When Steve Jobs introduced the iPad in 2010, one of the first applications he demoed was a version of the *New York Times*. While the newspaper’s mobile offerings have undergone sweeping changes in recent years, this early prominence serves to demonstrate the lasting presence and import of traditional print media in our digital landscape.

Print media has entered an increasingly competitive digital space, but many publishers have moved quickly to embrace new media opportunities on mobile. For many, this meant building a mobile-friendly website that matched their print content. For others, they transformed their empires into full-fledged native applications that took advantage of mobile platforms’ newest innovations and delivered custom content just for mobile. Regardless of their approach, newspaper and magazine publishers have modified their business models to varying degrees to accommodate the rise of smartphones and tablets—and this trend will only continue to accelerate.

### From the ink to the hyperlink

Many publishers have chosen to build responsive web interfaces for their online publications, leveraging robust blogging platforms to distribute new articles and manage content. While this approach lends itself to widespread accessibility and ease of sharing links to static pages of content, it also allows a publication’s voice to drown in an ever-growing chorus of competing voices—many of them amateurish and with their own agenda.

To avoid this common internet-age problem, publishers have explored various ways to encapsulate their content in a digital environment that eschews outside influence. Several, the *New York Times* included, have introduced digital subscription services and “paywall” techniques that prevent readers from viewing more than a handful of articles per month. This limitation certainly helps to monetize content beyond advertising, but hinders sharability and discoverability on social media’s lightning-fast news channels.

So how else can publishers differentiate themselves from competitors on mobile? The answer for many lies in native applications, which offer a premium user experience and allow for complete control of the brand’s representation to the reader. A beautifully designed app experience can help a publisher build a reader relationship beyond simple words on a screen, and the right level of interactivity and design flourish can elevate the content into a form that users will choose over competing web interfaces and social media streams.

### A Tale of Two Newsstands

But they don’t have to stop there. In iOS 5, Apple introduced a system called Newsstand by which newspaper and magazine publishers could build custom apps that lived in a dedicated folder on iPhone and iPad home screens. These apps could feature unique icons shaped like real-world newspapers and magazines rather than rounded squares, and even got their own featured section on the App Store. Newsstand apps could auto-update themselves with new content or fresh issues in the background, meaning users could expect to see fresh content every morning, and offered subscription pricing, a first for the App Store.

Many of these apps grew into beautiful translations of paper magazines and newspapers, complete with page turn animations and gorgeous full-bleed images—and advertisements. Newsstand was the platform for a new class of interactive digital publications, and interaction designers used new frameworks as their playground to explore the iPad.

However, recent changes have spoiled publishers’ fortunes. In iOS 5 and 6, Newsstand, being a folder unto itself, was set to remain a persistent tile on every iOS device’s home screen. In iOS 7, Newsstand could be rearranged into user-defined folders, adding another layer of translucency for those users who filed Newsstand away. With this simple change, it could take users up to three different taps to open a Newsstand-specific application—functionally, this meant that Newsstand apps could accidentally become invisible.

Google’s answer to iOS Newsstand came in the form of the aptly-named Google Play Newsstand in 2013. The app merged Google Currents with newspaper and magazine content on Android, and functions as a content hub for publishers on the platform. But, unlike Newsstand on iOS, Google Play Newsstand can serve as an aggregator for all kinds of user-defined content in addition to newspaper and magazine subscriptions, including RSS feeds from blogs and websites of their choosing. Also unlike iOS, Google’s option allows publishers to insert their own stories into users’ home page streams, meaning readers don’t have to enter a dedicated application to view content from their favorite newspapers and magazines. This “content hub” approach suits timely news information well, and could account for the popularity of news-related Twitter streams and social accounts.

Luckily, publications have an opportunity to recreate this experience in native applications for iOS, as well. Thanks to additions in iOS 8, publications have new opportunities to engage with users outside of Newsstand or even native applications. With the addition of third-party widgets in Notification Center, news outlets can provide timely and contextual headlines based on the user’s interests and subscriptions, all from a native app that can be tucked away in a folder. They can create new engagement with new share sheet capabilities, making their content easier to share on a wider range of social media services.

There’s still ample room for publications to innovate on mobile, and the recent reorganization for Android and forthcoming additions to iOS allow for even more visibility and engagement than ever before. As mobile and tablet technologies mature, the most successful media powerhouses of the next century will be those who can leverage their strengths and take advantage of the instant, seamless, and unaltered access to an audience of billions.