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For New Yorker on iPad, Words Are the Thing

By JEREMY W. PETERS
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When magazine publishers began pouring their resources and hopes into the iPad, their thinking was that readers wanted something substantially more than just words on a screen. A simple PDF of a page just would not do. The app had to dazzle the senses.

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The New Yorker has attained higher iPad sales than other iPad editions sold by Condé Nast.

But some consumers, it turns out, just want to read.

Offering the first detailed glimpse into iPad magazine sales since subscriptions became available in the spring, [The New Yorker](#) said that it now had 100,000 iPad readers, including about 20,000 people who bought subscriptions at \$59.99 a year.

Additionally, more than 75,000 people have taken advantage of the magazine's offer to allow print subscribers to download the app free. Several thousand more people, on average, buy single issues for \$4.99 each week.

Magazines are still in the early stages of app experimentation, and the number of buyers is small in the context of The New Yorker's one million print subscribers. But the figures are the highest of any iPad edition sold by Condé Nast, which also publishes Wired, GQ, Vanity Fair, Glamour and others on the Apple tablet.

"Those, to me, sound like strong numbers," said Andrew Lipsman, vice president for industry analysis at comScore. Mr. Lipsman said the figure was even more impressive because people paid a premium price to subscribe.

The New Yorker, a magazine that has always been heavy on text, took a different tack from its peers. Instead of loading its iPad app with interactive features, the magazine focused on presenting its articles in a clean, readable format.

"That was really important to us: to create an app all about reading," said Pamela Maffei McCarthy, the magazine's deputy editor. "There are some bells and whistles, but we're very careful about that. We think about whether or not they add any value. And if they don't, out the window they go."

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It is surprising that Condé Nast's biggest success has been The New Yorker and not, say, a magazine that has a more technologically stimulating app and a younger, more Web-oriented readership like Wired.

Making money from digital content has frustrated publishers since the dawn of the Internet. And for Condé Nast, a publisher whose digital history is full of fits and false starts, the issue has been particularly perplexing.

Condé Nast has tried with limited success to shift toward a business model that relies more heavily on revenue from consumers, like magazine subscriptions, branded products and events, than advertising, which is more dependent on the ups and downs of the economy. The success of The New Yorker app is a small step in that direction.

Among the app's interactive features are audio of poets reading their work. For articles that involve complicated legal cases or rely on documentation, readers can access the files through the app.

The magazine's aggressive iPad strategy is part of its embrace of the Web, a change that did not come easily or quickly. The New Yorker still leaves much of its content on NewYorker.com behind a pay wall.

"When we started this Web site, it wasn't something executives were dying to do because, quite frankly, they looked around and saw a lot of lost money," said David Remnick, the magazine's editor.

But Mr. Remnick has shifted more resources toward The New Yorker's digital enterprise. Nine months ago he hired the magazine's first news editor, who helps engage its writers on big breaking news like the killing of Osama bin Laden and assigns them to write for the Web site. That was the magazine's biggest mobilization of resources to put articles online. And Mr. Remnick said he envisioned more of that happening.

"The big trick as an editor is adjusting the culture enough so writers are willing to see this entire different format as part of what they do and as part of what The New Yorker does," he said.

For the iPad to be a truly successful medium for publishers, it cannot exist on circulation revenue alone. "You'd need a lot higher volume if all you were doing was selling ads against it," said Mr. Lipsman. "But when you're getting subscription revenue, tens of thousands of subscribers are meaningful."

Advertisers must be convinced that they are getting their money's worth. Many are awaiting better proof that readers are actually engaged.

Robin Steinberg, executive vice president of investment and activation for MediaVest, a media buyer, said that The New Yorker's 20,000 iPad subscribers and the 75,000 more who had activated through their print accounts were a big first step.

But she said use patterns needed further study.

"The question we now face is of those 75,000, how many are engaging with the magazine and the app or one exclusively?" she asked. "Understanding these behaviors will provide a stronger opportunity for advertisers to appropriately connect and create the right



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Time Inc., which offers print subscribers of People, Sports Illustrated, Time and Fortune free access to its iPad apps, said hundreds of thousands of people had activated their accounts through the Apple store. But the publisher does not offer iPad-only subscriptions yet.

One apparent reason for The New Yorker’s success with the iPad is that the magazine has the right demographics. iPad users tend to inhabit households with annual income of more than \$100,000, much like readers of The New Yorker. Research from comScore shows that all iPad users read news on the device more than they seek out entertainment like videos and games.

But The New Yorker’s popularity with iPad users could also say something about the experience people desire on the devices. Whether the glossy magazines that are Condé Nast’s specialty — those full of highly stylized photo shoots and sleekly designed page layouts — are something people prefer to view in print remains to be seen.

“I do think there is a really large dynamic of people who are interested in reading, actually reading, on an iPad,” Mr. Lipsman said.

In that sense, said Mr. Remnick, The New Yorker’s editor, his magazine and the iPad were a good fit.

“What do people read The New Yorker for? To read,” he said.

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