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Regional online news sharing network: A research opportunity

**Could you benefit from a deeper, stronger
online/mobile/digital bond with your customers?
Want to join a free experiment with that aim?**

The Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) at the Missouri School of Journalism has asked Clickshare Service Corp. to help RJI conduct a six-month research effort to test the business and news opportunity for web-based sharing of customers and content. During the test, a reader subscribed to one online news service will have automatic access to other network premium content at no extra cost.

We're calling this experiment *The New England Common*. The region's news organizations are invited to participate (signup details on the last page). *The New England Common* will allow a customer from any one of participating, independent news websites -- each with their own subscribers -- to access "protected content" on web, tablet or mobile devices of other participating news websites.

As newspapers begin asking the public to pay for online and mobile services, the research will test your readers' reaction to the convenience and depth of a single account that works to reach premium resources on affiliated, partner websites. At the end of the trial, we expect to have tested the opportunity for this new customer experience for news -- one that allows convenient access to trustworthy, valuable information from multiple sources via a single home-base relationship and account.

RJI and Clickshare are today inviting a group of New England newspapers -- and possibly other news-oriented sites -- to permit their respective customers to access premium content at each other's websites as an added benefit delivered at no additional cost. Publishers will have the option, in subsequent trials, to incorporate the service as part of a premium package or to charge a bit more for it as an add-on.

If you're already a Clickshare publisher client for customer registration, authentication and content access control, it is incredibly easy to participate. There will be no cost to you. If you are not a Clickshare client, you may still be able to participate.

HOW IT WORKS

The New England Common's research objective is to test customer reaction to multisite registration, authentication and event-logging service. It's designed to allow a web/mobile/tablet customer to access and purchase resources from multiple independent websites using a single ID/password issued and maintained by their home-base publisher -- and have multiple such events be aggregated and settled to a single customer account on a periodic basis. The scope will include research about the operation of the service, and outreach about the experiment to editors, the news industry and the public.

We will conduct this experiment from approximately Jan. 1-June 30. During the experiment, customers who are subscribed to one of the New England Common content providers will have access to additional premium regional services from other participants. *During the academic research trial, the participating publishers must agree there will be no additional charges and no attempt to solicit or seek information about each other's visiting customers.*

How will customers find out about this test?

All of the customers involved will be registered customers at their "home-base" publisher. When they "log-in" at their home base – their publisher will present them with a message explaining that they can choose to use free services from other sites as part of a test. The message will either contain logos of participating publishers, or will link to an explanatory page at <http://www.necommon.org>

The principal information source about the experiment will be a customer's existing home-base news source. However, in consultation with participating publishers, we'll design a New England Common website so that it provides some useful information to customers who go there directly. There, participating editors may share public links, advisories and background on their standout stories and work – some of it available only to customers of the exclusive New England Common content network.

What are some of the offers that can be made available?

- Limited day passes to digital and mobile editions
- Day passes to websites or counted access to the website articles
- Special resources not available to the general public

Is there money involved?

Not at this stage (beyond any subscription required to access their home sites). The system enables the tracking of access to resources at participating websites for individual charges, or as part of subscription bundles. We will demonstrate the reporting of access and charge records among and between content providers. However in this test, *no customer should be charged anything other than what they might already be paying at their host "home base" publisher website.*

What happens when the customer arrives on a remote site?

The system recognizes that this customer is a network customer and puts up an information page promoting the free access to otherwise restricted resources. Depending how customers react in the test, the system may direct customers to internal resource links on participating websites without any intermediate explanatory page. This ability to access resources on remote websites, with network login credentials issued by any one of participating home-base sites, (rather than a central registration service) is unique to the Clickshare environment.

Who will head this research?

The research will be overseen by Bill Densmore, founder of Clickshare and a consulting fellow to the Reynolds Journalism Institute. It's an outgrowth of his 2008-2009 fellowship, [the Information Valet Project](#), and the Aug. 4 white paper, "From Paper to Persona." (<http://www.papertopersona.org>) The paper argues that news organizations must shift from being product driven to being service driven. It asserts that to be competitive with Google, Facebook and other technology competitors news organizations must invite digital news consumers to describe their personal information needs, and then respond, becoming "information valets" – curators, advisors, agents -- for the public.

Amherst, Mass.-based Clickshare Service Corp. was founded by Densmore in 1996. [1]

As part of its mission to foster ideas, research and experiments that sustain the values, principles and purposes of journalism, RJI also is part owner of CircLabs Inc., a company developing methods for news personalization that would be branded and part of newspaper web services. CircLabs operates the [InfoValet Circulate Discovery Service](#). This service combines a newspaper's own local content with news from other national or regional sources and then presents stories tailored to a specific customer's preferences on a personal "start" page. The Circulate Service can be optionally deployed as part of the *New England Common* project.

The most trusted source of information in most communities is the local newspaper. *The New England Common* and InfoValet are tools that will allow community publishers to leverage their most valuable asset -- a decades-long relationship with the community -- so they become the one-stop shop for the community's information needs. It's a strategy for retain customers in the face of technology firms that want to pick them off.

If your paper or news website would like to be part of this experiment please contact us below to discuss and reserve a slot. Or use the form: <http://www.circlabs.com/contact/beta>

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[1] -- See <http://www.newshare.com/disclosure>