Google launches News Initiative subscriptions lab for publishers

The Google News Initiative (GNI) is one year old. In a blog post Wednesday, Google News VP Richard Gingras detailed the company's efforts to support journalism and combat the spread of disinformation.

This anniversary comes against the backdrop of ongoing controversy. Most recently, YouTube (and Facebook) were criticized for not acting more decisively to stop the spread of hate speech in the wake of the recent New Zealand killings. GNI's birthday celebration also occurs in the context of new copyright rules in Europe that seek to generate more revenue for media publications from licensing fees from news aggregators.

Helping publishers with subscriptions. As digital advertising (often sold and served through Google) has failed to sustain many publishers, more have turned to subscriptions. And last year Google introduced "Subscribe with Google," a streamlined process designed to attract Google users who have payment cards on file. Google sign-in credentials are used as the publications' login information; publishers receive the subscriber information.

Google's Gingras said that roughly "50 partners from 19 countries have signed up to implement Subscribe with Google and publishers like The Washington Post, the Financial Times, Folha de S. Paulo and Nine Publishing are using the product." The company is also testing a contribution- or membership-based payment scenario.



He also discussed a new effort called the GNI Digital Subs Lab, which seeks to help publishers in North America and Latin America "transform their approach to digital subscriptions." It's intended to create sustainable business models for publishers.

Combating misinformation. The post also recounts numerous steps taken to stop the spread of misinformation. Gingras said, "We've partnered with the International Fact Check Network and dozens of newsrooms worldwide to quell the spread of misinformation, especially during key times like elections. We've supported initiatives like Verificado in Mexico, Comprova in Brazil, CekFakta in Indonesia, FactCheckEU and the journalist training network in India." He listed several other, similar efforts.

Gingras then announced new tools for fact checkers: the Fact Check Markup tool and the Fact Check Explorer. Neither is live yet.

Spending to support publishers. In addition to the above, Google listed many of the other pro-journalism tools and initiatives it has championed or funded in the recent past:

- A $10 million global media literacy campaign with Google.org last year
- Teen digital literacy training and programming, in conjunction with the Poynter Institute
- Support for Media Veritas in Europe to promote media literacy
- More than $5 million in audio innovation grants
- $25 million YouTube program to help publishers develop "sustainable video operations"
- The GNI Cloud program (subsidizing GSuite and Google Cloud services) for smaller publishers

Finally the company touted Newspack, a content management and publishing system from WordPress and Google, announced in

January. It’s targeted to smaller, local news publishers that have struggled with traffic and revenue and don’t have technology resources.

Why you should care. Facebook recently lamented the lack of local news to show users in many smaller and rural U.S. markets. And earlier this year the company said it was investing $300 million in local journalism over the next three years.

After they effectively disintermediated news publishers and their advertisers, both Facebook and Google have come (over a period of years) to recognize the need to invest in the future of journalism or be deprived of a major source of content users care about. You could call it “enlightened self-interest.”

About The Author



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