



## About Lee Enterprises:

Lee Enterprises is a leading provider of local news, information and advertising in primarily midsize markets, with 46 daily newspapers and a joint interest in two others, along with rapidly growing digital products and nearly 300 specialty publications in 21 states.

Lee's newspapers have a circulation of 0.9 million daily and 1.4 million Sunday, reaching more than three million readers daily. Lee's digital sites attract more than 25 million unique visits monthly.

Lee is based in Davenport, Iowa, and our stock is traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol LEE.

## RESULTS

In partnership with Project FUSE, Lee Enterprises was able to:

- Analyze their current subscriptions model and deploy optimizations provided by the Project FUSE team
- Increase new digital subscriptions by 3x month over month
- Drive 150% increase in pageviews to their subscribe pages
- Launch several new Project FUSE-inspired initiatives to promote growth and sustainability

# Project FUSE and Lee Enterprises: Boosting Subscriptions Strategy

## Do Subscriptions Work for Local News?

The success of subscription-based businesses like Netflix, Spotify and HBO Go indicate that consumers in the United States are willing to pay for content they wish to consume. This seems to be the case with content from large news organizations, prompting NY Times CEO Mark Thomson to recently suggest that reaching 10 million subscribers is a reasonable possibility.

But what does the subscription model mean for local and community newspapers? Can a subscription model drive results for smaller news markets like those in the Lee Enterprises portfolio? To explore these questions, Lee partnered with the team at Google responsible for building the Project FUSE framework in an attempt to gain more insights into their readers and to understand if there were better opportunities to increase the number of paying consumers on their sites.

## Applying Project FUSE's Consultative Framework

After assessing needs and providing an overview of the subscription strategy for one of Lee's larger properties, the St. Louis Dispatch, the Project FUSE team created a comprehensive, easy-to-read, Datastudio dashboard. The dashboard aggregated data from Google Analytics 360, DoubleClick for Publishers (DFP) and Google Surveys to present a consolidated, subscriptions-oriented view of the data.

Additionally, the Project FUSE team provided Lee with initial recommendations:

1. **Optimize the conversion funnel by making subscribing easier:** Lee implemented and tested a more prominent 'Subscribe' button to their site's navigation bar and worked on optimizing the Subscriptions page.
2. **Define anonymized and aggregate profiles of potential subscribers:** Lee set up measurement and tracking in Google Analytics: They outlined specific goals and events that enabled them to capture high level information about potential subscribers and measure conversions.
3. **Identify effective value proposition for subscriptions:** Using free Google "House Surveys," Lee was able to gain insights directly from their readers. The Lee team asked St. Louis Post Dispatch users questions related to subscription such as 'what they were willing to pay' and 'what types of user benefits were expected in return.'
4. **Deploy "House Ads" to complement promotion strategy:** As a DoubleClick partner, Lee ran free "House" promotional ads targeted to Google Analytics' potential subscriber segments to boost subscription awareness and conversion.



### About Project FUSE:

Project FUSE is a data framework and consultative initiative that utilizes Google Analytics and Google Surveys data. It was created to help publishers better understand their audience segments, as well as the value of individual users, and to inform data-driven tactical decisions around audience development efforts.

### About News Consumer Insights dashboard:

The News Consumer Insights framework and dashboard emerged out of a series of findings from Project Fuse. Project Fuse was an initiative in 2017 to help publishers better understand their audience segments, as well as the value of individual users, and to inform data-driven tactical decisions around audience development efforts.

#### SOURCES

Ember, Sydney, "New York Times Co. Reports Solid Digital Growth as Print Slides", The New York Times, 1 Nov. 2017

### New Digital Subscriptions Grow 3 X

After implementing Project FUSE's recommendations, Lee uncovered some key, actionable insights. Looking at survey data collected directly from their readers, they were able to validate some of their ideas around promotional subscription pricing and they were able to learn about the types of benefits that were most important to potential subscribers. Based on the survey insights, they launched a \$5-per-month Unlimited Digital Access promotion that promised a more frictionless experience.

**Lee saw a 150% increase in pageviews to their Subscribe pages and saw new digital subscription purchases triple month over month.** Based on the results on St. Louis Post Dispatch, they rolled out similar campaigns across the rest of their news properties.

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We knew we wanted to become a bigger part of the subscription economy, but had concerns about development and scalability for smaller markets. The guidance from the Project FUSE team was extremely valuable in getting us pointed in the right direction. In just a few months, we have seen incredible results, and we're just getting started. That tells me there is a bright future for Lee and other daily newspapers.

BRIDGET SIBTHORP-MOECKER,  
CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL AUDIENCE  
DEVELOPMENT FOR LEE ENTERPRISES.

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### Looking Ahead

Encouraged by the results, Lee plans to apply the Project FUSE framework to several new initiatives. Using the Project FUSE report, they can better identify the profiles of potential subscribers based on engagement, referral source and device usage, and then apply that data to broaden the scope of marketing tactics such as deploying DFP house ads to promote their own products.

Lee also has plans to use Project FUSE insights to optimize their paywall meters based on potential user value while continuing to explore further optimizations to make data-driven improvements to the overall user experience.

**Based on the results driven from working with Lee and other partners, we have developed News Consumer Insights, a publicly available dashboard that leverages Google Analytics data to provide publishers of all sizes more insight into their audience's behaviors.**