

MOBILE

Flipboard exec dishes on market strategy

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By LAUREN JOHNSON

NEW YORK – A Flipboard executive at IAB’s Innovation Days conference last week said that ultimately the rise in HTML5 will address the publishing walled garden that companies such as Apple have established.



During the “A Fireside Chat with Flipboard’s Editorial Director” session, the executive spoke about how mobile, specifically tablets, have changed the publishing industry. The session also gave an overview of how Flipboard handles its partnerships.

“[HTML5] is not going to happen in the next year or two, but it will happen and it will naturally address that [walled-garden] question,” said Josh Quittner, editorial director at Flipboard, Palo Alto, CA.

“The tablet is great because I think it’s a fantastic media-consumption device,” he said.

“People love looking at or viewing or reading media on the tablet. It’s obvious that this is a really huge thing that’s only going to get huger as different form factors come out, different sizes, different weights, better screens – it’s just going to be endless. People love to read – that doesn’t go away.”

Publishing bells and whistles

Mobile has been tricky for publishers because it completely shifts the traditional way of thinking.



A screen shot of The Colbert Report on Flipboard

Coming from a background in journalism, Mr. Quittner said that it is hard enough for publishers to put out a magazine. With all the new digital platforms available to publishers, it is difficult to keep up with technology.

In particular, it is the mid-sized newspapers and publishers that are having challenges creating content for all mobile platforms.

According to the executive, Flipboard is a service provider that helps facilitate and promote journalism but does not create any content itself. Instead, the company works with partners to curate and connect content to an audience.

Instead of calling itself an aggregator, Mr. Quittner said that the company is a social magazine.

Therefore, there is a blur between what is considered a tech and media company.



Mr. Quittner with Randall Rothenberg, president/CEO of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, New York

Interactive reading

Flipboard's business model is based on its partners earning advertising money, of which

Flipboard gets a cut. Mainly, the company focuses on full-page display ads. All ads are sold by the content partners.

Compared to other news reading apps, Flipboard is designed to look like a magazine that lets users flip through pages of content.

The executive also demoed the Flipboard application and showed how two types of content appear from either a partner or a non-partner.

For example, the New York Times is not a Flipboard partner and its content shows up in a similar format of a RSS feed with just a headline and blurb. Traffic from Flipboard counts towards the New York Times' Web traffic.

On the other side though, for a partner such as The Atlantic, content resembles a digital version of a magazine with multimedia and ads.

Although Flipboard does not aid in helping its partners gain subscriptions, companies can take advantage of the platform to promote subscription plans.

For example, USA Today is one of Flipboard's partners and uses its content to promote its services to a new demographic who might not be familiar with the brand otherwise.

Flipboard is not the only tech company aiming to make online news reading easier for consumers.

Take for example, AOL with its Editions newsreading app. Although Mr. Quittner did not reveal what Flipboard has in store in the future, he did point out that it recently added audio support to let consumers listen to music while they flip through the app.

The real challenge will be from the next big technology wave though, according to the executive. Although it is tempting to try out every new tech thing, less is sometimes more in digital.

"What I'm most worried about is the thing I haven't seen yet," Mr. Quittner said.

"A mistake that I have made every time a new medium comes out is that I aim for the fences and say, 'We've got to bring in every bell and whistle because we can,'" he said.

"Look at how Steve Jobs approached reinventing the smartphone or the tablet – it's all about simplicity."

Final Take

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