# The KrehbielLetter

Dear Publishing Colleagues,

The articles in this issue focus on **putting the customer first** –
with paywalls, content recommendations, marketing language,
benefits, and even in the meaning of "perfect."

# If you care about your readers, build a paywall

"Digital transformation" includes several components: business models, content creation, revenue innovation, analytics, new technologies, and a few other things. It's all fun stuff.

But one aspect of digital transformation seems to have been neglected. **We have not considerably improved the experience of reading an article on a digital device.**

**Summary:**

An ad-supported internet allows free access to content, but it makes that content worse.

By neglecting that, we've gone backwards. And there's one likely culprit in this story.

**An ad-based site is designed to interrupt reading.** The advertiser's mission is something like "I want to find people who are interested in X, but I want to distract them in the middle of the article and send them elsewhere."

This is particularly annoying and disruptive on a mobile device, where it's often almost impossible to read an article without navigating several interrupters.

What's a publisher to do?

Let's say you wanted to test two pages. The first is designed for the reader and includes ads. The second is designed for the advertiser and includes text. Here's the problem: how would you measure the winner? Probably by ad revenue.

I'm not knocking advertising. It's a necessary part of the ecosystem. But **ads are designed to interfere with the reader experience**, which leaves content creators with an important question. **Are you creating content for the sole purpose of selling ads**, or do you want to inform and educate your readers?

You want to do both, of course, but an ad-based site will always trend toward the former at the expense of the latter, which is reason #412 to investigate a paywall.

- Articles on the outside should be designed to promote a subscription.
- Articles on the inside should be designed for the best possible reader experience.
- Ads should come in third place.

# Thoughts on content recommendation options

When you combine high bounce rates and high single-visit rates, **most traffic on most sites is from "drive-bys"** – i.e., the one-and-done visitor. Getting some of those drive-bys to stay for one more page view can make a huge difference in your site traffic. **Effective content recommendations might keep some of those people.**

Content recommendation systems suggest additional articles, videos, podcasts, etc., to visitors based on their interests, keeping them engaged with compelling content on your platform.

Consider these three issues when you think about content recommendation.

**Summary:**

Smart content recommendations can help your readers find the parts of your site that meet their needs.

## 1. How to classify content

The magic behind content recommendation relies on classifying content in a way that matches your goals and the reader's goals. Content can be classified in a number of different ways, such as …

- Words in the title
- Keywords or tags
- Word density in the article
- Categories
- Author
- Long vs. short articles

Match the right scheme to your use case. For example, if your site includes long articles and abstracts, don't recommend long articles to people who prefer abstracts.

## 2. Types of recommendations

Each of these options might have a different use for different kinds of content, or on different areas of your website.

- Popular articles on the site right now
- Popular articles in a specific category
- Popular articles by a specific author
- Articles read by visitors who read the current article
- Articles that visitors with similar browsing history have read
- Popular articles for people with a specific job title
- Articles read by people who are like the reader
- Articles read by people in a specific geographic area
- Etc.

### 3. Put the reader first

One of the challenges in creating a successful content recommendation strategy is to ensure you're putting the reader's goals first. It's too easy to fall into the trap of thinking about what you want the reader to do to promote your business model. Instead, **put yourself in the reader's shoes and design your content recommendation strategy around what will help the reader find the content they want to find**. That will be the best for your business in the long run.

Addressing the reader's needs will increase engagement, which is the primary goal.

## Eliminate silly marketing language

I recently read this in a post on LinkedIn.

"[M]edia organizations need to establish a relationship and give easy ways for the subscriber to stay connected."

Sorry to break it to you, but **nobody in the world wants to have a relationship with your brand**. That's delusional marketing talk.

Also, nobody wants to stay connected.

*You want* people to stay connected to your brand, but that's a consequence, not a goal. **Your readers stay connected because you're giving them something they need**. Focus on that.

**Summary:**

Speaking clearly goes along with thinking clearly, which is why you should avoid silly lingo and trendy words.

When you hear this kind of MBA-inspired marketing language in your business, turn it around. Reduce "relationship" and "connection" and all that fru-fru nonsense to something tangible and useful.

- How can I improve my offering to help my readers with their goals?
- How can I make my readers' lives easier?

## "Perfect is the enemy of done"

It's one of my favorite sayings, but it begs an interesting question. What does "perfect" mean?

"Perfect is the enemy of done" should not mean, "publish that amateurish first draft."

On the other hand, if my kayak is in the middle of a school of fish, the perfect fishing lure is the one I can get in the water *right now*.

The idea of the saying is that good enough is good enough. But "good enough" only makes sense in light of a purpose or goal.

The right question to ask is not whether something is perfect, but whether it fits the purpose.

# An update on "Features and Benefits"

When the kids try to convince lo-tech grandma to get a smartphone, they focus on the benefits.

"You can see what your grandkids are up to and chat with us!"

**Summary:**

Novices buy benefits, experts buy features.

Once grandma gets comfortable with a smartphone, she wants more storage and processing power. Those are features.

The rule I learned back in the 1980s was that marketing copy should explain features and benefits. In the following decades, the emphasis has turned decidedly towards benefits. Tell people why their life will be better with your product.

But that's not the whole picture.

According to pricing expert Mark Stiving, **novices buy benefits, experts buy features**.

You should think about this distinction in your acquisition and retention efforts. The first should emphasize benefits, the second should emphasize features.

By the way, you were explaining benefits and features all year in your engagement efforts, weren't you?

Sincerely,

Greg Krehbiel

**P.S.** Email or call if you want to discuss these or other issues. greg@krehbielgroup.com

**P.P.S.** Take a look at the "Ask me a question" section on my website.