

Daily Paywall - Critical text by Paolo Cirio. 2014.

A functional democracy needs an informed public. However, today access to knowledge is controlled by a for-profit industry, while information is manipulated in its distribution and organization to maintain undemocratic orders.

Daily Paywall proposes a provocative and conceptual economic model for the media and publishing industry. With Daily Paywall the for-profit scheme of information selling and consumption is reversed for democratic and educational purposes, by paying readers to access and understand the news, while directly rewarding critical content creators by sidestepping the interfering middleman's agenda.

In creating Daily Paywall, over sixty thousand articles covering developments in finance, economy, and business published during the course of 2014 have been stolen from the mainstream corporate media in order to redistribute them for free, and extract their value to reinvest into motivating sociocritical analysis. The articles are made available both online and in print to those who would not typically have access to or be exposed to such material due to their inability to afford a subscription, or because of how the media ranks the articles or simply as a result of the exclusionary language employed by these news sources. At its core, Daily Paywall proposes that access to this content should be more horizontal and democratic in scope, encouraging and incentivizing consumption and participation by those who are struggling financially, or who occupy a lower class status, as economic volatility and increasing wealth disparity ultimately impacts them the most.

Beyond promoting open access to knowledge, the project also makes a direct provocation regarding the one-directional flow of capital in our current information economy. This is achieved by incentivizing readers to read, absorb, and respond to articles that expose flaws in corporations, governments, and institutions.

The newspaper, Daily Paywall, provides a window into our modern reality of institutionalized economic exploitations, crimes and conflicts neutralized in the global complexity, and super power stakes. The articles are often highly ideological and deceptive, yet they contain facts and details that aren't presented in popular mainstream culture. This artistic re-contextualization of a huge amount of news articles is created to unveil the intrinsic value and significance of information. This artwork, in fact, aims to reconfigure structures of knowledge to unleash new meanings, as well as their social and cultural functions.

By enticing citizens to become informed in exchange for money, Daily Paywall radically shifts the current media paradigm of economic exclusion by providing access and effectively engaging people in a form of public discourse, disrupting contemporary social, economic, and media orders, and exploring alternatives to systems of knowledge distribution. Besides alluding to the media's role in informing the public, Daily Paywall also addresses the modern speculative industry of education, as paying high tuition discourages citizens from learning. In opposition, this new paid-to-learn model would empower everyone with financial means and knowledge for greater human progress.

Daily Paywall integrates the highly exploitative and precarious socioeconomic nature of the sharing economy and radically reverses it with a conceptual work on the reformulation of access to education for motivating social change. As a direct provocation, with subtle ironies woven throughout, Daily Paywall does not seek to redefine the media business, but rather presents a constructive, artistic model for an alternative approach to the distribution of information, education, income, and labor. Even though business model logic guides the structure of the project, sustainability and profit are not the goal and have been sacrificed or challenged in favor of ethical, philosophical, and social revelations.

Today information flow is the means of exchange for valuing any economic and social entity. Knowledge as an asset and information as currency determine the current economic hegemony and social order. Thus, the creative reconfiguration of the information flow is the ultimate political and artistic practice that can transform and address modern society at large.

The Media Performance

The critical aspects of this experiment are recalled as a conflict over information and social control. This conflict is enacted as a performance through the staging of a striking interaction amongst the social actors that the artist involved in the artwork, the corporate targets, the readers, the journalists, and the art world. During this temporary setting of the performance, the participants are left to confront and discuss the validity, legality, and finality of the artwork.

With the proper timing and preparation, the performance eventually reaches its apex with the social conflict becoming unresolvable, ending with the dramatic suppression of the artwork itself which in turn reveals the real power structures in place. Here, the artistic provocation of Daily Paywall is most explicit and the media performance truly takes place, showing a powerful rupture to the current restrictions over information concerning the important issues that govern society.

Daily Paywall questions contemporary socioeconomic dynamics and how they can be rearranged as a form of art practice. This project proposes a direct intervention into the power relations between corporations, media, authorities, individuals, and communities. As a mode of engaging and participatory artistic performance, the project has the potential to create symbolic and veritable ruptures within the operations of the financial and information economies, and challenges our complicity with corruption and inequality. As such, the project carries the ability to impact society at large, which is what all socially engaged art, and we as citizens, must strive for.

The Making of Daily Paywall Explained

On DailyPaywall.com, tens of thousands of articles have been gleaned daily from mainstream online news sources such as the Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, and The Economist.

After signing up for paid accounts with the targeted news sources, the artist created a script that automatically pulled entire articles from these sites and reposted them onto DailyPaywall.com. This sophisticated exploit into the authentication system forced these media outlets to release all their published content, with an average of 200 items a day, fetching a total of over 60,000 articles during the whole year of 2014.

The artist then sifted through hundreds of articles, collecting the most significant to unveil contradictions surrounding the contemporary global economy. He then edited and published a few issues of his own financial newspaper, Daily Paywall, which is available online and in printed form for distribution as a free paper in newsracks disseminated throughout NYC.

On DailyPaywall.com, the artist designed an interface to allow people to read and search through the huge database of articles for free. Online users can also participate in the project by sharing and rating the articles as well as suggesting questions and answers for selected news.

Ultimately, the artist has formulated a system for readers to submit their answers to quizzes on a few featured articles, and has planned to implement a payment process which will be able to issue funds to readers who've answered these questions correctly and also to journalists that readers have opted to pay.

The Social Business Plan

- Readers can earn \$1 for responding correctly to the quiz about the article.
- Journalists can earn money from those who've decided to donate to the article's author.
- Funders can offer an amount to crowdfund the system.

Moreover, alongside these republished, pirated articles, advertising is sold to create a revenue stream.

Everyone is able to donate an amount of money as part of the crowdfunding campaign and work on the editing of the content as part of the crowdsourcing project. The shared labor and the generated income is used to reward readers who correctly respond to a brief quiz about the articles, thus giving back to society by incentivizing analytical and critical thinking surrounding the story.

Readers of the Daily Paywall website and the printed newspaper will be recruited both online and offline, in several different types of communities and environments. For instance, online, the project will be promoted through social media channels specific to the teenage and undergraduate demographics, which will direct them to the website of the project. Eventually, paid readers will also be recruited through local papers, jobs listings, and online youth forums. Beyond the youth communities in NYC, readers and advertisers will be attracted by a wider community of artists and activists who are generally not interested in work for such low payment, but for whom the project's concept will appeal or for those who want to support quality journalism. With the appropriate contacts and sensibility, the Daily Paywall may also recruit and pay readers from developing countries.