

Making the Most of the Digital Leap Forward

Identifying Digital Content Delivery Systems That Effectively Support Magazine Publishing in 2021

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Introduction

When this report was first compiled three years ago, the trend towards Digital Content Delivery Systems was obvious. We called it the “great digital leap forward” and sought to help publishers answer whether they were ready for the change and how to do it. This time around, the question is no longer “whether”, but rather, “which”, as partnering with a digital content delivery system is now a necessary part of the publishing landscape.

The last year has been a period of rapid online growth with the increased need for remote and digitized options. Many companies have risen to the call, which is why this report has more than doubled its number of reviewed systems. Contained within this report are updates on the five originally reviewed platforms: Issuu, ZINIO, Magzter, Mag+, and 3D Issue. In addition, there are six systems that have increased their prominence in the last three years: Joomag, MagLoft, FlipHTML5, Readz, Zmags, and PaperLit, as well as local companies PressReader and Simplebooklet.

In this report publishers will find overviews, special features lists, and in-depth user experience reviews. Additionally, the end of this document provides tables comparing these sites’ special features, costs/plans, and recommendations.

Disclaimer

The information and analysis in this report was collated between November 2020-February 2021, and where possible, checked with the provider. The findings in this report are representative of the researchers’ interpretation and understanding of various systems’ offerings. However, errors and omissions do happen despite our best efforts.

We recommend that you review each system and contact each provider you’re interested in to confirm their pricing, profit-sharing model, and features before making a decision about which system you would like to sign up with.

Process

The goal of this guide is to help publishers decide which service out of the many available best aligns with the needs of their magazine. To do this, we approached the process of compiling information from two standpoints—that of a reader, and that of a publisher.

From a reader's viewpoint, we personally researched and test-drove these services using a laptop, smartphone, and tablet, while keeping an eye on their intuitiveness, navigability, features, and customization.

From a publisher's standpoint, we paid attention to costs and potential revenue, software intuitiveness, and powerful functionality (e.g. interactivity, multimedia, branding). We also documented plans and costs for Issuu, Magzter, Mag+, 3D Issue, Joomag, MagLoft, FlipHTML5, and Readz, PressReader and Simplebooklet, but this information was not publicly available for Magzter, ZINIO, Zmags, and PaperLit, all of whom expressly stated they prefer to discuss this with publishers upon request (except for Magzter, whose software is free, but who wouldn't divulge their revenue sharing percentages).

When questions arose, we asked the companies directly to provide clarification. Magzter, Joomag, MagLoft, Zmags, PressReader and Simplebooklet were very timely in responding, while Mag+, 3D Issue, Readz, and PaperLit offered a delayed response and Issuu, ZINIO, and FlipHTML5 never responded, despite multiple attempts.

The last three years have seen a burst of digital content delivery system activity. Many systems have adapted their offerings with the market; some features which were available during the last report have been cut, while certain trends (such as the focus on SEO and branding) have become universal offerings at varying price points.

With that in mind, publishers would do well to make sure all services currently being offered are actually of value to their magazine and that the platform they decide to go with is committed to retaining those services. The following comparison guide will help you to evaluate some of the most popular platforms and provide a framework for evaluating other providers not covered in this report.

Digital Content Delivery Systems

ISSUU

Overview

Issuu continues to dominate the list of DCDS with more than forty-five million publications (up from thirty million in 2017) related to food, travel, sports, technology, and a wide range of other topics available to more than 100 million visitors per month, according to their website. Issuu works by plugging content into its template to give readers “a native experience”, whether it is on desktop or mobile, through website or app, and across all social media platforms.

Issuu claims over 20,000 uploads daily, making it the most popular option among publishers, thanks to its publisher-friendly uploading process. Issuu still functions as a flipbook and to that end, users must upload their content in print layout in order to facilitate a “native experience”.

Special Features

Standalone and Branded Readers

Issuu continues to offer three reader platforms—default (web or app based), standalone (embedded on the user’s own website) and branded (customizable). While each reader has full-screen, zoom, search and navigation capabilities, standalone and branded publications can be downloaded for offline reading and do not need to include links to related publications. Premium subscribers can further customize the platform by adding their logo to Issuu’s branded reader.

Visual and Article Stories

Issuu no longer supports Clip, a feature from the 2017/2018 report that allowed readers to share parts of a magazine. Instead, they have opted for a heavier

focus on social media marketing tools. With their Visual Stories feature, Issuu plugs pages from your uploaded content into their own social media templates (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), and optimizes them for the platform. The Article Stories feature operates much the same as Visual Stories, but with a focus on content that is optimized for digital readability and driving traffic to related articles.

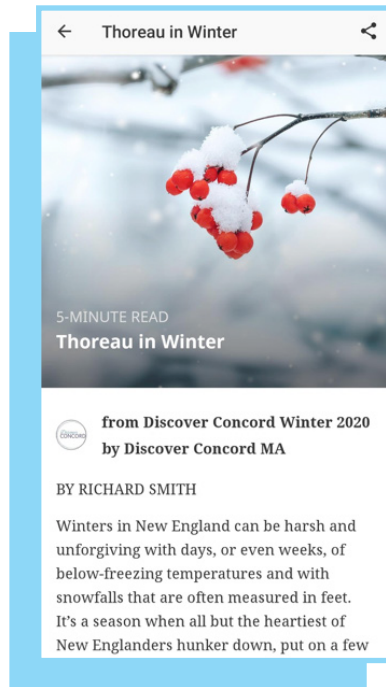
User Experience

As a publisher, Issuu is incredibly user-friendly. As long as you upload a document in one of the supported formats—Word, PowerPoint, Open Office, WordPerfect, Rich Text Format, Star Office, or the recommended PDF—Issuu does the rest. This does not mean Issuu will optimize formatting or layout design—you essentially copy and paste your content to their document viewer. Any tweaking needs to be done on the original file.

There are many guides available on their website, as well as Youtube video walkthroughs covering everything from the basics all the way to complex marketing concepts. Issuu does not offer free trials, but its basic version is free and they have a robust FAQ center with plenty of online tutorials. Unfortunately, their response time is very poor. While their website states this is due to COVID-19, publishers should note that Issuu’s response time was rated the worst on the previous report as well.

In order to receive sales revenues for their magazines, publishers must have Stripe, an online payment platform. There is an undisclosed revenue sharing percentage, which was waived for the remainder of 2020 due to COVID-19. There was no response from Issuu on whether this waiver would be extended into 2021.

Issuu publications can be read on a desktop computer or on the Issuu app. The app provides access to numerous publications in a visually appealing and mobile/tablet-friendly format that focuses on articles over entire publications. After setting up an account, including the creation of a username, a user is asked to select a preferred list of genres to narrow down the publications that may be promoted to the user within the app. As a user, I liked this feature because it both decreases the likelihood I will have to browse articles I am not interested in and promotes articles I may not otherwise come across.



One of the primary features of Issuu is its 'stories.' Essentially, it facilitates the creation and publication of a single article for users to read. What is significant

about this feature is that 'stories' can be created right on the app itself and transferred to other social media apps. As a user, it is appealing to see single articles promoted rather than entire magazines. While there are surely magazines that users are set on having in their digital libraries in whole, there is also a desire to find interesting articles to read generally. Issuu offers this to users on their app in an easily digestible manner.

Publishers can benefit from this feature as well because it allows them to promote their magazines via stories—it expands publishers' access to readers and potential subscribers. At the end of each article is a link to the full magazine PDF itself. This presents the magazine in a more traditional online fashion with the standard thumbnails of each page, ability to download for offline reading, and bookmarking and clipping capabilities.

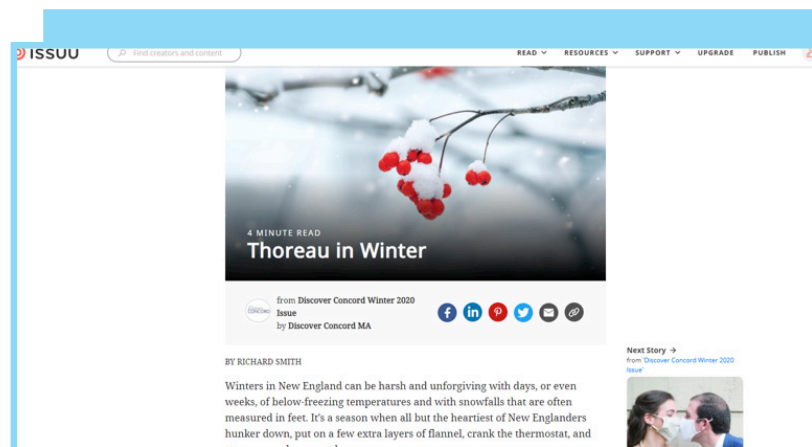
In essence, Issuu has transferred a social media framework to the world of publishing, building on elements such as 'following' and 'stories' to appeal to a varied user base. The app is structured so users

can 'follow' publications—a standout feature for a publishing app. It also has dynamic sections on the homepage dedicated to 'suggested reading' and 'today's stories.' These structural features of the app give it a personal touch, incentivizing the user to return frequently in order to see what is new. This personalized environment is one of Issuu's strengths.

The features and functions offered with the app and publications are good and consistent across devices. The user settings provide easy access to Downloads, History, Likes (of articles or magazines), and Clips (screenshots).

It's worth noting, however, that a user's profile is public and shows which publications a user follows, who the user follows and who follows the user. It is an interactive platform that connects users with each other just as much as with stories and publications. For users active on social media, this is a familiar experience; for users outside the social media demographic, however, these features could be seen as an invasion of privacy, which should be kept in mind by publishers when considering Issuu for their particular readers.

Overall, Issuu is one of the dominant platforms for publishing and the publisher user experience matches its popularity. However, Issuu is a vastly different experience for publishers than it is for readers. The desktop website is geared towards publishers; as a desktop reader, I was confused by the catalogue's paltry offerings and downright annoyed by navigation. Forget browsing—the selection of publications featured is based on "popular now" and "editor's picks". I either had to know exactly what I wanted to read, or be content with the suggestions made by the website. The zoom function on the desktop reader was frustrating to use as well. Reading small print is hard enough, and not worth the hassle of clicking and dragging across a page with preset magnification.



ZINIO

Overview

ZINIO delivers over six thousand titles to 15 million registered readers worldwide and is available on desktops, laptops, tablets and smartphones with iOS, Android, and Windows 8 applications. The ZINIO platform includes production services (layout and design), reader software, and a digital delivery system that allows users to purchase subscriptions and back issues of a publication.

ZINIO Libraries merged with RBdigital in 2018, then was bought by Naviga—a company formerly specializing in newspaper publishing software and services—in 2019, and RBdigital then became OverDrive. Due to these many changes, many libraries still call the app “ZINIO”. To add to the confusion, RBdigital still exists, with a focus on audiobooks, and OverDrive has developed another digital content app called Libby; both are meant for libraries. As such, their publisher website, ZINIO Pro, is not up to date and publishers need to visit the Commerce tab on Naviga’s website for current information. ZINIO does not offer pricing options up front, nor any information about their revenue sharing model. That information must be requested from their Director of Client Services.

Special Features

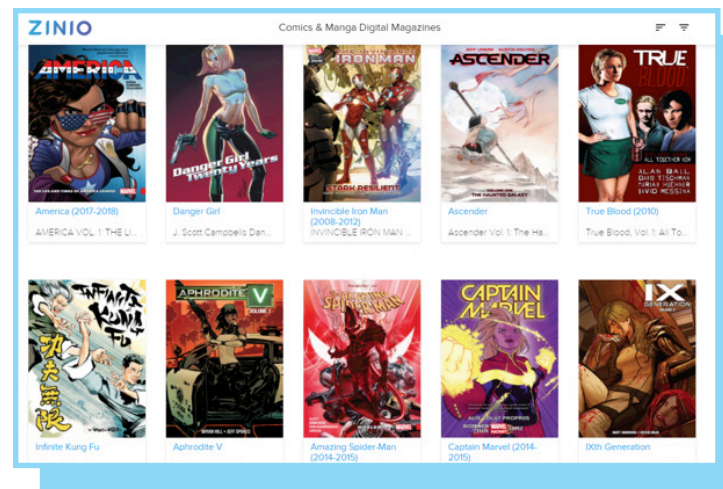
ZINIO offers a plethora of new features which did not exist in 2017, including a digital fulfillment manager, branded apps with features such as analytics, marketing, and social media plugs, and access to 3,900 libraries. For offering their content on OverDrive’s apps, publishers receive a usage-based payout with revenue share but representatives did not offer any actual numbers or disclose the percent share.

User Experience

Information on ZINIO Pro—the backend for publishers—is dated and sparse. The changes mentioned above have led to a poor publisher’s experience and an out-of-date website. ZINIO representatives assured me that improvements and a rebranding are in the works. This report focuses on the information I received after sitting down with them and going over ZINIO’s software and solutions.

ZINIO’s services are under four major categories: Conversion, Distribution, Enhancement, and Fulfillment. These services are à la carte: publishers can start off fully managed by ZINIO and take on more of those responsibilities as they advance their own skills.

The content conversion process is straightforward: give ZINIO a PDF or InDesign package and they convert it to a variety of formats, such as XML which is also fully HTML5 enabled. This is what powers their flowing reading experience, which is optimized for mobile, and also allows for a more traditional flipbook experience on larger screens. They also have piracy measures in place, and while it’s impossible to eliminate the threat entirely, ZINIO makes sure there are protections in place by limiting printing options. Distribution is through partnerships with other channels such as Amazon, Scribd, libraries, airlines, and their own newsstands and apps. This drives incremental revenue from multiple streams with different partners in many countries.



With the content management system, you can apparently enhance your content to your own specifications, although I was not given a tour or run-down of this system in detail. Also, while ZINIO doesn’t do the marketing for you, they will provide insight via analytics and monthly reports. They also have monthly marketing campaigns, exposure via free articles, and email blasts, all of which are driven through their newsstand app. In terms of fulfillment, users can choose ZINIO’s newsstand app, their own website, a white label solution, or a combination. These solutions are branded and configurable.

Regarding the reader, ZINIO is a newsstand app which hosts many different publications. The downloaded app has the same interface as the desktop website, with a sliding stream of advertisements at the top and sections meant to promote the most popular, featured, and recommended publications. Unlike Issuu, ZINIO did not require me to create an account or ask for my interests or preferences in order to target recommendations. This is not a good or bad thing: it simply left me unsure, as a reader, as to why magazines on my homepage were recommended or featured.

That said, I did appreciate the ability to use the app without an account, even to the point of purchasing and reading a subscription or a single issue, but I was restricted to reading the magazine on one device. For readers seeking some anonymity in their reading choices and what they purchase, this is a good platform. The platform also appeals to those who do want to create an account, allowing for the creation of a profile and for purchased magazines to be downloadable and/or viewable across devices.

There is a strong emphasis on selling the product to the reader. Upon clicking on a publication, the reader is taken to a page providing a description of the magazine and the cost of a single issue or of a subscription. Subscribing or buying an issue is easily done with a single click that redirects the reader to payment options. For publishers this is a good function that encourages new subscriptions. For readers, it is rather discouraging that nearly all the magazines are entirely behind paywalls, offering limited opportunities to browse the publication. Most of the magazines do provide previews of articles, but from the samples viewed, they are ineffectively brief and do not provide enough content.

As for the presentation and formatting of the app, there were little to no discrepancies across devices. The interface is intuitive, offering an Explore section that promotes articles as well as a Search section organized by subject for easy perusing. Within each magazine, articles are accompanied by a Format function allowing readers to customize the viewing experience. This is a great feature and noteworthy as one of the easiest to use across all the DCDS reviewed. The Format options include a slider bar for font size and brightness as well as options of dark, light, grey, or sepia for a background colour. A text to speech function stood out for its usefulness to

those with print impairments or who simply prefer audio. If this was available on other platforms, it was not evident and its inclusion on ZINIO's app is important to highlight.

While I appreciated a breakdown on what ZINIO offers, I was disappointed by the lack of pricing information. The representatives I spoke with did mention that there is an NDA on their revenue share, but publishers can expect to pay a production fee per issue as well as a monthly fee for add-on solutions and a delivery fee for their newsstand and digitization. There is also a monthly management fee for branded publisher applications, but the publisher retains 100% of all revenue generated. Publishers instantly start generating revenue, but again, no baseline numbers were shared, which makes me think these services are not going to be considered affordable to smaller magazines. There is something to be said for ZINIO's exposure capabilities through their partner channels, so for magazines that are serious about breaking into a larger market, the price tag could be worth it.



MAGZTER

Overview

Magzter touts itself as the largest and fastest growing self-service, cross-platform digital newsstand.

Once publishers have uploaded their PDFs to Magzter's cloud-based dashboard, they can add multimedia and other interactive elements before publishing their magazines across all platforms. Magzter's website states that while there are no upfront costs, they operate on a revenue sharing model, the details of which are not publicly available. This means that for however many magazines are sold, Magzter will take a percentage of the sales. Actual percentages were not given. Magzter has not undergone any drastic changes in the last three years.

Special Features

Magzter Gold

By default, Magzter is an à la carte service. Magzter Gold is a subscription option for readers based off of a monthly subscription price (\$9.99 USD monthly or \$99.99 USD yearly). This subscription offers unlimited access to over five thousand magazines and newspapers, including back issues. During research, Magzter Gold was on sale for half off the yearly subscription price.

Magzter Smart Reading Zone

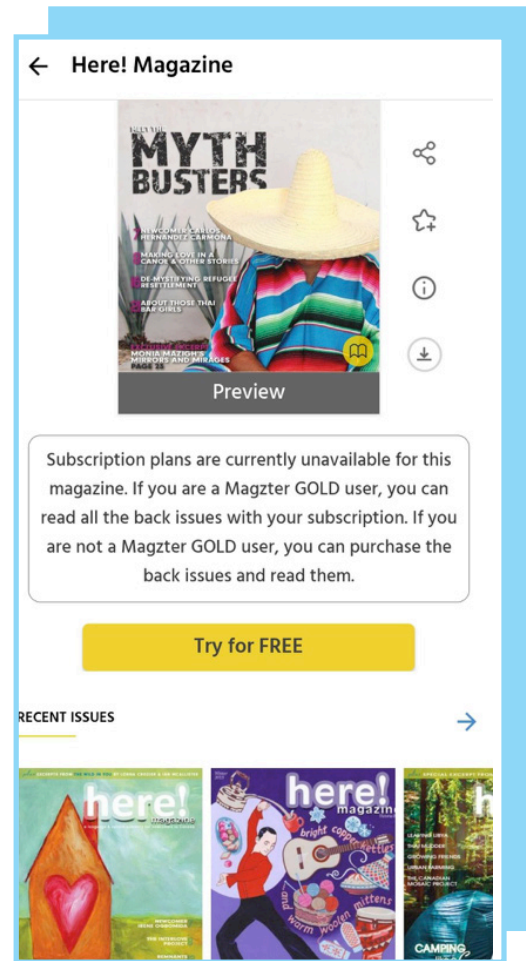
The SRZ is a new feature which enables unlimited access via location, rather than profile. It is easily accessed by readers via the Magzter app, and is marketed towards locations such as doctors' offices, schools, or hotels. This feature is unique to Magzter, and is part of the Smart Cities initiative.

User Experience

Much like ZINIO, Magzter has different websites for readers and publishers. Publishers.magzter.com is only discoverable via web search, or through a small link at the bottom of Magzter's main website. However, once you land, creating an account is straightforward. **Magzter boasts zero setup fees, a mutually beneficial revenue model, dedicated iOS/Android apps for your magazine, marketing reports and reader analysis, push notifications, interactive features, and social media promotion.** It does not include any further information on these elements upfront.

The dashboard is not intuitive, but there are plenty of tutorials that help with PDF Specifications, Exporting PDFs, Getting Started, Adding Interactivity, and Newstand App Creation. Users can download PDF guides on these various topics, but they do not have video tutorials. That being said, Magzter by far had the most responsive representative and they were quick to give answers, or let me know they would have to look into things further.

Magzter has its own app that hosts numerous publications for users to read and peruse. Upon downloading the app, the parallels to Issuu were noted,



particularly the ability to connect with other readers, follow and have followers, and have personalized stories promoted as some examples. As detailed above, Magzter is based on revenue sharing, so publications are behind paywalls. For readers, this requires a decision between paying for a subscription to Magzter Gold which provides unlimited access to all publications on the app or opting for a pay-as-you go model and subscribing to individual publications. The Magzter Gold subscription is heavily promoted while the pay-as-you-go model is not evident until the user is in the app perusing the publications. Within the context of a business model, this makes sense; for a reader, however, it is preferable to know what the options are from the outset so a fully-informed decision can be made.

The reader interface of Magzter is good and follows the same formatting as other major platforms. Elements that stood out included the search bar that



allows hashtags and specific topics to be searched in addition to magazine titles, a parental control option, good quality and extensive article previews, and the ability to follow different topics and favorite magazines. Navigation through the app was slightly clunky as a user only because there is an abundance of features. On one side, this is great because there are tools for every kind of user. On the other, I found myself lost within the app because the features appear and disappear as the screen is touched *and* are found all over the interface—top, middle, and bottom of the screen. I could not remember how or where I had seen certain features at times; there is certainly a learning curve in this respect.

Overall, on both iPhone and iPad, there were no discrepancies in the navigation and interface. The presentation is a standard PDF in electronic format which means that zooming is necessary on a smaller screen. The user can select vertical or horizontal scrolling, which is a nice customization feature, and Magzter adapts well to a phone and tablet interface. Within a single publication, the user experience is one of no distractions; the publication is full-screen and can be viewed in single- or double-page format. This is great, however, I found that the screen controls meant to pop-up after a single click to provide options to crop,

favorite, bookmark, and share were sensitive on the iPhone to the scrolling motion. In other words, there were a couple of occasions where I intended to be scrolling through a magazine but found myself bringing up this tool interface instead. Contrarily, the selection tool to return to the previous page or ‘go-back’ is not sensitive: I had to ensure I was pressing precisely on the arrow (i.e., ‘< The Magazine’) rather than the name of the magazine. While neither are a significant deterrent, both are noticeable elements of the navigation experience.

In all, Magzter offers a robust suite of free software for publishers as well as a decent reading experience, even with the clunky navigation and confusing payment options. Naturally, getting a better idea of the revenue sharing model would be an improvement, but considering the features are discussed upfront and the software is free, Magzter is a decent, middle-of-the-road option for publishers.

Overview

Since 2017, Mag+ has not changed in any notable way. **The company offers a series of free software tools that aid publishers throughout the production process, enabling them to design, build, and distribute digital editions and branded apps:**

Mag+ Feature Builder

An InDesign plugin for CS4 and higher allows publishers to create interactive HTML content (image galleries, slideshows, etc.) without code.

Mag+ Production

Once pages have been designed, publishers can use the Production tool to organize and customize their digital issues and apps.

Mag+ Reviewer

Available for free in app stores, this tool allows publishers to review their work on an actual device before publishing.

Mag+ Publish

This is where publishers can control the distribution of their branded app. Apps can be uploaded to iTunes, Google Play, or the Amazon App Store.

Special Features

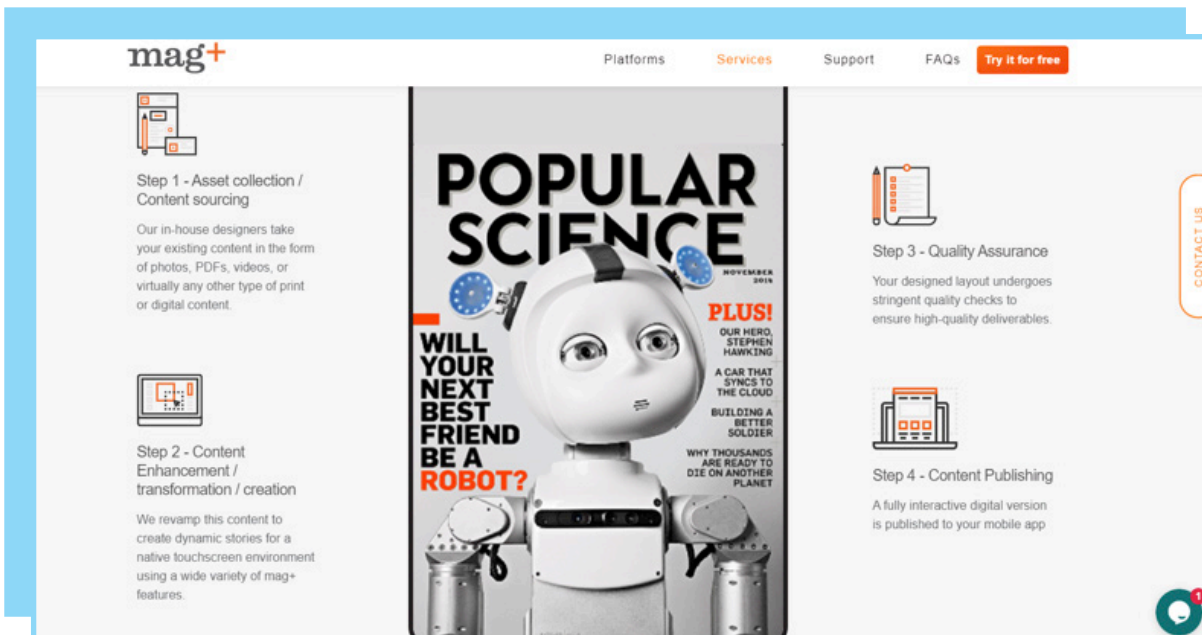
Mag+ NOW

An HTML5 authoring tool that creates responsive content which can be published to a Mag+ powered mobile app. This content can be created from pre-designed templates, or with uploaded PDF or Word Docs. It differs from the regular Mag+ creator in that it has white label functionality. Interested publishers must contact Mag+ for pricing on this option, as it is not part of the free software package.

User Experience

Mag+ is not a newsstand app like Issuu or Magzter. Instead, they provide software for self-branded applications which publishers upload their publications to. As stated, this software is free, but there are pricing options associated for publishers who want to pay Mag+ to do the work on their behalf.

The price tags associated with these services are steep; a one-time publication will cost over two thousand dollars. Subscribing to their service costs less, but compared to other services, it could still be a bank-breaker. And unfortunately, the software tools are convoluted and buggy enough to make that price tag seem worth it—at least until you realize there are other options out there.



Mag+ provides tutorials on their website on how to download and configure the Mag+ suite. However, it is not intuitive; users with minimal technological skill will find the process arduous. Self-diagnosis is required, and customer support is prioritized for premium members.

As with 3D Issue (next page), Mag+ uses HTML5 to create publications. As a reader, the content created with their software is slightly more responsive than Issuu, but still has a very PDF feel. Using their Mag+ NOW software, publishers can create more responsive mobile content, but this is priced separately and not complementary to the free software download.

Mag+ is a platform aimed towards publishers as opposed to readers. It does not have its own branded app for readers to download but acts as the channel through which publishers can create their own apps to develop and publish publications for consumption. From a reader's perspective, it was challenging to find examples of published material to assess. The few publications I had access to demonstrated that Mag+ draws on traditional formats of magazines as well as standard digital format adaptations. In other words, a publication can be developed in PDF format with the magazine appearing as an online version of a printed publication—an adequate option which appeals to many publishing types and reader groups. Mag+ also offers a more dynamic presentation option similar to Readz, wherein digital editions can be published via a branded app.

Well-known consumer titles as well as smaller publications have been created using Mag+ software, each of which has been developed with their readers' specific needs in mind using responsive design. The Mag+ Reviewer comes equipped with a *Design Examples* guide that introduces publishers to some of the interactive features that can be added to a Mag+ application. Each feature—pop-up windows, image galleries, video, presentation styles and so on—can be applied in several different ways.

Presentation, for example, can be single page or multi-page while videos can be looping, inline, or full-screen. These features give publishers the opportunity to include additional content within their publications. Mag+ publications can also be read regardless of screen orientation.

Due to the assorted options, the user experience varies from publication to publication. Generally, navigation within the apps tested was simple. One app was formatted to mirror a website with a running banner at the top and navigation tools at the bottom in the same manner as a web page. This app was challenging to navigate: the links were difficult to select and once articles uploaded, the formatting was out of alignment and difficult to read. Other apps tested are more user friendly, however, and are based on a digital presentation model. These apps were easier to navigate, with articles accessible through large thumbnail links and scrolling bars to narrow down topics at the top of each section.

The interface itself was tidy with minimal distraction. The only distracting elements were the advertisements and sponsored content not connected to the app. However, this is to be expected as a conventional element of online platforms. It acts more as a familiar inconvenience than a specific deterrence to using the platform. Within the apps sampled using the Mag+ platform, there are minimal customization options compared to other platforms. One option includes changing the font size within articles but gives two options: regular or large. From what I was able to experience as a user, the platform relies on the user searching for the content they are seeking.

Overall, the app satisfies the basic requirements needed to compete with other platforms and provides a decent user experience. On the other hand, the software leaves something to be desired by publishers, and the payment options are confusing. Mag+ displays competence with one consumer group while it underperforms in the other.

3D ISSUE

Overview

Since 2017, 3D Issue's offerings have mostly remained the same. With their publishing suite, publishers can choose to convert PDFs into digital "flipbooks" or create their own native applications. Publishers can also use the 3D Issue publishing suite software to create dashboards—content hubs that display material from all of a publisher's websites, blogs, and social media feeds. **Essentially, 3D Issue is a magazine-focused webpage and app creator allowing publishers to upload their PDFs and convert to HTML5, epub, or mobi formats. Further customization is encouraged with options such as video, audio, image galleries, links, buttons/hotspots, and user-facing features such as a content menu, search function, text selection, area for notes, and bookmarks.**

3D Issue currently offers a free fourteen-day trial with an upload limit of ten pages. Their pricing is available on their website and has three tiers: Professional, Enterprise, and Partner. The main differences between the tiers are the amount of storage, team management capabilities, and being able to house multiple brands under one account.

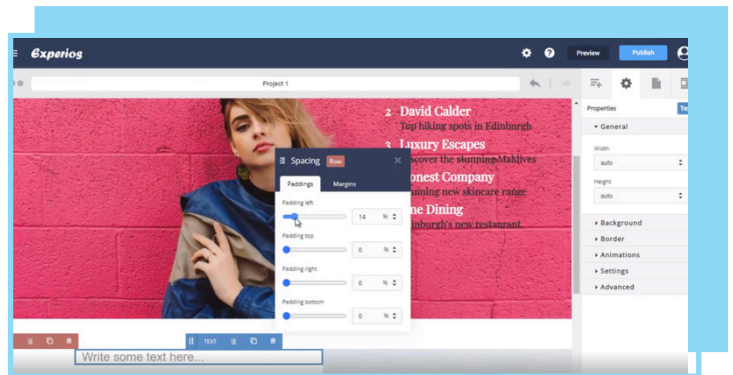
Special Features

Flipbooks

3D Issue calls its digital publications "flipbooks". PDFs are automatically converted to HTML5 flipbooks and as of now, no other format is accepted. Publishers can choose to self-host (Flipbooks Desktop), or host with 3D Issue (Flipbooks Online). While the PDF file itself cannot be edited with 3D Issue's software, flipbooks are customizable with features such as video, audio, images, links, buttons, and reader features.

Experios

Since HTML5 is inherently format-driven and will not translate well between devices, 3D Issue offers a solution by customizing content for alternative devices. *Experios* are responsive pages (i.e. they reshape themselves according to the device in use) that publishers can create without any coding or web design knowledge.

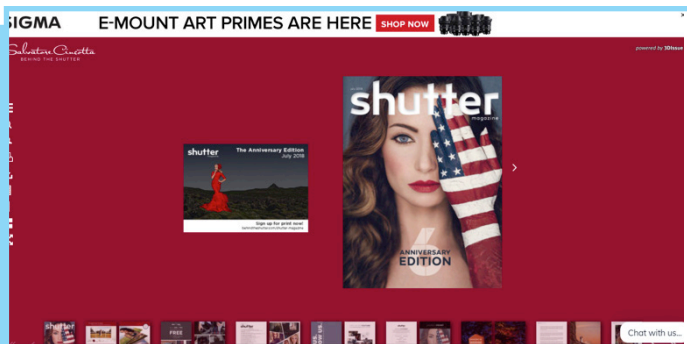


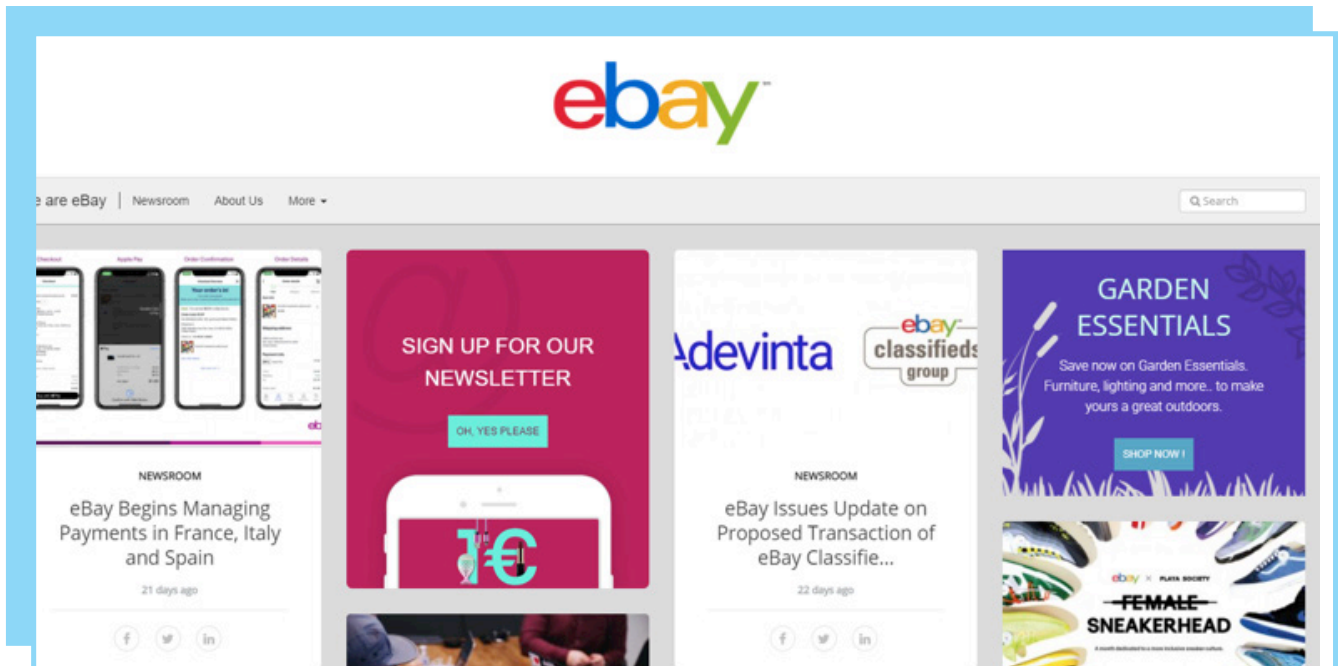
Hubs

3D Issue also offers a content curation tool for publishers interested in centralizing their social media and marketing content. *Hubs* allows publishers to centralize and aggregate their content from websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc. It also tracks current trends, news, and events from around the web to give marketing insight.

Apps

While 3D Issue does not have an app storefront for publications users make with their software, it does enable publishers to create their own branded apps. It is designed for publishers and marketers to make live changes and updates instantly without the need for re-submission through the Apple and Android app stores.





User Experience

3D Issue does not offer a newsstand feature. Instead, readers seek out magazines they want to read through other channels and quite likely download it without knowing it is published using 3D Issue. With that said, I tested the navigation, tools, and appearance of the Flipbook Viewer app as well as a branded app from a reader's perspective on an iPad and iPhone. The navigation and interface are identical across platforms and the navigation is straightforward. Scrolling is easy, embedded videos can be maximized for viewing, and the text of the magazines can be searched. However, there were some elements that were discouraging. None of the magazines I viewed had a table of contents that was linked—I had to scroll through all of the pages to get to a specific story.

As well, the bookmarking tool was complicated and time-consuming. I had to first find the bookmark widget either at the top of the screen or in the additional settings, enter the bookmark tool page, and then click an additional button to bookmark a specific page. Given that publishers are able to design the interface of the magazine, I assume they are able to choose the tools visible and accessible to the reader on the app. This is a great feature for a publisher but, from a reader's perspective, it is an ever-minor hiccup on the Flipbook Viewer app because the tools viewable on magazine interfaces are inconsistent (e.g. the bookmark tool). While not noticeable on the branded apps, it did stand out on the Flipbook Viewer app where consistency in the basic interface tools would be expected across the magazines published on the app.

As a publisher, once the PDF has been uploaded, the new content can be viewed online right away, shared, or embedded. Publishers can also edit their flipbook using 3D Issue's software; throughout the process of uploading, using the editor, and publishing the finished product, there were notably long load times. Once in the editor, 3D Issue is able to find links already in the document and publishers can embed videos, photos, audio, hotspots, and buttons. It should be noted that 3D Issue only works to add content—the document can not be edited to remove text, photos, or anything else. The software is simple to use—just click anywhere on the document page to add desired elements, and there are formatting options like layering, background, etc.

The 2017 report stated that 3D Issue failed to provide publishers with sufficient customization options, and the options that were available had subpar performance. It is a pleasure to report that in 2020, 3D Issue has revamped their software and now offers a totally different experience. They have forgone "native experience" in favor of a "reactive" publication, one which adapts based on the reader's device. 3D Issue has made the biggest improvement of all the originally reviewed digital content delivery systems. Where once their website was convoluted and hard to navigate, there is simplicity and intuitiveness. It is still not intended for readers, but is intended to help publishers interface directly with their readers without the use of a third party app.

JOOMAG

Overview

Joomag is a robust digital content delivery system new to this report. Their online editor, Crater Editor, allows publishers to upload and edit PDFs, create content with one of over three hundred templates, or build a publication from scratch. Publishers can sell digital or hardcopies via subscription or single issue, and can even import their own subscriber lists to be managed on Joomag’s platform. In addition to their suite of publishing tools, Joomag offers marketing and branded apps, all automatically updated and managed by Joomag. Of course, access to these tools depends on which tier publishers subscribe to: “Start”, “Grow”, “Scale”, or “Enterprise”. There is a free 14-day trial for all tiers except Enterprise, which is priced on an individual basis.

Special Features

Crater Editor

Joomag’s Crater Editor is their trademark online publishing suite. Publishers have three options: upload PDF, use a template, or create from scratch. There are options for spread type (single, double, or scrolling), and tools for layout that simplify creation and editing. Interactive elements include: adding/editing photos, creating slideshows within publications, embedding video and audio, adding hotspots and plugins for Facebook sharing, email, rating, and contact/feedback forms.

User Experience

As a publisher who has personally struggled with Adobe InDesign, Joomag’s software was slightly more intuitive/accessible and could be a contender, especially with the ability to distribute both digital and hard copies. When asked how hard copy distribution works, a representative of Joomag said: “Joomag discontinued hard copy distribution, and now publishers download the PDF version and print it out themselves”. This is a bit disappointing given the monopoly Amazon holds over distribution—a competitor would have been an interesting development. Hopefully the website is updated soon to clarify the change.

Regarding reader’s experience, Joomag does have its own native app. Magazines are parsed by category (art, lifestyle, news, etc.), and are also searchable. The magazines themselves can be viewed in a scrollable page preview format, but then switch to a native format which requires “page turning” and zooming. The magazines on offer are overwhelmingly niche and many are in foreign languages. This is not inherently positive or negative; the implications depend on the size of the magazine’s readership and marketing goals.

As far as self-branded apps go, a Joomag representative explained that the Joomag native app is the default option for publishers; self-branded app customization is only available for those who choose the Enterprise tier. Pricing is based on individual publishers’ needs.



Joomag has two branded apps available for download: Joomag Publisher and Joomag Newsstand. Joomag Publisher is available to publishers of Joomag-supported magazines on iPhone and iPad. It offers a range of services for publishers in conjunction with minor editing functions. Primarily the app serves as a one-stop shop for publishers to gain metric information for all of their publications at once. The app requires publishers to have an account wherein information about the number of subscribers and viewing of publications can be analyzed. Additionally, the app advertises some editing tools that are available to use through the app interface. These tools are very basic and do not support major changes to layout or presentation; they include tools for changing or updating categories, tags, and keywords for searchability.

For publishers, this app is useful and enhances the overall customer experience not on offer by other platforms. The design is logical and organized, the navigation easy. While new publications cannot be created at the app level, it is a convenient feature Joomag offers to publishers' benefit.

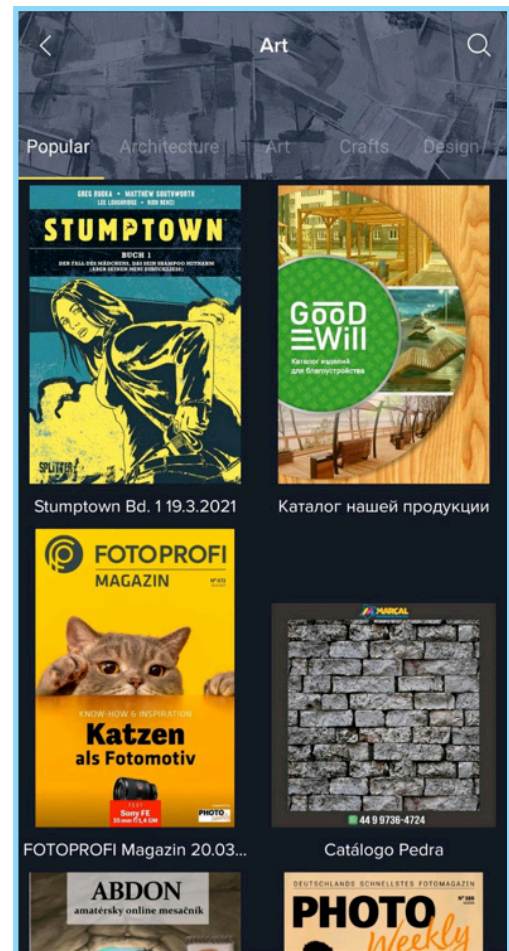
For readers, there is a separate downloadable app that operates as a newsstand app. The app organizes magazines by category. It also has a Featured, Popular, and Newly Arrived section that is first seen when opening the app. The app is designed so readers can browse magazines as guests or create a user account on the app or linking a social media account. A user account has a Library where users can save frequently viewed magazines.

There are in-app purchases—some of the magazines have to be purchased while others do not. This can be problematic because notification that a magazine must be purchased is only given once the user selects the magazine. A marker on the browsing screen that indicates which magazines are for purchase would be beneficial to the user. As well, the process for downloading magazines for offline reading is intricate. A reader must have an account, add a magazine to their library, and then go into their library to download the magazine for offline viewing. This was a complicated process compared to other platforms, although libraries often use this process for lending e-books and other digital materials.

Overall, the layout and navigation of the app on both iPhone and iPad are excellent. Users can search for a specific magazine or peruse by swiping and selecting

specific categories. The reader can choose to view a magazine in either a vertical one-page layout or horizontal two-page layout. Both layouts are designed to be full screen so there are no distractions, and the magazine is on full display. Some of the internal features include bookmark, thumbnail, and sharing tools accessible via pop-up by touching the screen, and a table of contents which link to specific pages in the magazine (in some magazines). These features enhance the user experience.

In comparison to other systems, Joomag offers something unique with its Crater Editor: the ability to design your content using their software rather than uploading PDFs, though this is still an option. Fundamental training and tutorials are plentiful thanks to their Joomag Academy, and "enrollment" is free. More advanced topics are covered on their YouTube page, and if all else fails, their live-chat option has a quick response time. Joomag would benefit from a reader's perspective by forgoing the "native" experience and opting for a reactive publication display.



MAGLOFT

Overview

Another new DCDS is MagLoft. It is a feature-rich option for publishers looking to create their own web and mobile apps. MagLoft touts itself as a digital publishing solution focused on optimizing content for mobile platforms. Desktop apps are not ignored, however. In fact, MagLoft remains free for publishers who are interested in web-only features, though of course those features are limited. The price tags associated with MagLoft's more robust publishing features could be prohibitive; while Indie is free, the next tier, App, starts at \$199/month. More information on pricing can be found in the price comparison section of this report.

Special Features

Progressive Web Apps

A major component of MagLoft's focus on mobile platforms is its Progressive Web Apps (PWA) function. The main benefit of this technology is superior formatting of digital content to combine the SEO benefits of a website and the multi-platform functionality of mobile apps. PWAs look like mobile apps when viewed on smartphones, and still function as regular websites when viewed on a desktop. MagLoft accomplishes this by converting publishers' PDFs into SEO articles and setting up a "Content HUB". A fully branded web application would then be built by MagLoft on the publisher's own domain.

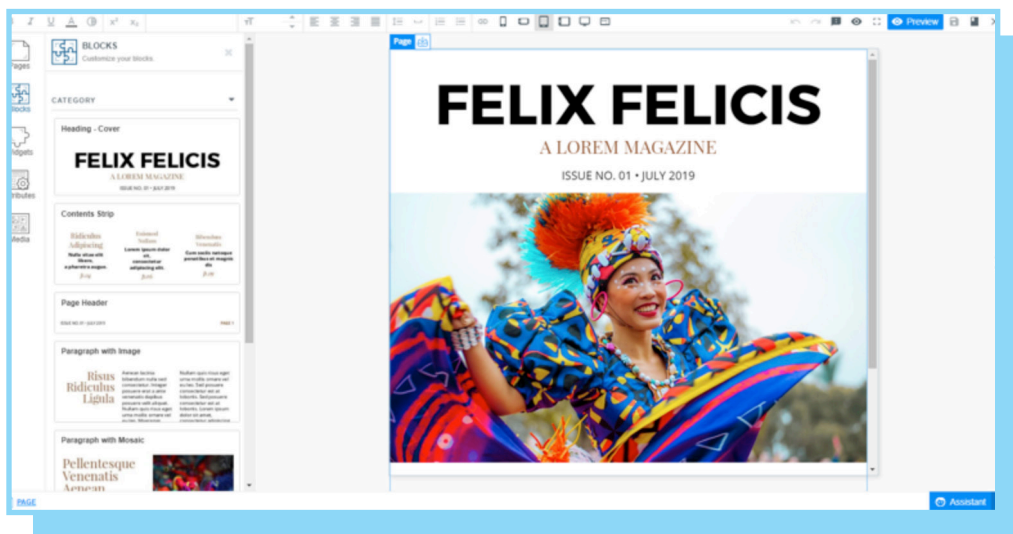
This feature is currently in Beta. As such, publishers who opt in now will get a 50% discount for their first year and a ninety-day money-back guarantee, along with a limited number of credits and free article conversions. MagLoft claims this culminates in a \$2,045 discount, but adds the disclaimer that there will be bugs and limited features.

FlexPDF & TypeLoft

MagLoft relies on its FlexPDF software to turn publishers' static PDFs into responsive HTML5 and they put a lot of emphasis on responsiveness, security, and engagement. In this regard, MagLoft is not doing anything revolutionary, but they do bring up a good point; HPUBs are much more difficult to steal and redistribute than PDFs. MagLoft also points out that grabbing and pinching to zoom and move through content on a device is bothersome—and rightly so! With their TypeLoft and FlexPDF, MagLoft assures increased readability and interactivity.

User Experience

Upon first signing up for MagLoft, publishers are greeted with an uncomplicated dashboard and easy-to-follow steps. While loading your chosen PDF is quick and straightforward, the process of editing can be slightly overwhelming. MagLoft has helpfully placed a video tutorial at the top of each page pertaining to which stage the publisher is at.



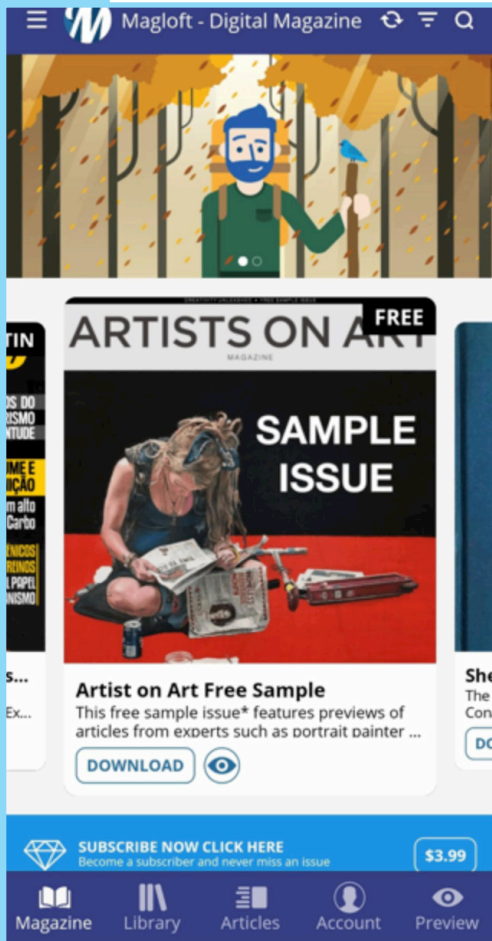
While MagLoft claims no background in coding is needed, a basic understanding of layout and design are—the tutorials were a necessity for someone like me with limited working knowledge of this field. It is not as painless as working with Joomag's software, nor is it as arduous as Mag+’s free software, though MagLoft’s representatives are quick to respond to any questions.

The MagLoft mobile app is similarly intent on making sure publishers have the knowledge to successfully use their product. While there are sample issues available for perusal, there are also several basic MagLoft guides. One unique app feature allows publishers to preview their content as it will appear on any device. Simply type in the PIN Code that appears on your MagLoft Dashboard into the app to get instant feedback without taking the content live.

Users will notice the amount of material available on the MagLoft app is sparse. This is because MagLoft builds a separate app for clients which it then publishes on Apple App Store, Google Play Store, and Amazon Store (features depending on which tier plan they choose). Client’s publications are not hosted on the MagLoft app, so readers will need to be directed to content by the publisher. And of course, the free tier is web only—no apps.

As far as reading a magazine created with MagLoft’s software, there are several considerations. First is that publishers can limit how many times a purchased magazine can be downloaded. It seems like most choose to cap it at three; however, readers must be wary of how many times they click the download button. I accidentally clicked it twice on my mobile, and the downloads are non-transferable. The second is that the file downloads as a PDF, and while it was easy to read on a desktop and tablet, getting into the fine print on a mobile meant pinching to zoom. The sample I read did not have any interactivity such as internal or external links, so I had to scroll through the entire magazine chronologically, but it did rotate to become slightly easier to read on a mobile.

MagLoft has some of the most comprehensive tutorials and guides of the reviewed systems, which goes a long way in making up for the lack of intuitiveness. Some publishers will appreciate the depth of software features and functionality, while for others it will provide a steep learning curve. The biggest detraction overall was reading from a PDF; this option is fine for desktops and tablets, but does not translate well for mobile devices.



FLIPHTML5

Overview

With the amusing tagline “Make a flipping book”, FlipHTML5 offers to help publishers create realistic, responsive HTML5 flipbooks at a very affordable price point (or even free, with limited features). Publishers can choose from a number of templates to customize and add multimedia with FlipHTML5’s online editor. With paid accounts, publishers can host the content on their own site with their own brand, access statistics, and monetize their publication with a linked PayPal account.

Special Features

Bookcase

Perhaps a better description would be “unique feature”; FlipHTML5’s Bookcase allows publishers to collect and display their publications on a literal digital bookcase which can be embedded on their own website. While this is a free feature, only paid accounts are allowed to create more than one.

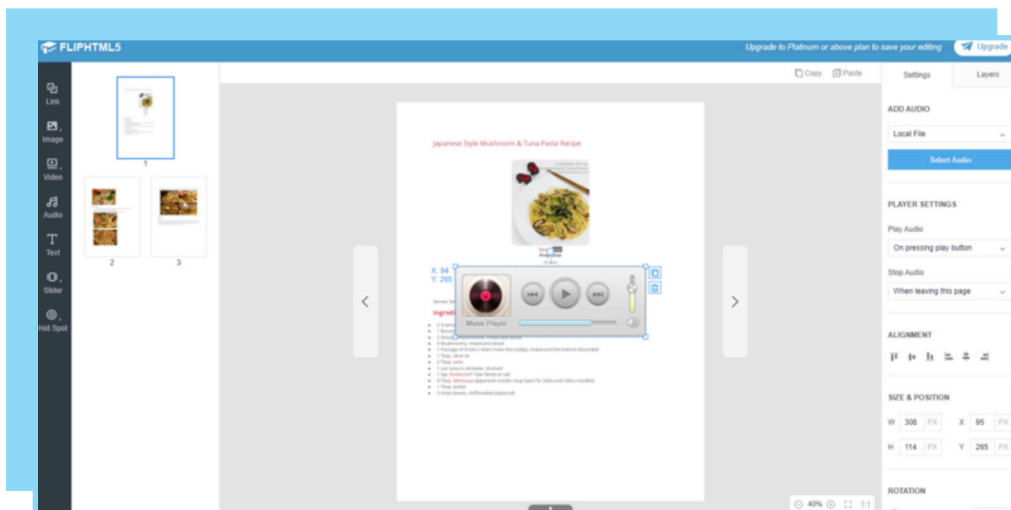
User Experience

On a free account, publishers only have access to six templates. For those who opt for the “Pro” tier, there are a total of 22. It is not clear in FlipHTML5’s marketing that these templates are simply a dressed-up way of asking how publishers want the toolbar to appear

on their content. Templates do not affect content layout; like Issuu, FlipHTML5 simply plugs static PDFs into their software. And although they do have a fairly robust set of page layout customization options, there is no manipulation of the actual content. As a publisher, some of these features are genuinely helpful to have for free, but they are not fancy, nor are they unique.

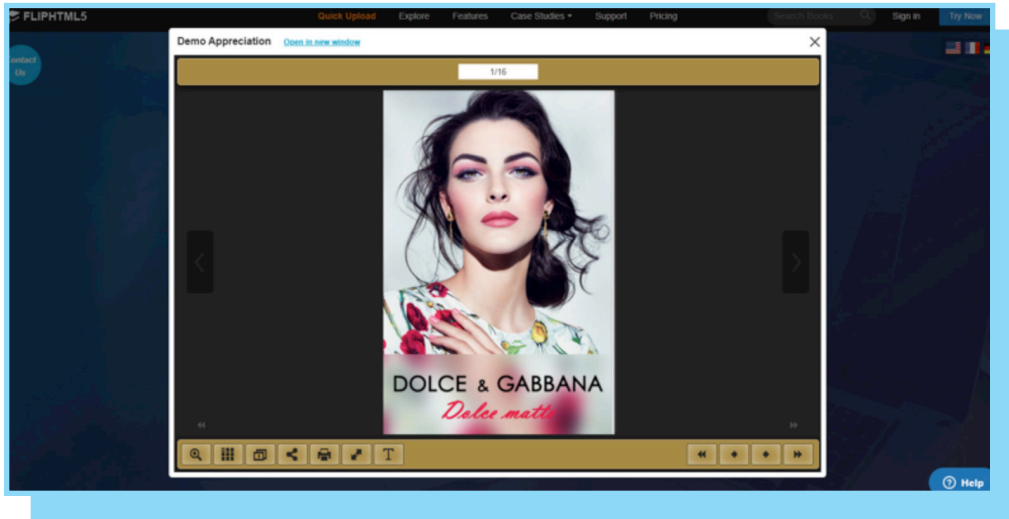
Publishers can change the format and button settings of the toolbar, upload a logo (displayed alongside FlipHTML5’s on the free version), and add a book cover for display on FlipHTML5’s Bookcase. If you’d like to have animated snow falling, or a picture of your logo displayed behind your content they can do that as well, although this gives it a dated look. To add multimedia content, publishers can insert a picture or video slideshow button to their toolbar, and upload photos or Youtube/Vimeo video links that will pop up in a separate window. Advanced options include formatting Table of Contents, Bookmarks, Ad Banner, and language settings. Unlike Issuu, FlipHTML5 allows users to embed their publications in their own website with an IFrame, Lightbox, or WordPress plugin, regardless of which tier they opt for. Paying account holders get access to SEO customization and selling options.

As a reader, “Realistic Responsive HTML5” made me suspicious because that sounds like a euphemistic way to say “native app”. And it is—in many respects, content on the FlipHTML5 reader is similar to Issuu. Readers have to press a preset zoom button and click and drag



to turn pages. There are some cool features like auto-play (which functions like a slideshow), or an internal picture reel loop on some pages. The desktop and mobile/tablet readers function differently as well; swiping on a mobile or tablet device turns the page, while swiping with a mouse or touchpad swiftly flips through many pages at once and is hard to control—much like a real magazine. It isn't a bad experience, but it did feel clunky and slightly dated compared to other systems.

At the end of the day, FlipHTML5 does what it says, without any frills or fuss. Publishers who are looking for a modern, sleek interface will not find it in FlipHTML5, but the functionality is still there. As always, I am disappointed by “native experience” claims that simply add a layer of basic interactivity for readers to an otherwise unresponsive PDF. However, FlipHTML5 is not the only system using flipbooks and their product has the best functionality for its price point.



READZ

Overview

Readz offers production and design services for content creation with two different features—Readz Studio, and Flipbooks. This software is solely web-based; there are no apps to download or worries about how content will present on different devices. Readz does not have any free options, but with these two features, publishers can choose between a “light” and “full” content creation experience. Each option offers a base price, with optional add-ons. The base price for the Flipbook Publisher tier is affordable; however, the price quickly skyrockets with any added features. Readz Studio starts out at a high price point, but there is a free fourteen-day trial for both options. Readz also offers production and design services, similar to Mag+, where publishers pay to outsource those aspects of their online content creation.

Special Features

Flipbook/Publisher

The Readz Publisher plan allows publishers to create flipbooks from uploaded PDFs. The base price allows for up to twenty flipbooks per year, the ability to publish on a custom domain or embed to a pre-existing website, email and social media sharing, full-screen HTML5 reader, and no ads/banners/dedicated reader. Additional features come à la carte and can become quite pricey; however there is a thirty percent discount for nonprofits, and two free months if billed annually.

Readz Studio

In addition to the capabilities of the Flipbook Publisher plan, the Studio plan includes an in-depth list of features to create “live projects”. Essentially, live projects are

responsive content, which publishers can create from a wide variety of templates or build from scratch. The base price for this software is steep, and climbs upward with add-ons like privacy, marketing tools, InDesign plugs, etc. The free trial is fairly robust and they never ask for a credit card, but all information will be deleted after 14 days if publishers opt out.

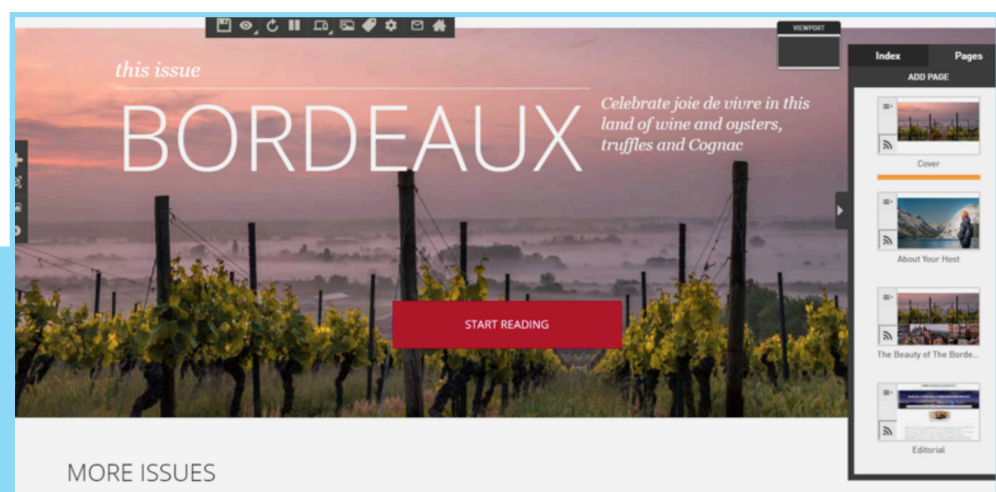
User Experience

When it comes to creating “live content”, as Readz calls it, their Studio software has some aspects which set it apart from its competitors. The Studio software allows publishers to make content which doesn’t require two-finger pinching and page turning, instead relying on scrolling content and creating clickable articles within the page, similar to a news or social media feed. Readz Studio is also highly customizable, in the realm of Joomag or MagLoft’s creation software; however, design aspects are limited unless you spring for the Design Pro add-on. Like most in-app purchases, these add-ons can be tantalizing, such as the ability to add a paywall or marketing tools, and while upfront pricing for à-la-carte options is refreshing, the monthly cost can be prohibitive for many small publishers. There’s also very little in the way of tutorials for the software and it took several weeks for anyone to respond to inquiries.

Readz is solely a web-based app so it cannot be found in the Google or Apple app stores. From a reader’s perspective, this matters little as the navigation, presentation, and appeal of the digital content

is generally excellent across devices. I tested a number of the sample pages provided on Readz website on both an iPhone and an iPad. The visual design of each sample, and the way the content is presented on each page, is attractive and creative—it is logical, clear-cut, and modern without being overwhelming. All of the samples loaded quickly and the navigation between pages was easy. Notably, most of the samples viewed have scrolling as a fundamental component of their design akin to a social media timeline or feed. This made the reading experience fluid and very simple on both devices and is a standout feature. While other publishing platforms essentially offer resources to publish a digitized version of a magazine, Readz offers a unique, web-based publishing platform that blends a social media and traditional magazine experience.

That being said, there were some inconsistencies in presentation across devices. For one, there was some text that was out of alignment on the iPhone but appeared fine on the iPad. As well, one of the samples had text that appeared on the iPad version of the magazine but not the iPhone version. Neither distracted from the user experience significantly, but it was noticed. What was more noticeable and frustrating as a reader was the viewability of the publication. Some of the magazines could be viewed in either portrait or landscape modes only, or a publication could be viewed in both modes on an iPad but only in portrait mode on iPhone (as was the case with at least one publication viewed). Depending on a reader’s preference for how they hold their device this is inconvenient and takes away from the overall experience.



ZMAGS

Overview

Zmags markets itself heavily towards branding and advertisements, but their software can be used for digital magazines as well. They offer two software suites, Creator and Publicator. Since their main focus is driving ecommerce, Zmags has integrated some flashier interactive elements to their flipbook creator, plus the ability to do personal branding, marketing analytics, etc. Zmags only works on the back end, converting PDFs to HTML5. The biggest letdown of their website is that interested parties must request a demo to find out about pricing. There is no option to sign up and get started immediately.

Special Features

Publicator & Creator

Zmags Publicator takes PDFs and turns them into HTML5 content. They offer the standard array of analytic and interactivity features common to other DCDS in this report, but in terms of standing out, the only unique feature of the publicator is its “drag and drop” interface. It seems easy enough to use, but publishers must request a demo from the Zmags sales team; there’s no free trial period. Creator is similar to Publicator in terms of the drag and drop interface and features, except publishers can use it to create content from scratch.

User Experience

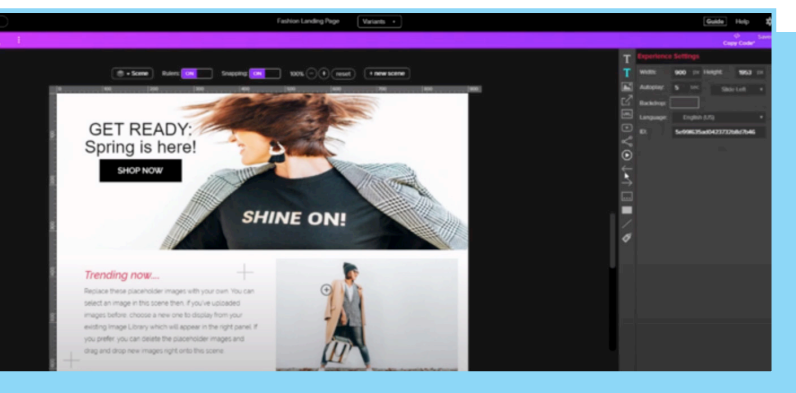
For research purposes, I chatted with a sales person to get an idea of pricing options. They were responsive and friendly, but very pushy about setting up a 30

minute meeting to go over my needs. We went back and forth on just getting a rough estimate for a small quarterly magazine, before they finally said the prices vary and they didn’t want to give me wrong information. Considering there are plenty of upfront pricing options out there for digital content delivery systems, this comes across as either shady and/or well outside of any small publisher’s price point.

Eventually, I did sit down for a demo. Again, the sales representative was friendly and showed me the software for both Creator and Publicator, but the software itself is not terribly impressive and I was not able to try any of it myself. Overall it felt a bit like Keynote’s software, which is great in terms of user friendliness and ease of use. However, for the price point they quoted me, I expected a lot more. Regarding price, my suspicions were proven correct—they quoted me just under five thousand dollars a year for a small publishing operation, but because of variables, this report cannot use that number as a solid price point.

That being said, Zmags does step up their game from a reader’s experience, which might make the mandatory sales pitch and exorbitant price tag less of a detraction. From their sample digital magazines, readers are treated to a refreshing feature—no dragging, pinching, or flipping required. Zmags’ sample reader opens in an overlay and readers can turn the page by clicking on left and right buttons at the side of the page. Hovering the mouse over the page shows a zoom icon and when clicked, the content magnifies. None of that is revolutionary—it’s what happens in the zoom state that really impressed me. I didn’t have to click and drag my mouse across the screen or scroll. All I had to do was move my mouse and the field of view adjusted itself accordingly.

Unfortunately, my phone and tablet would not allow me to open the sample for security reasons. I suspect this was probably because of the overlay window and might be solved if the content had been in a separate window altogether. Also, I experienced a slight lag in load time across devices. In all other respects, I found the desktop reading experience much more enjoyable than the publishing experience.



PAPERLIT

Overview

PaperLit offers software services for online content creation and distribution, powered by AI. Their use of AI simply boils down to a more data-driven approach to online content creation, and this is reflected in their software suites, including MobiLit, VoiceLit, MagPedia, and DataLit.AI. For the purposes of this research, we will focus on the features of MobiLit, but publishers may find some use for the other software, depending on their broader needs. MobiLit is a branded app creator, not content creator, so publishers will need to upload files. PaperLit also doesn't offer free trials or upfront pricing, similar to Zmags.

Special Features

MobiLit

By uploading PDF files, publishers can create interactive content by layering audio, video, images, and other HTML5 content, link websites, blogs, or RSS feeds to create a live feed and engage more readers with increased content. MobiLit will allow you to create a branded app for either single or multiple publications for Google Play, Apple Apps Store, and the web. It also includes marketing/analytics tools, WordPress plugin, and monetization.

VoiceLit

VoiceLit is a software for Voice App creation. What is a voice app? It is what enables smart speaker interfaces, such as with Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant. Creating a voice channel activates your content to be searchable via voice command.

MagPedia

Looking to digitize old print content? MagPedia converts print or PDF content, publishes it to a new web property, and uses AI to optimize content. Monetization is automatic, generating new profit off of old content.

DataLit.AI

DataLit.AI is an AI-driven approach to programmatic advertising. It uses user prediction, cutting-edge header binding, plus it's transparent and will never be sold to competitors. Their ads come in multiple formats—native, video, and multi-display types—for a variety of devices.

User Experience

For publishers, there is a Paperlit Content Viewer App available for download. The app offers publishers a preview of their content before it is launched. As mentioned with other platforms that offer similar publisher-preview apps, this service is useful and beneficial. For one, it allows publishers to see what their publication will look like on a phone or tablet; publishers can thus ensure that the presentation, colour, font, links, multimedia, and other aspects are all functional and formatted correctly before publishing their content.

Additionally, the layout and usability of the app seems to attend to publishers' needs. Since the app operates in conjunction with a user account, I was not able to get hands-on user experience. However, my review of the app through previews is that it offers the basic tools to review and edit publications from a phone or tablet in a clear and easy-to-use manner—it does what it says it does. There is a sliding bar that provides navigation through a publication and clickable tools at the top of the app to enable edits or search for specific text. There is also a sidebar to take a user back to their app list, the home screen, or to provide contact information for Paperlit. It should be noted that the app is not to be used in place of the desktop-based Paperlit Dashboard. The creation and publication process starts on the desktop; the app acts as a check on editing and presentation for tablet and phone mediums.

PaperLit, much like Zmags, does not have free trials and interested parties must request a demo for samples. After contacting PaperLit for a demo, I was told I would need to give them a PDF of my magazine's content. They would then turn it into a sample for me, using their software, and I would be given the app credentials for a limited time as a sort of "free trial". As of the final version of this report, PaperLit has not followed through. Due to the limited information available on their website, as well as the lack of information given by their sales team, PaperLit does not warrant recommendation at this time.

PRESSREADER

Overview

Based in British Columbia, PressReader is a newsstand app which compares most readily with systems such as Issuu and Magzter. It has an impressive array of well-known magazines and newspapers: The Wall Street Journal, Canadian Living, international versions of Vogue, GQ, etc.

As with other newsstand apps, PressReader is free to download, but content is behind a paywall. Clicking on a magazine leads to a larger image of the cover with download options below. Much like Magzter Gold, PressReader pushes their “Premium” subscription service fairly hard. For the price of \$39.99/month CAD, readers have access to thousands of issues. There is a free seven-day trial and you may cancel at any time. Alternatively, readers can choose to purchase individual issues for a set price—no word on revenue sharing models or who sets the price.

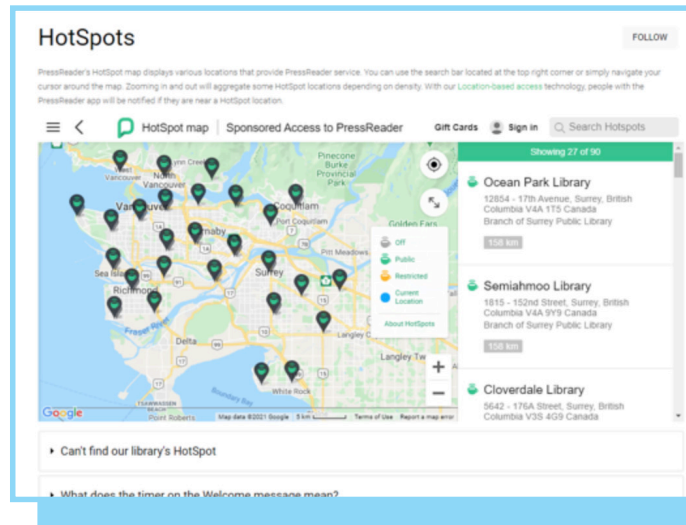
Special Features

Hotspots

PressReader also has a feature called “HotSpots” that is similar to Magzter’s Smart Reading Zone, where some companies pay to activate the newsstand at their location. Locations can be searched or browsed, and with PressReader’s location-based access technology, people with the PressReader app will be notified if they are near a HotSpot location. I found PressReader’s approach to this idea superior to Magzter’s SRZ because there was a clearly labeled map on PressReader’s website showing local hotspots—I didn’t have to search for or stumble across it.

User Experience

PressReader stands out due to a large and international reader base in addition to their committed focus on Canadian content. PressReader pays publishers for content that subscribers consume, whether those readers are subscribed to PressReader Premium, one of PressReader’s B2B partners, or to individual titles. Publishers do not have to pay to appear on PressReader’s newsstand



app; their Content Integration Team converts publishers’ PDFs using their exclusive HTML5-based technology. PressReader’s Branded Editions is one such DCDS which has developed scrolling with their SmartFlow presentation technology, meaning content is vertically scrollable on small devices, and horizontally scrollable on larger screens. They also have accurate text translation to eighteen different languages, and reliable text to speech translation in six. PressReader is the only platform which offers this feature, and one of the few to have any application based text to speech. However, the voice quality is very robotic and not better than any given devices’ generic text to speech software.

For publishers, PressReader also offers Branded Editions, a white label service that curates your content for your own platform using their technology. Branded Editions offers a great degree of personalization and flexibility in terms of monetization and subscription options. You can add multimedia, track engagement, and integrate Branded Editions’ Software Developer Kit (SDK) into your existing iOS and Android apps to give your authorized users access to all the features of the digital edition, plus your feed-based content - all in the same product.

So how much does this white label service cost? Unfortunately, this information is not offered on their website; a demo must be scheduled and the specifics of your magazine will be assessed before a solid price point is given. PressReader does have a responsive sales team and they are open about shortcomings and

the price of their services. The numbers they were comfortable giving me as an example for a small magazine were \$1500 for the set up fee, and ongoing monthly costs are dependent on the number of users. The set up fee is a one time fee. While they always feature new magazines, Canadian content, or niche content under the appropriate tab, PressReader is not responsible for any marketing or promotion outside of the PressReader app.

PressReader is a local platform that aggregates 7000+ magazines from around the world into one user-based system. The magazines offered are accessible on the PressReader app or online, but the app is the promoted and preferred interface. PressReader has tiered service; readers can download the app for free or subscribe to a premium account for a monthly fee. With a free account, readers have access to a number of newspapers and magazines as well as the option to pay per publication. A subscription to PressReader Premium provides access to all 7000+ publications with no restrictions. The ability for a reader to choose what level of access they would like on the platform is beneficial for readers and publishers because it expands the user- and reader-base. However, at \$39.99/month, the premium subscription is quite expensive. Unless a reader is seeking multiple monthly-issued magazines that would exceed this charge if purchased individually, the average user would likely prefer the free option.

The app interface is visually identical and operates the same on a tablet and phone. Once downloaded, the app guides the reader through a customizable process, similar to Issuu, by offering an extensive list of 'interests' for the reader to choose from; the list of interests was overwhelming to sift through and included separate topics for selection that seemed like they would give related results. For example, I could select Animals and/or Wildlife and Dining Out and/or Restaurants as four different interests. There was a point where I decided to continue past this initial setup page because it was too dense only to find that the next page in the initial setup process recommended an equally heavy list of publications to follow. Once into the app I was not able to review the interests I had initially selected, however the app states that it tracks my activity and will customize recommendations.

The interface itself is visually appealing and easy to navigate. It combines promotion of entire newspapers and magazines at the very top of the homepage with individual articles under specific topic headings like



Tech, Sports, and Health as the user scrolls. Within an article, the presentation is optimized for a tablet or phone platform. There are vivid pictures and links, the ability to scroll left to right through different articles and easy access to full publications from which a specific article is published. This is beneficial for publishers because individual articles are clearly linked to the full publication and likely yield a greater chance for subscriptions and readership of a publication as a whole. Additionally, readers can participate in the promotion of specific articles by upvoting or downvoting—a unique feature not seen in other platforms.

Overall, the app has similar search capabilities to many of the other platforms but is noteworthy for the many user accessibility features it offers. Font size, translation services and articles designed for audio—to be listened to rather than read—reflect the diversity and inclusivity of the readership PressReader can reach. Even more so, PressReader allows local users to link their library accounts to the platform, providing greater access to a broad spectrum of magazines on the platform. PressReader is a solid, local platform with a variety of magazines and newspapers and many customizable features that benefit the reader and the publisher.

SIMPLEBOOKLET

Overview

Another British Columbia-based DCDS, Simplebooklet offers to turn your PDF into an interactive flipbook for an affordable price, \$9.99/month (billed annually), and allows publishers access to Simplebooklet's software and features such as completely self-branded content, native apps, video teasers, photo slideshows and video popups, narrated content, ROI information, unlimited collections, and three Simplebooklets to start (more can be added à-la-carte).

Going with the Business tier (\$39.99/month, also billed annually) opens up a paywall option, and Simplebooklet does not charge any transaction fees for this service. Other differences between the Pro and Business tier lie mainly in the size and number of documents publishers can upload, as well as the addition of team member accounts.

Special Features

Page Narration

A unique accessibility feature Simplebooklet offers is the ability for publishers to narrate each page within their publication. It works on all devices, and Simplebooklet advertises its use as a tool to create audio books, or use narration to highlight parts of your page, or use narration to provide context and elaboration. One aspect they don't mention is that this can be used to create greater accessibility for readers; most audio readers are still robotic and read text literally. With a human (and in most cases, a human who can provide greater context), those with reading impairments can experience material closer to how the author/publisher intended.

Lightbox

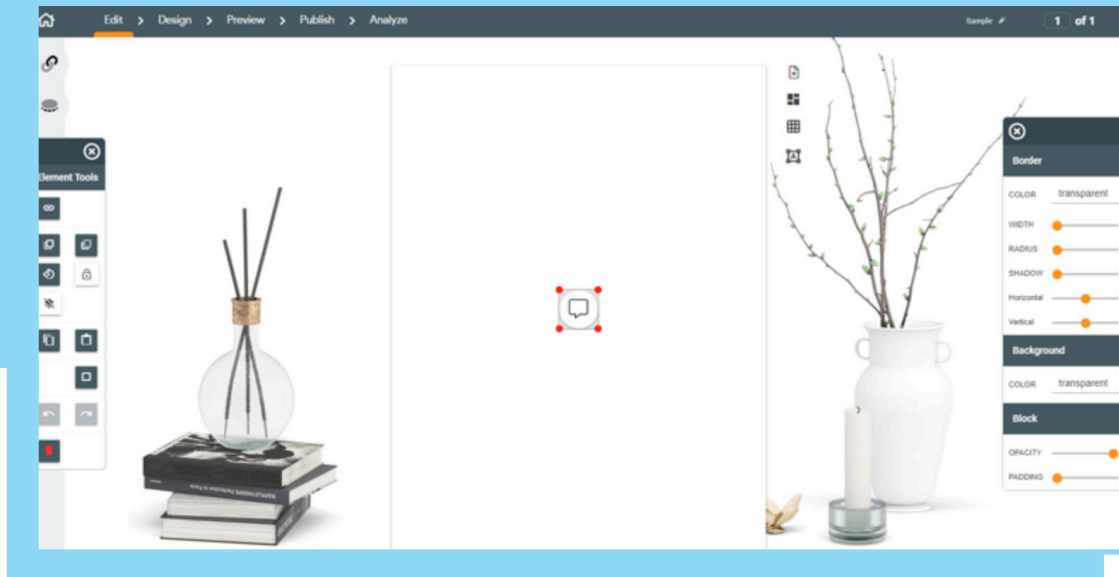
Publishers who want to add more relevant content without cluttering their pages can display additional content by creating a "lightbox", accessible with a button on the page. Lightbox content can be a video, an image, a caption, or even another webpage. It looks like a page within a page with the main content still opaquely visible behind the lightbox.

User Experience

Simplebooklet is an HTML platform that provides a comprehensive set of tools for publishers to design and publish magazines online. In effect, the online presentation is that of a physical publication digitized. Simplebooklet's customer service is prompt and friendly. In addition, publishers get secure links to their content, the ability to track activity across pages, and a native app that allows readers to install magazines for offline access while maintaining all of its interactivity. The software is simple, and even if there are hiccups, publishers can reach out and receive assistance while working on their Simplebooklet.

As a publisher, signing up is quick—no annoying questionnaire to fill out, no sales rep to liaise with. Upon signing in for the first time, publishers are granted a free fourteen-day trial of the PRO plan, which allows the creation of three Simplebooklets. Publishers can upload a PDF, document, presentation or Canva template, or start from scratch. Supported file types are numerous (see Appendix A for a link to the complete list), but most interesting is the ability to connect a Canva account with your Simplebooklet account. For those who haven't heard of Canva, it is a very useful tool for digital marketing across various platforms and as a Marketing Assistant, I can attest to the ease of use and interactivity it brings to marketing material.

Publishers have incentive to create material from a template provided by Simplebooklet due to the various templates and high level of customization. This includes a template for what they call a "blog style" template, which scrolls like a feed, rather than relying on pinching to zoom or turn a page. I was impressed by Simplebooklet's standalone editing software. Publishers can insert and customize links, buttons, images, video/audio, text, stickers, forms, integrate with various platforms (Mailchimp, Etsy, Shopify, and Google Drive files), design the background, insert a logo, manage navigability and accessibility features, add narration, or run your material through Simplebooklet's design wizard which guides publishers through a checklist to optimize SEO, contact information, page format and transitions, and makes sure of general cohesion.



The reader experience is satisfactory. The publications on both a phone and tablet can be viewed in vertical and horizontal orientations. While generally ideal, the horizontal presentation of the select publications I viewed were small and required the user to zoom and navigate around on each page. The vertical presentation is more user-friendly and provides a better overall experience. Additionally, since the platform is HTML-based, the presence of the standard web browser search bar and tools acts as a distraction to the publication itself. In other words, where other platforms maximize the screen and minimize distraction for viewing a publication, reading a Simplebooklet publication is akin to reading a basic webpage.

With that in mind, there are tools and features that benefit the user experience. The colour of the publications I viewed were vibrant and the layout was familiar for anyone who has read a magazine; there are no surprises or elements to learn within the platform when it comes to sharing, commenting, or accessing the publication. Pages can be turned with the swipe of a finger or use of navigation arrows and there is a toolbar that offers basic, useful functions such as searching the document, about the publisher, and sharing. Internal and external links can be embedded and features such as page narration and company branding are also available.

Simplebooklet provides a basic user experience on an HTML platform with some quirks in the functionality and navigation. It is not a platform with features in excess but a solid resource for publishers who are seeking a digitized version of their publication.

Comparison Charts

PRICING

Wording varies between different systems, so for ease of composition, this chart will use the terms “basic” to refer to any plan that has a free option, “starter” for the lowest price, then “premium” and “optimum” for higher price tiers. Advanced tiers contain the features of lower priced tiers. Systems that do not publicly share pricing are noted. Prices have been converted to CAD from USD using February 21, 2021 rates and rounded up or down.

	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Starter</i>	<i>Premium</i>	<i>Optimum</i>
Issuu *prices are for annual subscription rate	Free 1 user & 2 publications/year <i>Shareable stories</i>	\$24/month 1 user & 6 publications/year <i>Insert content on own website</i>	\$51/month 3 users & 12 publications/year <i>Branding/Remove 3rd party ads</i> Marketing & sales stats <i>Embed video</i>	\$342/month 25 users & unlimited publications <i>Priority support</i> Private sharing <i>Collaborate planning tool</i> Unlimited API access
ZINIO	ZINIO has declined to provide pricing information for this report.			
Magzter *operates on a revenue sharing model, the details of which are not publicly available	Free According to a company rep, <i>“There is no cost involved to publish, distribute and to promote the magazine. Publishers can fix their own pricing for their magazine and we shall share the benefits with the publisher from the sales on the equal revenue sharing percentage.”</i> The representative did not give actual percentages.			
Mag+ *Prices shown are monthly payments—a slight discount given for one-time payment *The pay as you publish option has a one time fee of \$2099—features are similar to the Starter tier.	Free The software itself is free to download.	\$634/month 1 app per device (iOS, Android, Kindle) <i>2 publications/month</i> Publish Adobe ID content, PDF, or HTML <i>Monetization</i> Analytics support AR packages for iOS	\$888/month <i>4 publications/month</i> Unlimited push notifications <i>Social sign-in</i> User management / role-based access	Pricing available w/ consultation Unlimited number of apps and publications <i>Premium customer support</i>

	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Starter</i>	<i>Premium</i>	<i>Optimum</i>
<p>3D Issue *prices are listed monthly on the website, but billed annually</p>		<p>\$95/month 1 user <i>Flipbooks Online</i> Flipbooks Desktop 50GB cloud hosting 1 branded library</p>	<p>\$212/month 5 users 250GB cloud hosting 3 branded libraries <i>Team & multi-brand management</i> Hot folder uploading</p>	<p>\$761/month 10 users 1TB cloud hosting 50 branded libraries <i>White labeling</i></p>
<p>Joomag *There is a 4th tier called Enterprise, but publishers must request a demo for pricing *prices are listed monthly on the website, but billed annually</p>	<p>Free trial Joomag offers a 14-day trial for its premium level plan. Cancel or change tiers at any time.</p>	<p>\$50/month 300+ templates <i>Crater Editor</i> Branding <i>Embedding</i> SEO Tools</p>	<p>\$100/month Publication privacy <i>Analytics</i> CRM <i>Email marketing</i> Subscription Management <i>Selling</i></p>	<p>\$189/month Custom domain linking <i>Lead generation tools</i> Integrations <i>User management</i></p>
<p>MagLoft *All tiers offer a 30-day free trial *MagLoft has a very comprehensive list of features—too numerous to list here.</p>	<p>Free Web only 500 readers Issues feature <i>Storage</i> Import PDF, EPUB <i>Remove ads</i> Custom graphics <i>CRM</i> Basic Analytics <i>TypeLoft Editor features</i> HTML5 web app <i>Social Sharing</i> App promotion</p>	<p>\$253/month Web and Android 2000 readers Import HPUB & RSS feeds <i>Mobile articles</i> Remove MagLoft logo <i>Branded Mobile Apps</i> <i>Mobile Live Preview</i> Advanced Analytics <i>Branded URL</i> Embed on website <i>Sales tools</i></p>	<p>\$380/month Web and 3 apps (Android, iOS, Amazon) 5000 readers Smart Banner Facebook</p>	<p>\$634/month *starting price Customized features and unlimited access</p>
<p>FlipHTML5 *prices are billed monthly; there is a discount for annual one-time billing. *FlipHTML5 has a very comprehensive list of features—too numerous to list in full here.</p>	<p>Free 20G storage 5 publications/day 500 pages/book 1 bookcase PDF conversion <i>Social sharing</i> Custom background <i>Mobile sharing</i></p>	<p>\$19/month 50G storage <i>Unlimited publications</i> No watermark or ads 5 books published offline/month 1000 pages/book 10 bookcases Monetization</p>	<p>\$45/month Unlimited storage <i>Multiple accounts</i> Unlimited books published offline/month 5000 pages/book Unlimited bookcases <i>Online editor</i> Custom domain <i>Page editor</i></p>	<p>\$126/month Customized features and unlimited access</p>

	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Starter</i>	<i>Premium</i>	<i>Optimum</i>
<p>Readz *non profits get 30% discount</p>	<p>Readz has two base prices with add-on features priced à-la-carte. Readz Studio starts at \$381/month and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Publish 20 live projects – <i>Collaborate with 3 team members</i> – Publish on 3 domains – <i>Custom domain names</i> – SEO <p>Readz Flipbook is \$45/month</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Publish 20 live flipbooks – <i>Custom domain names</i> – Embed on your site – <i>Social media sharing</i> 			<p>Add on features: \$64/month Make content private \$318/month Add paywall \$254/month SSO access control \$32/month Marketing tools \$32/month Design Pro \$127/month Import from InDesign</p>
Zmags	Zmags has declined to provide pricing information for this report.			
PaperLit	PaperLit has declined to provide pricing information for this report.			
<p>PressReader *Adding your publication to PressReader’s newsstand app is free</p>	<p>Free PDF conversion w/ Smartflow tech. <i>Revenue sharing</i> Self-branding <i>Text translation</i> Text-to-speech <i>Access to thousands of B2B partners</i></p>	<p>PressReader’s Branded Editions services are custom, as are their prices. There is a baseline set up fee of \$1500. Web/app development will depend on the number of users.</p>		
<p>Simplebooklet *free 14 day trial *prices are for annual subscription rate *Simplebooklet’s price points are flexible depending on # of publications *Simplebooklet has a comprehensive list of features too numerous to list fully</p>		<p>\$9.99/month 3 publications <i>Self-branding</i> Page narration <i>Video teasers</i> Slide shows & video pop ups</p>	<p>\$39.99 200 publications <i>Unlimited team accounts</i> Multiple custom domains <i>Push notifications</i></p>	

STANDARD FEATURES

Standard features refers to those features which are available at the lowest price point for each digital content delivery system.

* Responsive Help Center is based solely on personal results. All systems claim to have a responsive help center, but not all live up to that statement.

** ZINIO features are à la carte--there are no base-lines to start from.

	<i>Free Trial or Software</i>	<i>Interactive Content</i>	<i>Social Sharing</i>	<i>Responsive Help Center*</i>	<i>Analytics</i>	<i>Branded Apps</i>
Issuu	X		X			
ZINIO **						
Magzter	X	X	X	X		
Mag+	X					X
3D Issue	X	X	X			X
Joomag	X	X		X		X
MagLoft	X	X	X	X	X	X
FlipHTML5	X	X				X
Readz	X	X	X			X
Zmags		X	X	X	X	X
PaperLit		X	X	X	X	X
PressReader		X		X	X	X
Simplebooklet	X	X	X	X	X	X

PUBLISHER EXPERIENCE

1
poor

2
basic

3
good

4
great

	<i>Intuitive</i>	<i>Navigation</i>	<i>Features</i>	<i>Customization</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Issuu	4	3	2	1	2.5
ZINIO	1	1	3	4	2.25
Magzter	2	3	3	3	2.75
Mag+	1	1	3	3	2
3D Issue	4	3	4	3	3.5
Joomag	3	3	4	3	3.25
MagLoft	2	3	3	3	2.75
FlipHTML5	3	3	1	2	2.25
Readz	3	2	3	4	3
Zmags	2	2	2	2	2
PaperLit	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
PressReader	<i>PressReader does this work for the publisher, so these categories do not apply.</i>		3	4	3.5
Simplebooklet	4	3	4	3	3.5

READER EXPERIENCE

1
poor

2
basic

3
good

4
great

	Intuitive	Navigation	Features	Overall
Issuu	1	2	2	1.75
ZINIO	4	3	4	3.5
Magzter	3	2	2	2.5
Mag+	3	3	2	2.5
3D Issue	2	2	2	2
Joomag	2	2	3	2.50
MagLoft	2	1	2	1.75
FlipHTML5	3	2	3	2
Readz	4	4	2	3
Zmags	3	4	2	2.75
PaperLit	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
PressReader	2	3	4	3
Simplebooklet	4	2	3	3

Other Systems

YUMPU

Yumpu was originally going to be a featured DCDS, but after further research, it was decided that Yumpu didn't meet the minimum standards set for this report.

Copyright infringement claims have been filed against them, and there are an inordinate number of complaints regarding unauthorized charges and lack of refunds or communication.

Additionally, many customers complain of sexually explicit advertisements appearing with their content. Representatives have not responded for clarification on these claims, so for now, we recommend caution with this system.

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

These thirteen systems offer a range of features at varying price points, and with that in mind, we recommend the following.

For small presses with limited funds we recommend the following systems' free options:

- Magzter
- MagLoft
- FlipHTML5
- PressReader

For small presses with room in their budget for a DCDS with more features, we recommend these systems' starter tier plans:

- Simplebooklet
- Joomag
- FlipHTML5

For publications that can afford more features and need more access in terms of number of issues, analytics, more users, etc., the following systems are recommended:

- 3D Issue (starter or premium tier)
- Joomag (premium tier)
- MagLoft (starter tier)

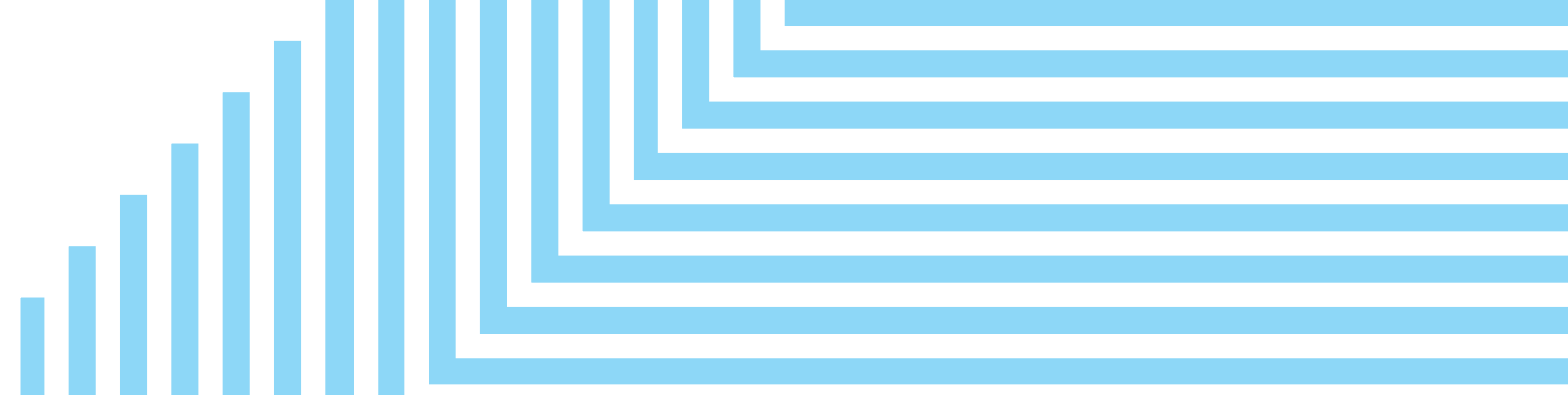
Finally, for larger publications with generous budgets looking for features, support, and full customization, we recommend these DCDS:

- PressReader
- ZINIO
- Joomag (optimum tier)
- Readz (base price + desired add-ons)

In general, publishers are better off weighing which components mean the most to their magazine and finding the system best aligned to those needs. We recommend trying multiple systems and utilizing trial periods or demos, though we suggest reaching out to system representatives directly for firm clarification regarding exclusive rights. No system is perfect; however, this report has uncovered a few things that publishers should keep in mind when looking at any digital content delivery system.

The first is transparency. Does the company provide pricing and features up front? A few systems in this report did not do so and were cagey about answering questions. Being compelled to sit through a “free demo” just to find out this information is an obvious sales tactic, but it's also false advertising. A free demo is not free if it ends up being a waste of time. Considering there are many companies out there offering information and pricing upfront, this sales tactic is questionable.

Second, there is no system which will promote content for publishers. At certain (often higher) price tiers, most systems offer analytics and social media tools, but even systems that do all the work of app development and content adaptation for you do not include marketing. Systems with newsstand apps can offer some promotion within the app itself, but this should be discussed with their respective sales team. Publishers should generally anticipate contracting a separate marketing assistant, or promoting themselves.



The third is “native experience”. This is marketing shorthand for “reads exactly the way a physical copy does”. At face value, this might not seem like an issue. We want our digital content to be a simulacrum of the printed copy a) because it is closer to the original product of which we are proud and reluctant to shift away from, and b) because readers still indicate a preference for print over digital. The issue with native reading experiences on digital platforms—especially smartphones and tablets—is that this concept is purely aspirational. Acknowledging this fact does not negate the importance of going digital; it does acknowledge that imitation has its limitations.

Publishers who use digital content delivery systems that seek only to imitate print are not using their content to its full digital potential. Of course these publications have met the main goal of digitisation; they are available online, which can help increase distribution and readership. However, that mainly helps the publisher, not the reader. The copy and paste PDF format is clunky at best and becomes more aggravating on smaller screens; given that online reading trends are moving towards mobile devices, content will read better if it is adapted for digital reading. Ideally, both publishers and readers should benefit from the digital experience. Systems which can accept and adapt a richer variety of content to perform better on diverse digital platforms are taking advantage of the strengths of the medium to cater to proven digital reader expectations.

This report has uncovered a trend towards what is known as “Scrollytelling”; the use of scrolling to move through content, similar to how we peruse social media feeds or blog content. If your readers are primarily

using a mobile device to consume content, systems that offer this format have an edge. In general, companies that focus on magazine content are moving away from stand alone e-reader devices and focusing more heavily on app development and website embedding. It is somewhat surprising then that more of the systems covered in this report haven’t developed scrolling software, but when I asked PressReader why they thought that might be, they revealed that this software is still very expensive to develop. Essentially, flipbooks can easily plug in a PDF, while scrolling feeds require tweaking and special attention to work properly. For some magazines (those whose content is not media diverse), PDF flipbooks are fine and readers won’t be hampered greatly. But those whose content switches between text and pictures on the same page should keep this scrollytelling trend in mind.

As an industry, we are well beyond asking whether having a digital presence is worthwhile. Thankfully, we are also at a point where publishers have a plethora of options to choose from, and while we hope the information gathered in this report helps publishers narrow down their options, this is not an exhaustive list. In that regard, we also hope this report functions as a sort of guideline for publishers when comparing other digital content delivery systems to get the most out of the digital leap forward.

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Appendix A: Digital Content Delivery System Resources

If you are reading a print version of this report, you can visit mags-bc.com/about to access a digital version with links.

ISSUU

[General FAQs](#)
[Tutorial: How to Get Started on Issuu](#)
[YouTube](#)

ZINIO

[Web Reader FAQs](#)
[Mobile Reader FAQs](#)
[Naviga Commerce Page](#)
[OverDrive Libby Page](#)
*ZINIO does not have any listed resources for publishers.

MAGZTER

[General FAQs](#)
Magzter does have tutorials for publishers, but you must be logged in to download the PDFs on topics. These include:

- PDF Specifications
- Exporting PDFs
- Getting Started
- Adding Interactivity
- Newsstand App Creation

MAG+

[FAQs](#)
[Tutorials](#)

3D ISSUE

[3D Issue Knowledge Base](#)
[FAQs](#)
[Guides](#)
[Video Guides](#)

JOOMAG

[Joomag Blog](#)
[White Papers](#)
[Free E-Book YouTube](#)
[Help Center](#)

MAGLOFT

[MagLoft Feature Tutorials](#)
[Digital Publishing Blog](#)
[YouTube](#)
[Help Center](#)

FLIPHTML5

[Getting Started](#)
[Billing Subscription](#)
[Offline Publications](#)
[Manage Publications](#)
[Desktop Client](#)
[Sell Publications](#)
[Custom Domain](#)
[Statistics](#)
[Bookshelf](#)
[Embedding Browser](#)
[User Management](#)
[PDF Document](#)

READZ

[Licensing and Billing FAQs](#)

ZMAGS

[Zmags Resources](#)
[Zmags Blog](#)

PAPERLIT

[PaperLit Blog](#)
[YouTube Tutorials Playlist](#)

PRESSREADER

[PressReader Care](#)

*PressReader does not have any listed resources for publishers.

SIMPLEBOOKLET

[Simplebooklet Supported File Types](#)
[Link Canva with Simplebooklet](#)
[Getting Started with Simplebook](#)
[Simplebooklet Editing Tutorials](#)
[Simplebooklet Dashboard](#)
[Designing Your Simplebooklet](#)
[How to Publish your Simplebooklet](#)
[3rd Party Integration](#)
[All Simplebooklet's Help Documents](#)

Appendix B: DCDS Contacts*

* refer to “Standard Features” under the Comparison Charts section for responsiveness rating

ISSUU

- Issuu features a chatbot on their webpage, or contact sales via services@issuu.com

ZINIO

- ZINIO readers can submit a request [here](#)
- Publishers ZINIO can reach out via the ZINIO Pro’s website’s chatbot, or [contact us page](#)
- Director of Client Services, Jean Zamora, is at jean.zamora@navigaglobal.com

MAGZTER

- Magzter’s [contact us page](#) has forms for [Publishers](#), [Advertising](#), [Customer Support](#), [Careers](#), [Librarians](#), and [Media/Press](#).
- William Sam, Magzter Publisher Relationship Manager: william@magzter.com

MAG+

- Mag+ has a chatbot and contact us form embedded on their main page
- Publishers can email Mag+’s sales team via sales@magplus.com

3D ISSUE

- Reach out to 3D Issue via the chatbot on their main page, or [contact support page](#)

JOOMAG

- Joomag’s representatives will respond to either their chatbot or [contact us form](#)
- Joomag representative, Chris Alton, can be reached via chris.alton@joomag.intercom-mail.com

MAGLOFT

- Publishers interested in MagLoft can reach out via the website’s chatbot, or [contact us page](#)
- Christine Mokoginta’s email is christine.mokoginta@magloft.com

FLIPHTML5

- FlipHTML5 has a help button embedded on it’s main page which functions as a contact form. The [contact us page](#) functions much the same

READZ

- Visit Readz contact page [here](#)

ZMAGS

- Publishers interested in Zmags can reach out via the website’s chatbot, or [contact us page](#)
- Publishers who need support for the software can email support@zmags.com

PAPERLIT

- PaperLit’s [contact page](#) promotes reaching out for a quote on their solutions, but they can be emailed at info@paperlit.com

PRESSREADER

- PressReader’s [contact us](#) page has tabs for customer care, business inquiry, and publisher inquiry.
- Ornella Sinigaglia can be reached via OrnellaS@pressreader.com

SIMPLEBOOKLET

- Use Simplebooklet’s chatbot to be connected to a team member, or reach out to Scott Brownlee directly scott.brownlee@simplebooklet.com

