Is content still king?
Learnings from product and design thinking

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Products in four languages: English, Chinese, Malay, Tamil
THE STRAITS TIMES

- Singapore’s most read newspaper; flagship English daily of SPH, published since 1845
- Daily average newspaper circulation: 370,100
- Daily readers: 597,000 online, 600,000 print (Nielsen Media Index)

- 63% PMEBS & White Collars
- 89% Live in 4-Room Flats & Above
- 66% With Diplomas & Higher
- 69% Household Income > $5,000
- $3,919 Median Personal Income
- $7,204 Median Household Income
Awards and accolades

- 9 awards at Asian Digital Media Awards 2018 by Wan-Ifra, including Reader Revenue Initiative award for ST Premium, and Gold for ST's first augmented reality project, Asia's sacred art.
- 8 awards at Best Of Digital Design 2018 by Society for News Design, including experimental design for Are you ready for Smart Nation?
- 2 awards at Best of Newspaper Design 2018 by Society for News Design.
ST’s paywall journey

1994
ST Online launched

2005
Freemium
Commodity news: 4 pars
Premium content: Subscribers only
One of first adopters of a hard paywall

July 2015
Metered paywall
30 free articles per calendar month
Subscribers get full access from S$29.90 a month

Nov 2016
Tiered paywall
15 free articles for anonymous users
15 more articles for registered users
Social and search traffic count towards quota
Subscribers get full access from S$29.90 a month

Feb 2018
ST Premium
Commodity: Free
Premium content: 2 pars
Subscribers only
ST Basic: S$14.90
ST All Digital: S$29.90
Let’s put our journey into context

- **1994**: ST Online launched
- **2005**: Freemium
- **July 2015**: Metered paywall
- **Nov 2016**: Tiered paywall
- **Feb 2018**: ST Premium

Key Events:
- **1995**: MS IE
- **1996**: Google
- **2004**: Facebook
- **2006**: Twitter
- **2007**: iPhone
- **2010**: Instagram
- **2012**: 1b monthly active FB users
- **2008**: 1st Android device (HTC Dream)
- **2014**: Mobile penetration rate in SG hits 156.3%
## Why ST Premium?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Leaky paywall</th>
<th>Restrictive metered model (e.g. 3-10 articles)</th>
<th>Freemium model (Free articles + paid premium articles)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand positioning</strong></td>
<td>Low value provider</td>
<td>⬅️ Volume provider</td>
<td>⬅️ Premium content provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subscription value</strong></td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>⬇️ High</td>
<td>⬆️ High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incentive to write premium content</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>⬇️ High</td>
<td>⬆️ Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact on ad revenues</strong></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>⬆️ Negative</td>
<td>⬇️ Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social media reach/ ability to share</strong></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>⬆️ Medium</td>
<td>⬆️ High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical feasibility</strong></td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>⬇️ Difficult</td>
<td>⬆️ Easy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘It Pays to Know’ campaign

Campaign objective: **To connect audience to the personalities and stories** behind the best and most exclusive work of the ST newsroom.

Series of social media-friendly videos featuring ST writers and their most memorable work, from insights into life in North Korea to candid confessions of a food critic. (Click images to watch the videos)

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**The Straits Times**
Published by Daryl Chin | February 7

It took 7 months of negotiations with the North Korean authorities before permission was granted for ST’s visit.

Associate editor Rahul Pathak shares what he saw during the trip, and what went into the making of this story: str.sg/otherkorea

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**The Straits Times**
Published by Gregory Phua | February 20

“I keep my car to the ground... to give voice to forgotten historical figures and everyday people with stories to tell.” - Melody Zaccheus, ST heritage reporter. Find out more: http://str.sg/melody-zaccheus

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**The Straits Times**
Published by Daniel Wong | March 1

Being a food critic doesn’t come with the perks most people think of, says ST’s Wong Ah Yoke. But the biggest job hazard? An expanding waistline.

http://str.sg/o849
SPH-Google tie-up

- We offered Google Home and Google Home Mini to new and existing subscribers
- Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) offers four native audio feeds on Google Home
- Part of SPH’s efforts to continuously innovate and connect newsroom personalities to audiences on emerging platforms
Results

- 90% increase in monthly new digital subscribers
- Less than 10% churn
- Minimal impact on ad revenue
- More data-driven approach to content production
- Greater flexibility with event-driven promotions: During first Trump-Kim summit in Singapore, we pivoted paywall for lead generation rather than direct subscription.
Which articles got us new customers?
Bread and butter: health, housing, education, transport, jobs, money

**THE STRAITSTIMES**

**SINGAPORE** > Courts & Crime > Education

**PREMIUM**

Under-16s can still ride e-scooters under new rules

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**THE STRAITSTIMES**

**BUSINESS** > Companies & Markets > Economy

**PREMIUM**

Tech firms hiring varsity students to beat talent crunch

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**THE STRAITSTIMES**

**SINGAPORE** > Courts & Crime > Education

No asbestos found in Johnson & Johnson's baby powder in Singapore: HSA
In-depth: Pieces that cover newsy topics

1. **THE STRAITS TIMES**
   - **BUSINESS** > Companies & Markets > Economy
   - **PREMIUM**
   - Going overseas to be farmers: Driven by worry over Singapore's food security

2. **THE STRAITS TIMES**
   - OPINION > ST Editorial > Cartoons
   - **PREMIUM**
   - When weddings become displays of wealth
   - John Gapper
   - Published: Dec 20, 2018, 5:00 AM SGT

3. **THE STRAITS TIMES**
   - ASIA > East Asia > SE Asia > South Asia > Asia
   - **PREMIUM**
   - PM Mahathir and his old-style politics are back with a vengeance in Malaysia
   - Shannon Teoh
   - Published: Dec 18, 2018, 9:24 PM SGT

   Social media and globalisation are turning private celebrations into aspirational events.

   Kuala Lumpur - Cries of Malaysia Baru
Woodlands resident does it again with latest festive project - a Christmas log cabin with 'snow-capped' roof
Fines v fees: What your condo management can do if you break rules

Under-16s can still ride e-scooters under new rules
Harsher punishment for security officers who sleep on the job, act unprofessionally from Jan 1

Bomb hoax, car breakdowns, rampant queue-cutting all add to last weekend's Causeway jams

Court rules estate agency director liable for botched NZ deal, to pay $210,000 in property investment losses
Lessons

- Premium means different things to different people: Journalists think about ‘premium’ differently from consumers
- Evergreen archives are just as important as news to consumers
- Besides premium content, there are other factors at work...
Why do they pay?
Why do customers pay for online news?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Subscribers</th>
<th>Non-subscribers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It allows me to access news from my smartphone or tablet</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to pay for print and online access together</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to consume news from a range of sources</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was offered a good deal</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to have access to information that most people do not</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need particular information for my job</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News you pay for is better than free news</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My favorite news source does not allow free access</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were benefits from membership other than news access</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was cheaper than paying for offline access</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to help fund journalism</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=3,174; Source: SPH, 2017
Why do customers NOT pay for online news?

Reasons for non-subscribers for not paying for news

- The news sources I use don't currently charge for access: 49%
- Online news isn't worth paying for: 37%
- I prefer to consume news offline: 18%
- I'm not interested enough in the news: 16%
- I'm worried it will be difficult to cancel the payment: 14%
- I can't afford it at the moment: 13%
- I don't like using my credit card or bank details online: 12%
- Making the payment will be too much hassle: 9%
- I found a way to circumvent paying for access: 8%
- I'm not online enough: 7%
- I don't own a smartphone or a tablet: 1%

N=3,174; Source: SPH, 2017
So what does your customer want?
It’s not just about content.
Know your customer
Convenience
Millennials in Singapore spend almost 3.4 hours a day on their mobile phones: Study

Digital habits in Singapore
People in Singapore spend over 12 hours on gadgets daily: Survey

MRT commuters using their mobile phones while waiting for the train at City Hall station. ST PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN

Singaporeans spend an average of 12hr 42 a day on digital devices. PHOTO: ST FILE
Experience
Let data drive decisions, not the Highest Paid Person’s Opinion.

#HowGoogleWorks
Make it easy
Email > Anonymous
The future
How come Netflix can convert more?
30+% of its audience (NYT 2-3%)

Customer-centric business
Use of algorithms
Personalisation
Reduce churn
Convenience
Be where our customers are
Personalise
We are social
Other revenue
E-commerce, affiliated marketing
Events
Entertainment
Content is king, but value, distribution, and experience are queen and she wears the pants.
Thank you!
vming@sph.com.sg
Segmental Operating Revenue and Profit Margin

Operating Revenue (S$'m) vs Profit before Tax Margin (%)

Year: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

- Media (Teal)
- Property (Orange)
- Others (Light Green)

2014: Operating Revenue 900, Profit before Tax Margin 120
2015: Operating Revenue 700, Profit before Tax Margin 90
2016: Operating Revenue 600, Profit before Tax Margin 70
2017: Operating Revenue 500, Profit before Tax Margin 50
2018: Operating Revenue 400, Profit before Tax Margin 30