

The News Lens invests in digital video capabilities and creates a membership program to drive non-ads revenue

The News Lens (TNL) is an independent digital news media company based in Taipei and Hong Kong. Since its first article publication in 2013, TNL has grown into a multi-brand media powerhouse that covers domestic and international news, sports, technology, consumer electronics, and lifestyle.

OPPORTUNITY

TNL wanted to build up capabilities so it could create a sustainable digital video department. It saw an opportunity to expand the team and experiment with an increased publishing schedule, then launch a membership program to help monetize digital video.

APPROACH

TNL invested in its digital video team and studio so it could experiment with new formats and an increased publication schedule. It also established a membership program, which helped drive non-ads revenue.

Building up the department: TNL outfitted a dedicated space in its offices for digital video, purchased furniture and equipment, then hired three additional team members.

Testing new content formats: The team surveyed the market and the TNL audience to get a sense of content formats that would resonate. They already had some success with a weekly video explainer series called "WorldView", which covered one topic from international news headlines per episode. They decided to test a [Q+A series](#) where they would take questions from the "WorldView" comments section and answer them. In addition, they tested a weekly digest show called "[International Class Monitor](#)", which covers four or so international news stories from the past week.

Measuring for success: TNL used YouTube data and insights to gauge the success of each show, including total views, total view time, retention rate, and click through rate. The team found that about half of total watch time came from subscribers, which made them think that this loyal and engaged audience would have a high propensity to sign up for channel memberships.

Establishing a channel membership program: Prior to the launch of the channel membership program, loyal "WorldView" viewers asked how they could support and donate to this series and TNL. Now, with its increased capacity for production, TNL decided the time was right to launch a channel membership program — the perfect way to meet that need and monetize its loyal audience's support.

Driving member engagement: A loyal audience and user interactivity are the keys to membership success, so the team looked for ways to deepen engagement with their members. For example, they held members-only live streams on a biweekly basis, and also published and shouted out the names of certain members at the end of episodes as a way of acknowledging and thanking them.

RESULTS

TNL successfully built up the team, tested new formats, and put a channel membership program in place to help drive sustainable digital video efforts.

- **50K increase** in subscribers.
- **New video formats** saw almost the same retention rates as old ones (~ 4:40 minutes).
- **New stream of revenue** through channel membership program.

LEARNINGS

Test and learn your way to format success: Finding the right format that works for both the production team and the audience can be difficult and is only achieved through a trial-and-error process.

Give your audience a heads up about new formats: Audiences who are used to one type of format might get confused if your brand tries out something new with no clarification. TNL found it was important to explain to the audience the design and intention of each new format it tested.

Done right, channel membership is a win-win: A channel membership program can be a very important source of (non-advertising) revenue. TNL worked hard on member engagement and creating special content for members, and were rewarded with a steady rise in membership contributions over the course of the year.

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I hope the project will show that the organization should invest more into video content and ultimately create a self-sustaining video business model. We plan to expand the team further and continue experimenting with new formats while refining the old ones.

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