pdf>) In accordance with application of the Chatham House Rule, speakers are not identified.

**SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS:
PROTOTYPE FEATURES**

(notes by Bill Densmore)

In Portland, participants spent about a third of the day sharing perceptions of the current environment, about a third of the day define elements of a minimum-viable proof-of-concept demonstration, and the last third on some details how content and user data might be shared – and paid for.

By agreement of those present, we observed the Chatham House Rule, in which all participants agree not to identify speakers outside of the room except with the speaker’s explicit permission.

Let me sum up what I see as a publisher/participant value proposition: It’s ITE members as brokers of trusted relationships, along with the recommendation engine, creates a situation where I as a user give up more information so I get a customized and targeted menu of news and information and I’m doing this willingly because I value my time. I don’t want to wade through a whole bunch of stuff that’s not of interest . . . I want you [the publisher] to have that information on people in your community. A profile that goes deeper and asks people about critical community issues – the idea that you can customize that profile to your market to use that as a tool for your newsroom by asking pertinent questions in that process.

-- One participant’s summary

Key points made at the opening:

- Get beyond siloed audiences
- Discover quality content
- Respect legacy silos
- How to monetize public-media content
- There is strength in numbers – working together
- Trust and loyalty are the bottom line
- How to hire enough engineers for a seamless experience
- Need a scalable platform

Participants collaborated well on defining elements of a proof-of-concept or minimum-viable-product (MVP) test of an ITE-compatible news-personalization service. They decided it would source at least 200 curated feeds of topical content, would show the ability to create, using significant and ongoing user input, parameters of a user profile that is controlled by the user. The testing should show the ability for curatorial intervention by editors with services that can be configured across geography and topic.

Consensus on most attributes, but now how to demonstrate payment

At Portland, some discussion centered on methods to enable direct user payments for content (subscriptions, per-click, royalty pools, etc.) There was no consensus on what should be demonstrated in a pilot. One participant argued direct payments “would not scale” and an alternative would be a shared royalty pool based on usage.

Another participant said this would not work because publishers would not agree on the relative value of their works. A third participant suggested focusing in prototyping not on a specific business model but on the user value proposition. A fourth participant asserted: “You need a pay environment otherwise it is not a test of anything. This is a test of a system of high enough value that people will pay.”

The Portland meeting highlighted the need for more work to develop consensus on how any ITE-sanctioned networks would facilitate pricing of content. Prototype efforts will need to demonstrate flexibility to enable a variety of approaches to pricing – subscription, per click, free, priced by the presenter or by the producer.

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There was significant consensus on other attributes. We reviewed 14 potential requirements for a proof-of-concept demonstration / pilot. After each statement, the group’s consensus reply is in *italics and underlined*.

POTENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

- 1) User-created and updated profiles of preferences, interests and demographics
Include ability to create sub accounts or sub profiles within a household on one payment account with individual user accounts.
- 2) Ability to match dynamically-specified buyer interests with colleagues, family or friends.
Yes
- 3) Ability to selectively share your interests with colleagues, family or friends.
Not important to the prototype, later in the product.

- 4) Discovery service focused on quality, trusted content, uniformly tagged/identified.
Critical to include in proof-of-concept.
- 5) Allows content owners (publishers) to track and control access to their work.
Yes, need to know where it is showing up. Need some control in start, these are the rules. Usage rules for content.
- 6) Allows each content owner to price their own content for varied uses.
You need it but you could build it as an analytics engine, don't do anything about pricing yet. I think you need it in prototype. Content owners will make a distinction. Engineer into design but not needed in trial. Wave hands.
- 7) Allows sale of content on a per-click or subscription basis.
There was not consensus here. See discussion below.
- 8) Allows user to be rewarded for viewing sponsored content.
Not a function of the ITE -- not mandatory feature
- 9) Does not pre-empt or interfere with each publisher's own "silo" payment strategy.
A critical given.
- 10) Allows content access to be variable depending upon user attributes.
Yes
- 11) Allows publisher to apply their own price to digital content.
Yes
- 12) Allows publisher to vary price depending up use or user or time.
Yes
- 13) Allows publisher to allow access based upon variable subscription rights.
Yes
- 14) Exchange does not play any role in setting pricing or commercial service offerings, just transferring data about them. (i.e., "managing the marketplace.")
Agreed.

Participants felt the prototyping should seek out sources of unique, original, trustworthy, authentic content that is easily discovered or packaged on the "free" web and which can be filtered based on a user's interest. Adjectives used to describe such content included unique, original, trustworthy and authentic and user customizable. It should be adaptive to expressed and inferred user interests.

DISCUSSION -- OWNERSHIP OF USER DATA

"Who owns the user"? asked one participant. The observation yielded a critical discussion. Publishers are concerned that technology platform companies are stealing their customers, more than one participant said. Another participant appealed to avoid the word "own" as inaccurate and inappropriate. This participant said what's needed is a deeper more insightful relationship with users, one in which interests are shared and amplified across communities of interest. This participant said publishers who can deliver such an experience won't have to worry about "owning" the users – they will be in a close relationship. This participant called for a service that rewards publishers who "work really hard to engage" with their readers/viewers/listeners.

In discussion, one participant that the user data and privacy-preferences task group (or the authentication/identity task group) think through carefully how a system will work if public users have many choices for their "home base" agent. For example, what if a subscriber from the Winnepeg paper, already registered there, arrives at The Chicago Tribune's web/mobile service to read a story.

If the Chicago Tribune invites them to become a member there, do they lose their primary connection with Winnipeg?

A consensus seemed to emerge that the system would have to allow users to potentially have multiple home bases, perhaps at different prices or for different services – much like there are multiple banks from which to obtain a Visa or Mastercard – with the market and service qualities determining whether a user settles on a single, primary home base or many.

WRAPPING UP – CONTENT EXCHANGE AND PASSPORT?

Wrapping up, participants discussed what they consider the essence of the Information Trust Exchange project idea. One participant described prototype ideas as both “content exchange and the passport” but wondered how they are connected.

Here is a medley of other wrapping-up thoughts:

Said another participant: COMBINING PROFILES AND PERSONALIZATION

It is the combination of the content, the ability create profiles and the deployment of that profile to deliver a personalized experience. That to me is the combination that makes the creation.

Said another: A PRETTY SIMPLE MODEL

My big takeaway is that A) we can personalize really high quality feeds for everyone from everything that is out there. (b) If you do that without ads people will pay for it. I believe that . . . It is content exchange. I've opted in, there is a premium mechanism. It's a pretty simple model, I think.

Said another: GO TO WHERE THE PUBLIC IS

I used to think the model for newspapers was lets build a site and figure out ways to get the public to come to us. Let's find out where our public is and go there. That is what this is about. How do we send our content out there? We have content attractive to that constellation of people. To me this is a life and death conversation. For newspapers, this is not an optional wouldn't it be nice to fund. Today we have too small reach, too small penetration, not enough good content. No personalization. I like the conversation we had today although I understand the challenge with building that nationwide consortium.

Said another: SUSTAINING MULTIPLE VOICES

This is a question about our democracy. Not that we have a free press but a vocal press representing different communities and debates within. We can't have that conversation if we have this monolithic social media sites with disappearing differences between these different news sites. We keep strong regional voices, around different issues and all of these voices together are what give us democratic discussion. I feel this is way beyond newspapers. Who cares if newspapers die, what we are about is our democracy. What would happen if the gods of Twitter were to tweak their algorithms and suppress a certain type of political thought? We've got to have these institutions in place that take care of that.

Said another: A DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL

I think this kind of solution is essential to have available to the masses if journalism is going to survive. Newspapers will not survive, but journalism needs to survive and it can. In 10 years will I still fly a plane and still see somebody reading a newspaper. Possibly. But it won't be many. Having something like this in place can actually sustain journalism and what it does because it is a distribution channel that has conduits coming in and out. That's what a newspaper was for a long time. But it is antiquated and broken in a lot of senses. I see hope for journalism, not for newspapers.

Said another: A BIG DEAL

Thanks for starting this project. Don't be tentative about it. This is actually a big deal and it can work and do the things that have just been talked around. There are venture capitalists, philanthropists and enge capitals who understand this is the saviour for content that doesn't go to Apple and Facebook. I'm quite excited about your ideas of personalization. I want you to understand this is a big deal. It can scale. Always it starts small and tentatively but the idea here is very compelling.

EXCERPTS OF DISCUSSION

What follows now are excerpts of the day's discussion in Portland. Each bullet represents the near-verbatim comments of one participant.

THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

- The information commons right now is what's on Facebook and they are monetizing it all. There isn't any money left over for the people who make the stuff.
- We're still as an industry trying to take the models we have known offline for charging and applying them online. No one has come up with a solution that matches how consumers consume content digitally.
- We aren't competing with each other. Our competition is Apple, FB. The only way we can compete with that size, scale and audience is if we move together and strength in numbers.
- Competition is not next town paper or TV it is Google or FB. They have the advantage of scale, the advantage of an enormous investment in tech and engineering. Big opportunity – is could we become a platform, could this become a platform that local publishers could plug into and derive revenue? Because the only other option I see is for 2-3 companies to consolidate the entire newspaper business. But possible outcome would be recognition of the value of a platform and of scale.

ELEMENTS OF A NEW ECOSYSTEM

- If we have a platform where the user is separated off from the outlet there is a danger we are going to lose that relationship. I'm very concerned about that. How do we discovery content from them -- and with them?

- I want to loop back to community. A big part of our content strategy is linking consumer research to content and using that to identify pressing community issues, and use that analysis of the research to identify topics to then put more resources into. Does that create an opportunity when creating a profile to share issues on pressing issues?
- Is there a way to connect the creation in the role of being an agent for a user and develop a profile that enables personalization -- to have an application that comes back to the news team on these are issues that we need to be focused on? The publication is then reflecting the interests of people who connect with that brand.

THE ITE AS MIDDLE LAYER BETWEEN PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

- The legacy model is going to evolve. Right now most legacy organizations are still in a very vertically integrated model of producers as well as distributors so the question I have becomes do we separate the two and we have a production layer about the creation and curation of journalism and then you have a distribution layer -- I really see the ITE as being that middle layer between the two that empowers the 5,000 bloggers because the 5,000 bloggers are producers but they don't have the muscle to distribute. So the ITE layer provides access to a wider spectrum of distributors as well as end users who choose to either create a profile with a specific organization or maybe there is a global set of circumstances. We talked about Blendle last night where people are creating a relationship and Blendle owns that relationship and is divvying up the payments. People may come into the ITE from a number of different pathways based on their particular relationships with a local entity or in another way.
- My gut feeling is the presenters are going to be local newspapers who want to keep that audience and wants to keep them, and the providers will be investigative, issued based, life style, spiritual. For the providers the content benefit will be reach.

FILTERING CONTENT TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS AND CUSTOM HOME PAGE

- I like the idea of filtering content based on the specific needs of a target demographic -- having a source for it. That's one of the real opportunities and I want that to be automated as highly as possible. So I can give my user a dedicated homepage that has a combination of the serendipitous stuff -- investigation on newborn screening or lax regulation on medical testing -- but I also want to be personalize the home page for each user -- everybody -- based on their profile. To me that's the value that this kind of network can provide, a custom home page or landing page for every individual who comes to our site.
- And for the nonlocal folks that benefit of such an approach is reach, access to audiences all over the country, people who haven't even found us. All the publishers want to know is the user knows where it came from and can go there.
- This raises again the question of how the content is presented. We have talked about the idea of ingesting into the CMS. The other is linking off to the other source, which to me is problematic as an ad-supported platform. Is there a scenario to talk about topical or interest category filtering?

- So for small newspapers, give them something that would make it easier to customize what they offer their readers. Create an ecosystem where that measure can be tracked and measured and eventually compensated.
- You are creating an ecosystem, a home page for each user in this ecosystem. Eventually you are going to be paying seamlessly for content in this system.
- I definitely think user identity is the unique feature here. We don't know anything about the end user. That's the real value-ad here.
- I want more content. I want content that I get that generates me money that I don't have to pay for. If I can give them a value share, then I can scale my content dramatically with very little risk.
- So I get money for aggregating as well as a new source of content that is not flooding the market.
- The one thing that would get everyone participate is money.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE IN A PROTOTYPE?

- What do we need to pull in for a prototype?
- A big bucket of content and filter it based on expressed user interest.
- In the prototype put in the option to create your own topic.
- The proof of concept has to show there a mechanism to show that it can learn and improve its effectiveness. Users are gauging content, does it adapt?
- One of the requirements is a way for a user to characterize themselves for the system. A simple elegant way for somebody to quickly inform the system. Existing systems do that through what are the word clouds of the things you tweet.
- As that profile is being built, you go to that personalized page and there are all these pages checked dynamically.

SUMMING UP

- Let me sum up what I see as a publisher/participant value proposition: It's ITE members as brokers of trusted relationships, along with the recommendation engine, creates a situation where I as a user give up more information so I get a customized and targeted menu of news and information and I'm doing this willingly because I value my time. I don't want to wade through a whole bunch of stuff that's not of interest.