Google News Initiative

The Guardian

THE GUARDIAN APP RESULTS

- The Guardian app reached 2.6m browsers per month and more than 6m in 2018

- 4 billion page views on The Guardian app

- 60% increase in premium tier subscribers in 2018

- Premium tier acquisition volumes doubled YoY

- Android app now ranked #1 Highest Grossing App in the News & Magazines category on the UK Play Store

- Winner of 2019 Apps, Mobile and Voice Webby award

- Winner of The Drum's 2019 App of the Year award

The Guardian App: Building a Sustainable Reader Revenue Strategy

The Guardian: It's no secret that there's pressure on the media industry - and that news organisations are looking to find new ways to generate revenue.

In 2016 The Guardian implemented a three-year strategy, with the objective of breaking even at an operating level by April of 2019. This strategy was focused around developing deeper relationships with readers and growing reader revenues. We believe that our journalism serves a purpose to hold power to account, and that it should be open for all to read, watch or listen to. We do not believe that a paywall would be in keeping with our purpose and have steered away from creating a barrier to our content.

Instead, we have looked to other means to generate revenue from our audience; we are now funded more by our readers than by advertising. Guardian readers support our journalism through a combination of revenue models, including contributions, membership and subscriptions, which includes our Premium app.

Our focus has been firmly on breaking even and executing the strategy put in place to get us there. Longer term, we aim to build upon the success that we have achieved this year. We will continue to operate sustainably, increasingly funded through reader revenue streams which do not compromise the free provision of our journalism.

The app project has been critical to the evolution of our reader revenues strategy. It has fundamentally changed the way in which we operate, collaborate and approach the development of new and innovative reader revenue streams.

With support from Google, we approached the development and optimisation of our Premium app tier in two phases.

Phase One

During Phase One, we focused on building up our Premium proposition by introducing a new set of Premium-only app features. We introduced **"Live"**, which helps committed news consumers access our live blogs and follow breaking news stories as they unfold, with our award-winning "minute by minutes." We also launched a dedicated news feed for live sports coverage.
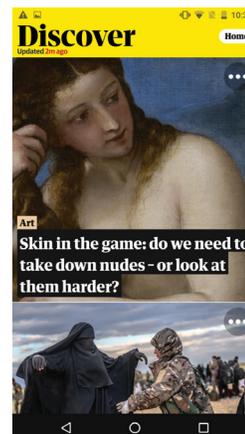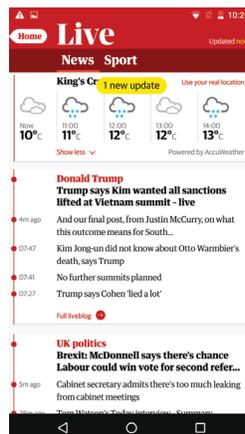
Meanwhile **"Discover"** curates long-form and features journalism from the full breadth of the Guardian, enabling readers to delve into our most engaging features at a slower pace. Our readers can personalise their feed of articles in Discover by removing topics they are not interested in. We also enhanced the **offline reading experience** for Premium users to allow readers without reliable internet access to fully download selected sections of the app. By developing the Premium tier, we are now able to deliver our journalism in a more innovative way and can monetise our app, while continuing to provide our journalism for free.
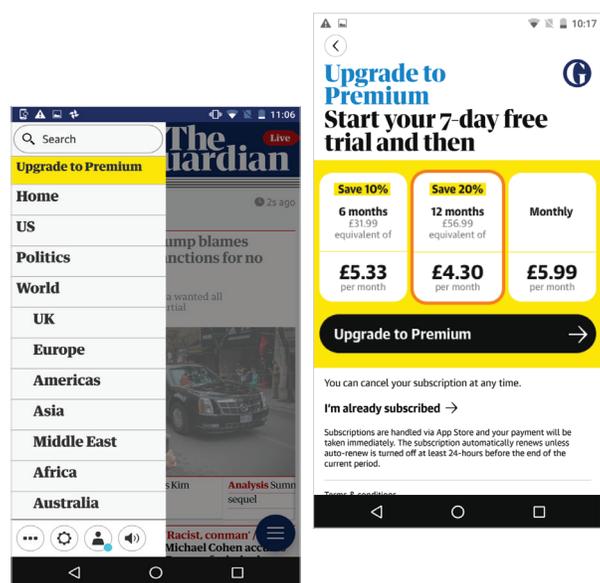
Phase Two

Following the launch of our new Premium proposition, Phase Two saw us working closely with the Google Developer Relations and Google Play teams to identify and test ways in which we could drive increased awareness of, and upgrades to, our Premium tier. The Google Play team took time to understand the challenges we faced before making recommendations based on their learnings, to help us leverage market-wide Android UX best practices. They ran app conversion rate deep-dive sessions with us, looking at how we could tackle our Premium subscription upsell challenges, while still maintaining an excellent user experience. We identified the following areas where we believed we could yield a conversion uplift, and took a fast-paced, experimental approach to testing and learning about how these impact the Guardian app Premium conversions:

1) In-app messaging

2) Payment options

3) Premium upsell screens (content, frequency, timing)

4) Store listing optimisation

Google Recommendations

Detailed below are some of the recommendations that the Google Play team made to help us grow subscription revenues, including how they performed for the Guardian:

1. In-app messaging

    Google Play recommendation - Increase visibility of our Premium upsell trigger points throughout the app:

- We introduced an 'Upgrade to Premium' button at the top of article screens which has, so far, driven **19% of our acquisitions** since its launch - the second highest channel in the app

- Highlighting Premium more prominently within the Android app navigation has **doubled our acquisitions** via navigation since its launch

    Google Play recommendation - Improve in-app messaging around Premium:

- We introduced visibility of the Premium proposition within the new user onboarding journey and we've seen **5% of acquisitions** through this new channel

- We A/B tested a new version of our Premium explanation screen, so that messaging around Premium benefits became clearer. On Android this led to a **significant improvement in Premium acquisitions** (circa 16% uplift). Once we have finished our other A/B tests this quarter, the plan is to roll this out to the full userbase

2. Payment options Google Play recommendation

Improve our price framing and subscription options:

- We ran an A/B test, changing the visual layout of our price options as per Google Play recommendations, adding a third payment option which placed the most popular payment option in the middle. To achieve this, we introduced an annual subscription option with a 20% discount. This test produced a 64% increase and the featured, annual option became the most used subscription type during the test. We have rolled this out to all of our users.

3. Premium upsell screens

Google Play recommendation - Change the way we frame our Premium costs by featuring the monthly price for 6 month/12 month subscriptions as opposed to displaying the full price:

- We ran an A/B test on this messaging and saw a 64% increase in conversions and will roll out the change to all of our users as a result.

4. Store listing optimisation Google Play recommendation

Increase our app installation rate with new Android app bundle:

- We worked with the Google Play team to identify opportunities to improve our Android apps installation rate. We integrated with the new Android app bundle, which subsequently saw an average 33% app size reduction, with almost 40% reduction on lower-end devices.

Still to come

We are continuing work on further recommendations made by the Google teams which will include a limited time, reduced price sale offer later in 2019. We also plan to integrate with Subscription Developer Notifications, as well as further increasing visibility of our upsell trigger points throughout the app by testing how we can better highlight Premium-only features within our app navigation.

Conclusion / results

Our app remains the destination where our most loyal readers consume our journalism. In 2018 we reached an average of 2.6m browsers per month and more than 6m over the full year, in which this audience generated over 4 billion page views.

Our approach has been hugely successful. Our total premium tier subscriber base increased by 60% in 2018 and our premium acquisition volumes have doubled year on year. Our Android app is now ranked the #1 Highest Grossing App in the News & Magazines category on the UK Play Store.

Open Sourcing

As part of the Google News Initiative, we open sourced our libraries to share with others in the Android app community. More specifically, we open sourced our code for the remote configuration of Premium upgrade friction screens: https://github.com/guardian/frictionscreen - A small Android library which shows a friction screen after consuming certain content based on a simple algorithm.

The discussion with Google about open sourcing inspired the team to look at open sourcing other work, for example: https://github.com/guardian/newsroom.

Learn more about how you can partner with Google at g.co/newsinitiative.