

# The Future of Content Aggregation ▶

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"Traditional" print media is under pressure; fuelled by the perceived commoditisation of news on the internet, falling print revenues, the departure of advertising revenues, and the struggle to monetize online sites. Analysts and industry pundits have also long been predicting the demise of the information professional as more and more free information is available to anyone at any time.

**Content aggregation** is a service where content is licensed, and royalties paid to publishers. **Web aggregators** are typically free search engines that direct users back to publisher websites.

What do these trends mean for the future of information gathering and delivery? And how will this impact the information professional? The profession is evolving bringing new priorities and a clearer requirement to demonstrate value; these challenges are mirrored in content aggregation.

## The big shift from traditional print to online information

There's no denying that there is plenty of 'free' information available to everyone. With all this information available for free, why does anyone need to pay for information? What value can a content aggregator bring?

This white paper will be exploring the future of content aggregation. When we discuss web aggregators, it is only to explore their impact on the content aggregation market.

## The impact of declining advertising revenues

Newspaper groups are increasingly looking for new business models to compensate for declining print subscription and advertising revenues. Paid-for content is perceived by many as the only way to create a sustainable economic model for quality journalism. Publishers frequently have two routes open to them: Put content behind a paywall on the web, and distribute content through a paid-for aggregator.

When publishers announce a move to place their content behind a paywall, it frequently drives a concern that content may be removed from aggregators. However, as aggregators directly pay publishers for the usage value of their content, it does not inevitably lead to the removal of their titles.

## So publishers might be having a hard time, but with all that information available for free, it's hard to justify paying. I can access everything I need via the internet right?

Actually, no. Let's look at the sizeable proportion of licensed content that is not available for free.

This is content that is available from the publisher through subscriptions or transactional payments. Sometimes teaser texts are available, or a sample article or report, but these will essentially drive you back to the paid-for sources. This is typical of business publications, company financial information and reports; and generally information where the publisher is adding insight, analysis, or industry knowledge. Because these publishers provide unique, high-value or segment specific content, they are able to charge for it.

Adding together the subscription costs of even a handful of these business publications or services outweighs the one-off cost of a subscription to an aggregator. This then begs the question, 'what's in it for the publisher?'. In this case it is access to a long-tail of usage; the large volumes of occasional users accessing their content through aggregators.

It would be pretty much impossible to market and sell to these users directly so aggregators act as a useful marketing tool, raising brand awareness, and profiling content to different users and segments.

For these publishers, aggregators are not just regarded as an extra revenue stream, but core revenue. They see aggregators as a means of reaching new markets, and to tapping into an established revenue base. When publishers are increasingly focusing on their online revenues, they more frequently offer aggregators additional content - good for the publisher and good for the information professional.

### The primary challenge with 'free' content

Where content is 'free' on the web, this is typically supported by advertising. In many cases this is unobtrusive and does not affect the reading experience. These sites are often arranged for browsing today's news, rather than targeted business research. Here the primary challenge is in getting to the information required and the time it takes to do so. When content is normalised and

indexed in a consistent manner through an aggregator, and served up in a product environment designed for this purpose, it makes it quicker to get to the information required. This is particularly important where an archival search is required. Different websites have different approaches to archiving, and an article found online today may not be available tomorrow.



#### The Voice of the Information Professional

Our panel were asked “**Do you sometimes use search engines (like Google) for work tasks?**”

While 100% of respondents use search engines for work tasks, only 4% can access all the content they need for work tasks through free web searching.

The gathering of highly targeted information is increasingly labour intensive and unreliable when this has to be extracted from numerous websites. Additionally, publishers often release different information to their websites than through their print publications. Sometimes the web content is more timely, or frequently updated, as suits the medium. But it may also be less comprehensive, or feature cut down versions of print articles

Websites often depend on agency copy rather than unique editorial. Traditionally aggregators have focused on the print version as the most authoritative source, but aggregators are actively adding web copy as a complement to the print version, especially where this has unique coverage. The limitation here is the publishers' capability to copyright manage website feeds and ironically deliver the data in a useable format. The future will be comprehensive coverage of online feeds to match the print collection.

Broadly it is the customer (mis)perception that news is free which is causing challenges across the publishing industry. Print revenues are declining and, whilst online usage increases, publishers struggle to get paid for their content. News is certainly not free to produce.



**The Voice of the  
Information Professional**

Our panel were asked **“Do you trust free information for work tasks?”**

Panellists tend to trust selected free information available on the web. The content held on government sites, those of the major professional services firms, or authoritative news sources such as the BBC are highly trusted.

“96% of respondents ‘Sometimes’ trust free information for work tasks.”

## What exactly is 'content aggregation'? And why is it worth paying for?

To answer this we need to look at the value chain.

## The Content Aggregation Value Chain

Attribute	Description	Customer Value
<b>Select</b> 	Identify and select key titles, publishers and third party distributors of content.	Reduces number of individual subscriptions. Saves time in gathering authoritative and interesting content.
<b>License</b> 	Extensive contracts are put in place directly with publishers, covering legal and commercial terms.	Copyright payments are handled by the aggregator, directly with the publisher. Specific rights secured ensuring high quality and timely delivery.
<b>Normalise</b> 	Thousands of different data formats are converted, so that content appears uniform, and is stored securely.	Uniformity of appearance saves time in gathering information from articles. Business continuity procedures prevent interruption of supply.
<b>Archive</b> 	Data is permanently stored, and backed up for future reference.	Data is available for in-depth archival searching, any data used by a customer remains available and can be referred to in the future.
<b>Index</b> 	Consistent and granular metadata is applied.	More precise and comprehensive search helps customers reach the information they need faster.
<b>Productise</b> 	Building content into a product environment and/or interface that enables the extraction of this data; along with associated functionality and delivery.	A single point of access for content. Makes it easier to get to the specific information needed.
<b>Service</b> 	Customer Service desks and Customer Training.	Resolve issues at point of need; training provides customers with the tools and skills to find information faster.
<b>Maintain</b> 	Continuous monitoring of incoming data and related problem solving, such as publisher driven editorial amendments.	Maintain the timeliness and accuracy of content.
<b>Secure</b> 	Protect the database from security threats, and implement business continuity measures.	Ensures uninterrupted supply of information, and removes risks in accessing content.

In summary, the components of the value chain add up to the following for customers:

- ▶ **1. save time**
- ▶ **2. save money**
- ▶ **3. increase search accuracy**
- ▶ **4. access an extensive archive**
- ▶ **5. have a single point of access**

The true benefit of these services is amplified where a high-value or high-risk decision is based on the information professional's research



### **The Voice of the Information Professional**

Our panel were asked **“Do you believe using a paid-for aggregator service saves time?”**

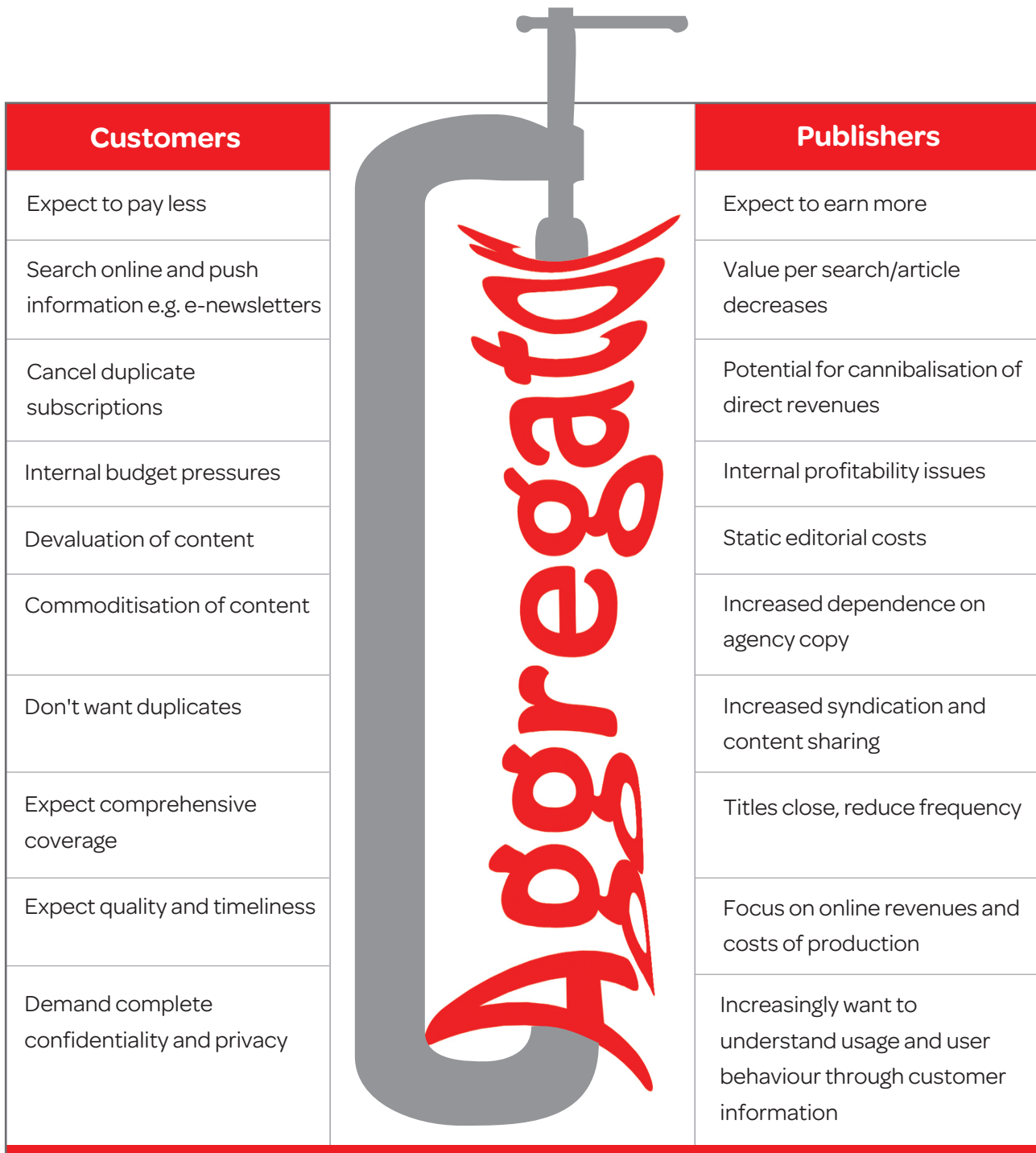
Our panellists, as professional researchers, use aggregator services and need sophisticated research tools. 77% believe a paid-for aggregator service saves time through efficient searching and streamlined results. 65% believed they could not conduct their role efficiently and proficiently if they lost their paid for aggregator service.

Our panel were also asked **“Do you still look for a source on a paid-for aggregator service, even if it could be found on the web?”**

50% replied “yes” to this question, with only 11.5% saying “no”. This speaks to the benefits added through the content aggregation value chain, and really encapsulates why publishers have been willing to provide their content to aggregators.

## The Aggregator Squeeze

The future for publishers is directly affected by the changing requirements and expectations of the customer.



## **If free news doesn't pay, why do publishers remove their content from aggregator services?**

The most frequent reason for content being removed is because a title ceases publication.

Alternatively it can transfer to another publisher in which case an aggregator will try and follow the title to the new publisher and maintain continuity of supply. In other cases, publishers make a commercial decision to go it alone, with either their own direct distribution or through a related company. It can also be for commercial reasons where licensing content would mean passing costs on to the customer which would not be merited by the value of the content.

The reality is that aggregator content is constantly changing. New titles are added and - as noted above - existing titles are removed. We do not see this as an indicative trend towards removing content from aggregators. It is simply the normal pattern of new titles becoming available and others going away.

## **If more content is out there on aggregator products than on the web, is it harder to find the actual information you need?**

The simple answer is "no". In fact, free information is becoming harder to get at - not because there isn't enough of it, but in part because, the full page indexing used by search engines returns too many and too broad a result.

The advantage of an aggregated solution is the superior indexing, customer service, training, and search capabilities that help customers find the exact information they need. The future is inevitably to create products, capabilities and solutions that are actively targeted at specific job roles, thereby providing greater focus on the needs and tasks at hand.

This reflects the evolving roles of information professionals as they focus their time on high-value or specific tasks where they can better add value.

## **How information professionals can add value - and how content aggregators can help**

Today's competitive business environment creates an atmosphere where every activity is under scrutiny to make sure it pays its way for the business. This is especially true for support functions such as information and library services. So how can content aggregators help information professionals provide good value to their business?

It seems ironic that, while the value of information as a strategic asset is elevating in organisations, many libraries and information groups are under threat. This shift in importance creates both opportunity and pressure for in-house professionals. The opportunity is that of being a dynamic collaborator for strategic decision making, while the threat is that of seeming to be not suited to the new requirement of information in the organisation.

The following guidelines outline where an information professional and a content aggregator can collaborate to really add value:

1. How do senior management value information and how much are they willing to pay for it? Competitor intelligence is priceless and that's hard to come by via the web. Aggregated information gives a unique insight through analysed business and company reports.
2. Users can get information anywhere. You need to show how to add value not found in generic information:

<b>TIMELINESS</b>	Aggregators update information daily with feeds that may not be visible on a web platform if behind a paywall.
<b>ACCESSIBILITY</b>	Aggregators invest in indexing that guarantees your search will be more precise and thorough.
<b>USABILITY</b>	A single point of access through an aggregator is your gateway to an uninterrupted supply of information for business continuity.
<b>INDEXING</b>	Searching is precise and comprehensive, ensuring you reach the information you need faster. Filtered, targeted, styled and formatted; results need minimum processing.

## So what does the future hold?

- ▶ Aggregators must focus on meeting end user needs. It is no longer enough to have information if it is not available to a user at the appropriate time. The continuing development of indexing and search is a necessary requirement in managing information overload. Information professionals use indexing for both precision, and for surveying the breadth of information. The information-push tools or product environments where end-users access information require these capabilities, often working behind the scenes.
- ▶ Aggregators need to retain supply of content and this needs to be achieved through continuing to offer publishers a valued distribution channel and, increasingly, becoming a component of publisher digital strategies.
- ▶ Aggregators will increasingly need to address the challenge of social and online media. Whilst aggregators have fully incorporated these media types in analytics, media and sentiment measurement tools, the challenge of utilizing these rich sources of information in conjunction with licensed content has not been fully utilised. In part this has been due to the stringent licensing, copyright and quality controls imposed by their business models; this does not, however, prevent them from securing and distributing trusted online content.
- ▶ Aggregators need to continue to invest in the full value chain to actively differentiate themselves from free or low-value services. It's the combination of high-value content and the associated services in making it easier to interrogate and extract information which brings customers to services.

- ▶ Aggregators must acknowledge specific job functions or key segments by building products or solutions that deliver relevant content. This is where information can be applied to a specific task with a defined value, making it easier to justify the costs of services.
- ▶ Information on which decisions are based must come from authoritative, reviewed and edited sources - many of which are behind publisher or aggregator paywalls.

The conclusion is that content aggregation services provide better information for end users and a guaranteed income for publishers. This sustainable model will ensure that content aggregation isn't going to disappear anytime soon.

## **Paul Al-Nakaash**

Paul is Head of Content Alliances at LexisNexis , responsible for all partnerships with publishers; including national newspapers, major regional newspapers and magazines. Formerly the European Strategic Intelligence Manager, then Publisher Relations Manager at Factiva, Paul has a wealth of knowledge in the News and Business Market. His areas of specialism include content aggregation, newspapers transition from print to online, and media partnerships. Paul is the UK spokesperson for News and Business at LexisNexis.

## **The Voice of the Information Professional**

The 'Voice of the Information Professional' panel has been specially created to represent the thoughts and interests of Information Professionals across a broad section of our business community. Members represent a full range of industries, from top City institutions and Magic Circle law firms to the Public Sector.