Idea: News service with three dimensions of personalisation, content, ads and layout. In this context, personalised layout means optimising ad serving without having a negative impacting on the user’s experience.

In total we conducted nine face-to-face interviews and received 28 responses to our online survey. The questions were the same for both the interviews and the survey but the interviews allowed us to explore certain topics in more detail and capture insights.

All interviewees accessed news content via the web to a varying degree. In general, the younger the interviewee the more time they spent online accessing news while the mature interviewee tended to go online if they forgot to buy the paper or were on holidays / abroad. This group still liked to buy a physical newspaper because of such things as crosswords and also from habit.

All said they would be interested in a personalised news service but no one was willing to pay for it. It was mentioned by a few respondents that they feared that with a personalised service they might miss some interesting news that would probably catch their attention from a paper / TV / radio. If there was a way to include a feature which allowed them, from time to time, to turn off the personalisation and view all news would overcome this concern.

In general the idea of the app acting as a high level filter but allowing the user to dive into the detail when needed was well received and for most respondents personalised news would be ‘very likely’ or ‘moderately likely’. They would also recommend it to others with the same level of enthusiasm.

Those who viewed many different news sites liked the notion of a summary of stories. This is a web equivalent of “and now a short look at tomorrow’s papers’” which was a popular signing off piece by BBC’s News night.

Regardless of age, a large percentage liked to view the news sites of the country they were from or had lived in the past. It was felt that a service which offered summarizes in the language of the news source would be beneficial.

The need to save time while trawling news sites was the reason for the app’s conception and indeed this was a problem most faced, i.e. the need to find fresh, relevant and interesting news in a timely manner without spending too much time manually searching and filtering various sites and content.

From our research, there is a well defined market for (mobile) personalised news / content services from providers such as Flipboard, Pulse, Zite, Streamglider and more recently Summly. We think we can evolve this market with the personalised layout feature in order to optimise ad serving which satisfies advertisers’ commercial needs while not driving user’s from the site.

We are still pursuing our idea as most respondents generally liked the concept and would probably use such a service if it were available. A key stakeholder, advertisers, would have to be approached to see if they saw value in optimising the ad layout per user. Organisations like ‘iab’ would also have to be interviewed to see if such an approach was acceptable from an industry standard perspective.