

Webbmedia Group Technology Profile

Flipboard

A dynamic, real-time, personalized social magazine platform

By Amy Webb and Webbmedia Group Staff



Executive Summary:

Flipboard (<http://www.flipboard.com>) is an iPad application that publishes real-time social media streams. Content is dynamically organized and updated across nine channels that users select, including two personal social media networks (Twitter and Facebook). At first glance, it may seem like Flipboard is nothing more than a pretty RSS reader, but with its semantic tools, clever pagination and always-on streaming capabilities, Flipboard is a virtual magazine of the moment (literally).

Significance:

Flipboard's founders are Evan Doll, former senior iPhone engineer and Mike McCue, who founded Paper Software and TellMe. McCue has said that Flipboard reflects the latest big shift on the web, from browsing to curation via social networks. Flipboard is backed by well-known investors, and Steve Jobs has recently visited its offices to learn more about what McCue and Doll have planned for their latest venture.



Key Flipboard Info

- Launched July 20, 2010.
- Acquired Ellerdale, a real-time semantic analysis company. Ellerdale's technology is being used to analyze real-time data streams inside of Flipboard.
- Raised an initial \$10.5 million in funding from Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, Index Ventures, Jack Dorsey (Twitter co-founder), Ashton Kutcher, Dustin Moskovitz (Facebook co-founder) and The Chernin Group.

Contact Info

Site: <http://www.flipboard.com>

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Key Staff:
Mike McCue, CEO
Evan Doll, Co-Founder
Arthur van Hoff, CTO

Download Flipboard for iPad for free at the iTunes store.

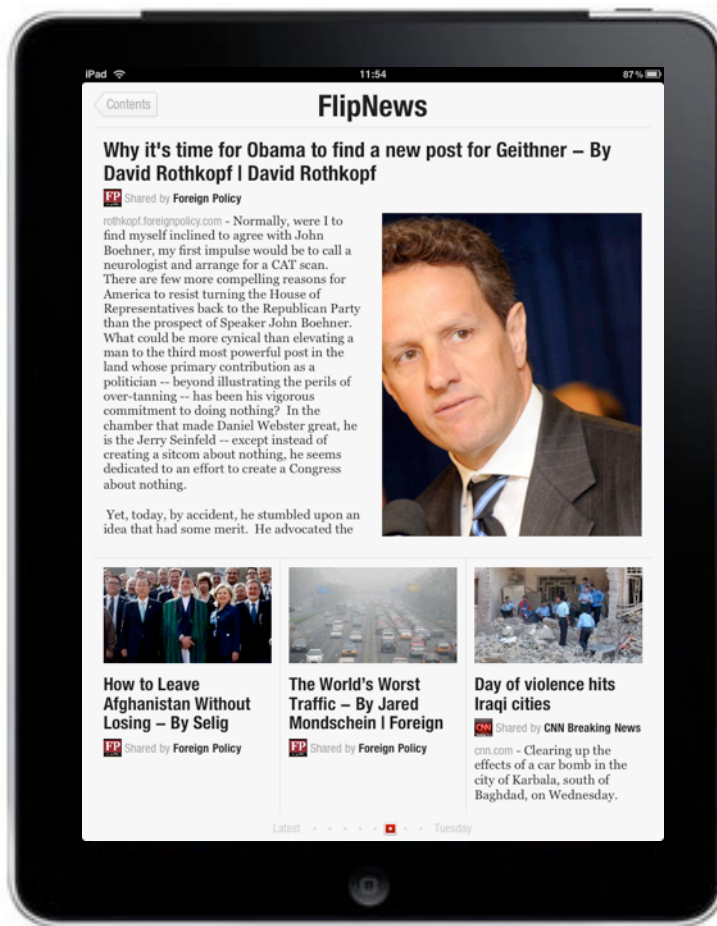
Flipboard is a Dynamic, Interactive Magazine

Flipboard (<http://www.flipboard.com>) is “personalized social magazine” that works on the iPad. Similar to an RSS reader, it aggregates syndicated up to nine sources of content. You can select from channels including news, business & finance, tech & science, “cool curators,” art & photography, design, lifestyle, entertainment, travel & adventure, food & dining and their own Facebook and Twitter accounts.

When you first open Flipboard, you find nine placeholders with links to add selections. You can select from one of Flipboard’s curated channels or from a news source itself. The Huffington Post, ProPublica, PBS NewsHour are all offered. Some noted individuals also host curated channels on Flipboard: tech evangelist Robert Scoble, former Vice President Al Gore, artist Maria Popova, film critic Roger Ebert and others.

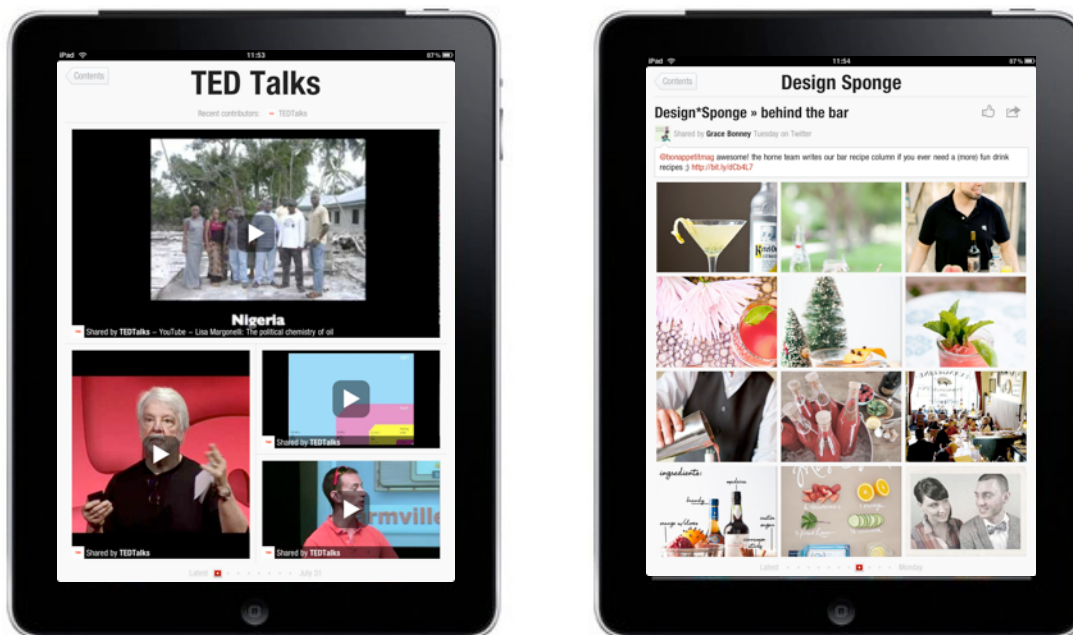


Once you configure Flipboard with your desired media sources, each section updates itself in real-time, displaying an image and/or headline from your streams. Tap on a section, and you'll find a dynamically-arranged page of content. Photos, text, even cutlines are all displayed on the fly. You'll see that instead of a traditional byline, Flipboard displays a "Shared By" next to the source name and its logo:



To read a story in its entirety, tap and you'll be taken to the web. To see more stories, swipe your finger from right to left to virtually flip through your pages.

In addition to text-based content, Flipboard displays photos and videos. In many cases, you can play the videos within the application. The exception is any Flash-based video, which the iPad cannot display.



Isn't This Just RSS?

It may seem like Flipboard is nothing more than an elaborate RSS reader. When a source publishes a link via RSS, its Twitter or Facebook accounts, Flipboard aggregates and publishes that content. So in a sense, it is similar to an RSS reader. But instead of just displaying the headlines and first paragraph or two of a new story, Flipboard dynamically paginates everything for you. Using Flipboard is an experience much truer to flipping through a printed magazine...though one that has been personalized for your exact tastes and is continuously, seamlessly updated.

Flipboard Is Free...For Now

For now, Flipboard is free for anyone to download.

Flipboard has been compared to Google News, since it syndicates content derived from traditional media (and other) sources. However critics fail to point out that while Google is making money from ads displayed on Google News pages, Flipboard, astonishingly, carries no advertising.

We expect to possibilities for future monetization and growth:

1. A free, but ad-supported, version of Flipboard;
2. A premium version of Flipboard without ads;
3. A premium version of Flipboard that allows users to customize the platform with content sources outside of Flipboard's current channels, additional social media streams, or possibly unlimited channel selection (currently, users can only select up to nine channels);
4. "Sponsored" channels where content providers pay a premium to be included in the platform;
5. A white-label version of Flipboard that could be customized by outside companies and used as custom-branded dynamic magazine products.

Competitors

There are a few other players in the dynamic, real-time content aggregation space:

Apollo News (*from Hawthorne News, \$4.99*). Apollo was created by former Bing and Google employees, who call their app "The Newspaper of the Future." Content is taken from traditional sources and displayed in seven topic verticals. Apollo learns about your preferences by calculating the number of minutes you spend on a story, whether you mark it as a favorite, whether you send it to Twitter or Facebook and whether you email it. Over time, Apollo analyzes your preferences and starts matching the articles it displays to its perception of your tastes.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/apollo-news/id378397114?mt=8>

Newsy (*from Media Convergence Group, free*). Newsy brings together video, text and photos to create analysis summaries of popular news stories. The app runs daily videos that include these summaries and source content from around the web.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/newsy-for-ipad-multisource/id367718944?mt=8>

Impact

One common complaint is that Facebook and Twitter can't be added to Flipboard immediately. Most users have to wait five days for their accounts to be activated -- this is due to Flipboard's current capacity overload. Even so, Flipboard hasn't exactly reached critical mass.

However record iPad sales, a prominent position in new iPad commercials and growing word of mouth endorsements may change things soon.

We expect Flipboard's increasing popularity to impact how consumers expect to see content on tablet devices. The promise of dynamic personalization, real-time news streams from traditional news and social media sources, an ingenious interface and a great consumer price point (currently zero) will color how tablet users view other media iPad applications. For example, most magazines are still struggling to create iPad experiences that make sense intuitively and offer all the requisite social tools. If Flipboard can display that magazine's content -- along with a user's social streams and perhaps a few other sources of material -- why even bother with the clunky magazine app that has to be re-downloaded with each new issue?

To be sure, as much as we like Flipboard for its design and functionality, we anticipate trouble with major publishers and with photo agencies especially, who have been arguing that any further syndication beyond what has been explicitly stated in contracts should be stopped.

Additional Resources

- Flipboard Site: <http://www.flipboard.com>. Click Watch the Video for a demonstration of how the app works.
- Flipboard in the iTunes store: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/flipboard/id358801284?mt=8>.
- Flipboard on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/flipboard>
- See community feedback and discussion about Flipboard on GetSatisfaction: <http://getsatisfaction.com/flipboard>
- Questions about whether Flipboard is using content legally from Gizmodo: <http://gizmodo.com/5594176/is-flipboard-legal>

Questions

If you would like to discuss Flipboard further or if you have any questions, please let us know. Contact our office at 267-342-4300 or via info@webbmediagroup.com.

About the Authors

Amy Webb is the CEO of Webbmedia Group. She has spent more than 15 years working with digital media. She began her career as a reporter/ writer with Newsweek (Tokyo) and the Wall Street Journal (Hong Kong) where she covered emerging technology, media and cultural trends. She has contributed to the *New York Times*, NPR, *Economist*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and many publications and broadcast shows. Her work has been recognized with awards/nominations from Webby, Editor & Publisher, Investigative Reporters & Editors, Society of Professional Journalists, W3 and IAVA. She has a M.S. from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and holds a B.A. in political economics from Indiana University in Bloomington, IN. She also earned Nikyu Certification in the Japanese government-administered Language Proficiency Test and speaks fluently.

Amy serves on the Board of Directors for the Online News Association, the South By Southwest Accelerator Advisory Board, the Knight-Batten Advisory Board, the Advisory Board for Temple University's Journalism Program and the Advisory Board for the International Center for Journalists. She is also a member of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (Interactive Media Peer Group) and serves as a judge for the Emmy® awards. She has been on the adjunct journalism faculty at University of Maryland, Temple University, Tokyo University and University of the Arts. She is a featured speaker at media conferences and journalism workshops around the world.

About Webbmedia Group

Webbmedia Group is an international digital strategy consultancy that offers mobile, platform, social and emerging tech/ media strategic services and workshops to Fortune 500 companies, media organizations, mid-sized businesses, governments and universities worldwide.

Webbmedia Group provides insider access and tech insights to our client base. Our detailed analysis, tech trend reports and quarterly tech wrap-ups help our clients learn about new industries and gain better expertise in those they already know.

For more information or to inquire about our services, please see <http://www.webbmediagroup.com> or call our office: (267) 342-4300.