Sparkable White Paper & FAQ

Note: Please be aware that this is a living document that is updated continuously.

Last update: **July 20, 2023**

Mechanics

Origins

The mechanics of the new online platform called Sparkable (prev. Butterfy) have been thought out as an alternative to the dominant business models of the internet today.

Today, most websites and platforms are financially sustained by the business model of advertisement. The dangers are clear to most of us today and can briefly be summed up in a few keywords: clickbait, polarization, filter bubbles, hate, erosion of democratic norms and civic discourse, etc.

Paywalls have not proven to be a valid alternative as they originate from the last century when information was scarcer, and therefore, access to more information was a privilege people were willing to pay for. The internet has turned this logic on its head because most of it is powered by advertisements; therefore, people can consume everything without paying for it. The price to be paid is hidden and has been mentioned in the keywords above. But, before we realized this as a society, we had already gotten used to getting information for free. To the point where today, we are drowning in information.

That is why, we believe, we must turn the business model of paywalls on its head too: by changing it so that people don't pay for access to more but instead can access all submissions for free and can *choose* to pay if they want to see *less but better* submissions:

Advertisement   **Paywalls**   **Crowdfiltering**

For-profit   Not-for-profit
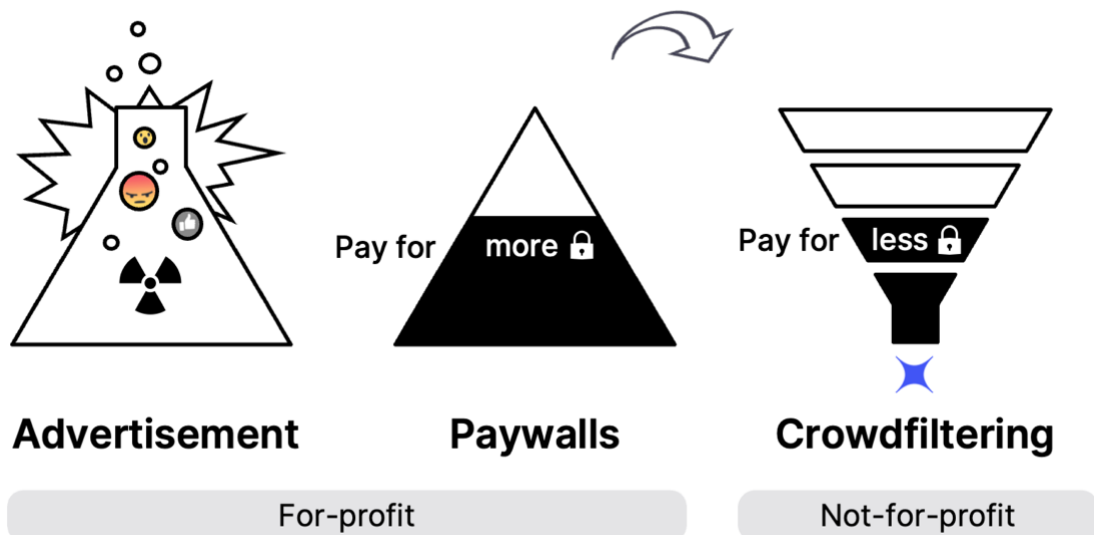
How it works

Sparkable can be seen as a giant filter that **content** but also **users** go through.

1. Every person globally can create an account on Sparkable and **submit links** [1] to content on the web (podcasts, videos, anything) that has led them to a new understanding of others or the world [2]. These submissions start at Stage 1.

2. There are voting cycles with a duration of 14 days. In the first 10 days, users view content, and in the last 4 days (voting days), users can **vote to select up to 7 submissions** that sparked new understanding for them [3].

3. Sparkable now calculates for each submission *how many of the users who opened the submission have also voted for it* [4]. This is then called the **insight percentage**. If the insight percentage is higher than 10% (meaning more than 10% of the people who opened it have also voted for it), the content is added to the next stage and stays visible in the previous stages. If the percentage is lower, it goes back by one stage. Submissions at Stage 1 with an insight percentage lower than 10% stay at Stage 1.

4. There are **4 stages**. The most insightful submissions are added to more stages. However, they always stay accessible in the previous stages. So, at Stage 1, **all submissions** are visible; at Stage 4, only fewer but better submissions are visible. Submissions that have once made it to Stage 4 will stay there because no further voting is happening at that stage. The platform will, however, archive them if no one has looked at them within 4 weeks.

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[1] Users cannot submit a link that has already been submitted.

[2] The criteria are defined in more detail in the Acceptable Use Policy which includes the Content guidelines.

[3] Rules: Users need an account to vote / Only users who viewed one or more submissions can vote / Users can vote only once per voting cycle / Users can vote on up to seven submissions per voting cycle / Users cannot vote multiple times for a submission / Users can vote on all the submissions they ever viewed / Users can vote on all content they have seen (on all stages) / Users cannot vote for their own content.

[4] The insight percentage is one of our bigger innovations. It frees us from the problem of clickbait because we evaluate not how much attention something gets (views, likes, shares, etc.) but rather how much of that attention turns to votes a couple of weeks later. So, clickbait content has no advantage on our platform because even if it gets a million views it still needs to ensure that 10% of those who viewed it also vote for it. This way, everyone has the incentive to submit content that is valuable and insightful over the long term instead of chasing clicks.

5. There is a point system: **users initially receive points** for incentivized actions like submitting content or voting.

6. Every person with or without an account can always view **all submissions** (= Stage 1).

7. Users who received enough points (see also 9.) can **choose to go to the next stages** if they want to see less but better content.

8. If users choose to do that, they pay a **small regular contribution of points to see** only the submissions with the highest quality. This is not a paywall because, on Sparkable, you can see everything for free. You only pay if you choose to see less but better content.

9. Users at Stage 1 do not pay as it is free, and users at Stage 4 do not vote as it is the last stage. Users at Stages 2 and 3: each time they vote, their contribution of points is then **split and redistributed** to:
   - the submitter of the content they voted for,
   - everybody who voted for it too,
   - and the platform.
   - If they do not vote, their contribution is split and redistributed to all users who participated in this voting round and the platform.

10. In the future, when the point system is stable, safe, and thoroughly tested, the points can be **exchanged with real currency**. People will also be able to buy points to access Stage 4 directly. This poses no threat to the workings of the system since no voting happens at Stage 4, so those users have no influence; their contributions are just split and redistributed to all users and the platform.
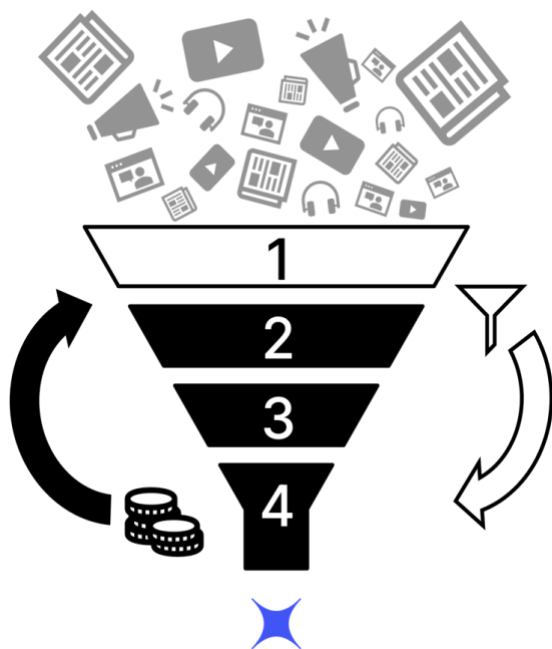
Important note: Everything mentioned in this document (including all numbers) is subject to continuous user testing; we are always ready to change every aspect of the system if necessary.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Who decides what is insightful and peaceful?

In short: everyone together. The platform just gives guiding questions for the decision-making. Every person brings their own definition of such content to Sparkable. Then, the wisdom of the crowd should lead to a shared understanding of what insightful and peaceful means for the broadest, most diverse range of people.

How do you avoid bias, trolls, hate, or destructive coordinated behavior?

In short: the crowdfiltering model of Sparkable is divided into four distinct stages with different sets of people on it, which separates the power. Sparkable also has every "business" incentive to act against those dangers, unlike the big ad-based platforms, which often even financially benefit from it.

• No one can be at all stages at the same time, so no one has control over the whole curation process on Sparkable. You are only allowed into the next stage if you "prove" your investment in the vision of more mutual understanding by submitting or voting for such content. The aim is to build a resilient community to deflect such attacks.
• All incentives on Sparkable aim to discourage and sanction destructive behavior. Spam and abusive content can be reported and removed from the platform.
• All aspects of the platform are designed to be slow and calm. For example, you can't like or react to something instantly. The voting happens only every second week, making virality impossible and incentivizing long-lasting insightful content.
• Later, Sparkable plans on including randomness: e.g., every 10th content link shown could be random to help prevent social bias and power accumulation.

How is it different from ...?

In short: It's the business model. Sparkable is not ad-based or paywall-based but has an entirely new not-for-profit business model of crowd filtering, which allows the platform to design all incentives so that it leads to a better information environment.

Sparkable vs. social platforms (e.g., Twitter, Reddit, ...)
• No algorithmic recommendations that keep you scrolling forever.
• Measures and rewards long-term insight and understanding instead of clicks, likes, or follows.
• Aggregates existing content, not another platform generating more content.

Sparkable vs. traditional media (e.g., CNN, BBC, ...)
• No hyper-current news but rather long-term insight and understanding.
• See content from all kinds of sources, not just one medium.
• Aggregates existing content, not another platform generating more content.

What can I do?

If you're interested, please:

- Send us your questions, feedback, ideas, or constructive criticism via email: support@sparkable.cc
- Apply to one of our open roles.
- Join the Sparkable Slack channel to participate in polls, ideation, and co-creation workshops.
- Join the Sparkable mailing list to receive updates.
- Follow Sparkable on Linkedin or Twitter to stay informed.

Thank you!