

**Digital Refresh Workshop**

**The American Prospect**

**May 14-15, 2010**

Participants: Phoebe Connelly, Web editor, *The American Prospect*, Richard Boriskin, Business manager, *The American Prospect*, Mark Schmidt, Executive Editor (May 14th only), *The American Prospect*,

Facilitators: Andrew Golis, Yahoo! News, Tracy Van Slyke and Jeanne Brooks, The Media Consortium.

**Day 1**

**The American Prospect Digital Analysis**INTERNAL STAFFING

Staff producing or working on the web:

2 editors fulltime editing on web

1 editor half time on the web

2 editors nominally editing on web

2 writers for web 60-80%

1 editor does half writing for web

(maybe get about an hour of copy editor/day but that is missing in this dept.)

Editorial assistant: does promotions, but most promotion falls to the editors

There is no art person devoted to the web.

The editor spends about 2 hours in the morning formatting the site, etc. and then about an hour at the end of the day working on web production tasks.

No ability to do timed posts.

Losing about 4-18 hours between Phoebe and Alex every day.

No full-time advertising person devoted to website.

There also is no tech person. There is an IT director who loads in the ads.

Web editors do all of the back and forth about any CMS technical fixes.

Business stats:

Current ad revenue per month: $2500/month

$2K out of ad networks – direct 10% and 90% remnant ad

Fundraising on the web:

* 1 campaign in 2008,
* 1 campaign in 2009 editorially directed. All of the writers wrote a post about giving to the magazine.

1/3 of money comes in from production, 1/3 is general support from foundations and individual supporters, 1/3 comes in from special reports and the Prospect wants to be raising that money as a web presence.

TAP AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

*What is the normal user experience?*

Users come in thru the TAPPED homepage, and they are found through aggregators. Site visits are 1.5 mins and the avg visit is good.

*How does the Prospect view their audience?*

* Trying to reach a younger and more diverse readership.
* know that most news sites are mostly white males and the Prospect is less so and strives to be more diverse and to be known for that.
* Recent top 3 articles are white male authors, and they are very standard political affair. The Prospect is looking to take the next step.

TAP TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

The breakdown of current known user information:

3.2 million page views this year. (1.6 million to blogs)

Homepage gets 300K

TAPPED homepage gets 400K

This means that 2.5 million page views are not on the main homepage.

Peak hours are 2-3pm. Not the morning.

Referrals are RCP, Atrios, Ysglesias, Ezra,

Referrals from social networks: Twitter is ranked 11th on the referrer list. Facebook is 16. Nothing from Digg. (TPM’s absence was striking for Andrew.)

6th highest referral is Google reader. 60K views, with 1,750 subscribers, which is significant engagement.

**THE FOUR AUDIENCES-A GENERAL ANALYSIS**

When thinking about editorial, distributing strategies they should be plugged into the framework for these four audiences.

*\*\*Defining the audiences\*\**

**CORE**: Prospect junkies, they comment on the site, they read you everyday, they donate money, and know the writers in an intimate way (3-5 visits/day).

**GENERAL**: they are not obsessive prospect junkies, but they’re still coming to TAPPED (3-5 visits per week). TAP is part of their media diet.

**NETWORK**: (3-5 per month) they maybe read one of your referrals and come over when there is a link. They have a sense of what the Prospect is, they’ve already opted in to news and analysis but they’ve never made a decision that the Prospect is something they read.

**DISTRIBUTED**: these are one-offs who have no idea what the Prospect is, they probably don’t read political news everyday but have found you totally randomly.

**ESTABLISHING THE PROSPECT’S FOUR CORE AUDIENCES**

**Core:**

*Editorial*:

Introducing writers, guests or staff. Creating a sense of intimacy and identity.

Own the story, own the issue.

Publishing practices: consistency with publishing, so readers know what is coming.

Comments (all comment data is corrupted)

Publishing frequency

*Business*: If they are core, they’re willing to donate. So if you’re trying to move to a 1/3 of web monetization you should be creating to reach the audience often and get them to donate. Also, having ads that are relevant to the readers, to get them to click through.

Paid content? There are things that only a core audience wants, and would pay to have access to. There could be certain features or functions that require a donation or subscription that users could pay to access.

**General:**

E*ditorial*: the take of the day – thru either the blog or the columns, you get engaging, interesting articles. But could also be the Take of the Week.

Need hierarchal presentation

Readers are looking for the related content

*Business*: the newsletter goes out, but is limited in scope. Newsletter list is about 9K with 26% click thru rate. Such a high click thru rate shows you have an engaged audience and you could be optimizing that engagement further.

How do you connect your newsletter to intimacy and content and donations?

Direct ads

**Network:**

*Editorial*:

Scoops

Exclusive takes

Appearance & booking

*Business:* Direct and remnant ads, conversion to general audience

**Distributed:**

*Editorial*:   
Search engine optimization (articles and topics) ie. Salon segregating things by topics to optimize SEO

Sharing: giving people the tools to push content and making the ask for them to help distribute

\*\*TAP Analytics broken down by audience\*\*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Core:**  1700 RSS  2K twitter  2.5K on TAPPED  2.5K @ Prospect.org  800 facebook  5-8 kpvs  1.6 pv/visit | **General:**  10K e-newsletter  2.5K on TAPPED  2.5K on prospect.org  5-8 kpvs  1.6 pv/visit | **Network:**  22-25K are referrals  1.35 pv/visit | **DISTRIBUTED**: (search)  10K  1.5 pv/visit |

*The best way to measure the general audience is: how many people are consuming a product that highlights what you want to push that day.*

\*\*Editorial products\*\*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Core/General:**  Tapped  Homepage  twitter | **General:**  Topical columns  Web only non-blog content (doesn’t necessarily speak enough to the core audience)  Issue expertise  Magazine content | **Network/Distributed:**  Twitter, Facebook, Digg, etc.. |

*How do you convert the networked audience to become core and general audiences using the editorial products that you build based on your new audience knowledge?*

How do you start expanding your audience?

🡪Through social networks and referrers and more engagements.

🡪Feeding and building the core audience.

🡪 Explore the audience question.

🡪Then how do you attach revenue generation?

**Matching Goals/Editorial Values to the 4 audiences**

**TAP Editorial Goals/Promise**

* Superior journalism about politics and policy from a progressive point of view

This is a magazine that battles the right-wing message machine, almost like an advocacy model.

* Journalism that broadens the progressive conversation, which includes opinion journalism and advocacy journalism.
  + Contributing to a broader conversation in elite levels.
  + We are not trying to give people an overarching perspective of the conversation.
* Good judgment
* You can get opinions anywhere, here you can get opinions you can trust.
* Analysis you can trust
* KNOWLDEGE BOMBS
* Judgment based on depth

*Potential Products for Core Audiences*

* should have Today’s featured posts.
* Linking posts/articles (related content)
* well tagged
* common database
* Redigesting other pieces of content in a way that will appeal to various audiences.
* Potential spin-off blogs
* Merging TAPPED and Prospect homepages. This would take away a layer of complications.
* Better comment system. How should it be built out?

*Short and long-term for general, networked and distributed audiences:*

* Design a post layout that promotes additional content
* Think about converting audiences once they come in is part of the page layout.
* Expanding the network, who are you reaching out to now? And how are you actively going out to them?
* Promotion: build segmented email promotion lists to blast to other editors/aggregators
* Build the Twitter audience:
  + Engage followers,
  + Ask people to retweet.
  + Asking audience their opinion on your latest analysis and compiling it on your site.
  + Finding a way to engage people and then feature their tweets on the blog.

**Day 2**

**Online Reader Survey Development**

*Goals:* Create a comprehensive knowledge base of the TAP web site readership to help with editorial, fundraising and business products, strategies and development.

*Needs:* At least 400 people to fill out the survey. Highly recommended that the survey is anonymous (link them to the e-newsletter, twitter at end of survey)

Potential Survey Topics

Industry/profession

Location

Age

Gender

Race

Political affiliation

Income

How often to you visit the site?

How important is the Prospect to you?

How do you access the site? (reader, e-newsletter, blog links, twitter, etc..)

Do you know we’re a non-profit?

What media do you consume?

How often do you share Prospect content with friends in social networks?

What issues do you care about, at what level?

Mobile question?

How much video do you watch and on what medium?

Promotions:

Explain to people why you’re doing this, provide them with an explanation up front to encourage them to take the survey. Try to capture data at the end but do so in a way that keeps the survey-taker anonymous.

Communicate with the reader. Hit all of your angles and mediums (blogs, home page, twitter, facebook, e-newsletter, letters from editors, etc..)

Additional Tools:

* Put Quantcast on the site. 🡪 figure out if it can work in the short term
* Tool: [Chartbeat](http://www.chartbeat.com/)
* Sign-up for a weekly report from Google Analytics

What is useful in a weekly report?

* Uniques,
* Page views
* Track top tweets/shares
* Overall followers
* Top stories.

**STAFFING**

In January the Prospect plans to hire another person for the web team. Need to determine required skills for job description. Think about:

* What’s your strategy and what do you want to offer your readers. Ie. Social media/community editor, who does some editing but also is the person who engages.
* Would you rather have more content or would you rather concentrate on pushing out your content in a more meaningful way?
* Someone who is checking out the site and knows about current tools and widgets, etc.
* Someone who can do the basic maintenance but also has he ability to be nimble and respond to things creatively.

**COMMENTS**

What do you want out of a new commenting system? What do you need to make the comments system manageable and effective?

* General principles
* Permanent identities on the site. Any system where you have to create a stable identity before you can comment and you have to login before you can comment
* Threaded comments
* Report abuse button for other commentors to help police.
* What is your strategy of interacting with your community over a period of time? This will also inform who you hire for the additional web position.

Dealing with trolls

* Define clear standards for what is required dialogue.
* Closing comments, keep live for a while but then close them at some point to keep spammers and trolls away.
* IP blocking, so that people can’t keep coming back with multiple logins.

**Donations & Advertising**

Donations Goals: Establish a consistent donation program that has at least 3 campaigns a year. How to integrate more donation opportunities throughout the site year round.

Things to think about:

* How are you integrating it into the DNA year-round?
  + E-newsletter – blog, soc nets
* Coordinate social network to e-newsletter list development.
* How will the survey help donations?

Successful campaign strategies:

* Letting people know the impact of your work. 🡪 soft ask.
* Communicate in a very transparent way about who you are and why they should be supporting you.
* Articulate why they should give:
* What it does for your reader/community?
* What it does for politics and democracy?
* What would happen without you?
* And don’t forget humor (and guilt)

Advertising Goals: Increase advertising sales/revenue on the TAP web site

* When thinking about the site redesign, get a system that is flexible enough that allows for you to test out layout strategy.
* Try to build out the ad networks out as a base, start to test out click-thru rates, to know what places work better. You need to have a sense of that before you go to the market and start investing.
* Get into Google AdManager and look at what the click thru rates are and have weekly reports, and when thinking about redesign think about where ads are placed on the site.

Direct ads vs. ad networks.

* Add an ad network optimizer (via Rubicon Project) and add that to AdManager and allow AdSense to compete.
* What is your market for getting direct advertising selling? What is the cost/benefit for hiring a full-time direct sales staff? Is this the correct strategy right now?

**NEXT STEPS**

TAP and The Media Consortium will work together over the next 3 months to:

* Solidify the five major editorial/business goals for the TAP website overhaul
* Build out an online survey for TAP to use for its readers

TMC will provide up to five hours a month and a regular monthly conference call of support over the next three months.