Branded Content Benchmarks
Feb 2015 – Oct 2016

Insights from over 200 brands and publishers in North America
Pressboard is a story marketplace.

Brands leverage Pressboard to work with the world’s most influential media publishers to create, publish and measure brand content, instead of ads.

We believe that stories are the most powerful way for brands to communicate and that data can make us all better storytellers.

Jerrid Grimm
Co-Founder, Pressboard

Ex. Ford branded content on VentureBeat.com
Where's the data from?

...and hundreds more

906

Custom branded stories from top brands and publishers
Key Findings

The most interesting insights from these benchmarks show that branded content drastically outperforms traditional display advertising.

Readers spend an average of **66 seconds** actively engaged with a branded article. Compared with the average engagement time for a traditional banner ad — **8.02 seconds** — these results show that engaged readers spend over **8x** more time with branded content than with standard banner ads.

Other standout metrics in the report reveal that the average person reads **79%** of a branded article and that the average conversion rate from a piece of branded content back to the sponsoring brand’s website is **1.9%**.
Table of Contents

Sections

Glossary & Methodology 6
Average Reads 9
Attention Benchmarks 13
Active Reading Time 13
Average Scrolled 20
Conversion Rates 28
About Us 31
Glossary & Methodology
1. **Reads**
   A Read is a unique view of the story by a real human.

2. **"Presented by" Header**
   A highly visible tag below the content’s headline that discloses that the content is sponsored by a brand. Most headers also include the sponsoring brand’s logo.

3. **Branded Footer**
   A call to action written by the sponsoring brand that sits at the bottom of all content published through Pressboard’s platform.
4. **Active Reading Time**
A measure of how long the reader is actively engaging with the page’s content. Unlike Google’s Time on Page metric, Pressboard’s Active Reading Time measures all visitors to a page and analyzes how active and engaged they are, how far they are scrolling and what they do after they finish. For more information, see this comparison of Active Reading Time and Time on Page.

5. **Average Scrolled**
A measure of what percentage of the piece of content a user scrolled through before leaving. This is measured by tracking how close the individual scrolls to the branded footer included on all content published through Pressboard’s platform.

6. **Conversion**
A conversion is counted when a person clicks back to the sponsoring advertiser’s website from either the “Presented by” header or branded footer that accompanies all content published through Pressboard’s platform.
Average Reads
Content is fundamentally different than other forms of advertising and requires a new approach to measurement. That's why we introduced the Read as not only an indicator of success, but as the currency with which campaigns are valued. Pressboard campaigns make use exclusively of the “Cost per Read” model, meaning that campaigns are evaluated based on a guaranteed number of reads. This is in contrast to CPM or CPC models currently used for display advertising and native ad units.

Jerrid Grimm
Co-Founder, Pressboard

2,904

The average number of reads a piece of branded content receives
Unsurprisingly, a piece of branded content is viewed primarily on a smartphone. Still, 16.8% of reads a story receives come from a tablet device.

Phone – 59.6%
Desktop – 23.6%
Tablet – 16.8%

*Average across all reads
Facebook is the primary source of reads for a piece of branded content, followed by direct traffic. LinkedIn drives the least amount of traffic to branded content.

Facebook – 73.6%
Direct – 10.2%
Referral – 8.6%
Search – 6.3%
Twitter – 1.1%
LinkedIn – 0.2%

*Average across all reads
Attention Benchmarks

Active Reading Time
Average Active Reading Time

When it comes to analyzing content you need to go beyond pageviews or Reads into attention-based metrics like Active Reading Time. While Google Analytics uses a metric called Time on Page, it's often inflated because it cannot accurately measure attention time for "bounces". Bounces are visitors that only visit one page on a given site, and they can make up over 80% of all visitors on content-focused sites.

Pressboard's Active Reading Time measures all visitors to a page and analyzes how active and engaged they are, how far they are scrolling and what they do after they’re finished. For more information, see this comparison of Active Reading Time and Time on Page.

66 seconds

The average amount of time a user spends reading a piece of branded content
Most readers (78%) will spend a minimum of 20 seconds on the page. Half of all readers will spend 50 seconds or more on a branded article.

- Less than 3s – 2%
- 3 – 10s – 6%
- 10 – 20s – 12%
- 20 – 50s – 30%
- 50 – 100s – 28%
- More than 100s – 20%

*Average across all reads*
How long a reader spends on an article varies across story categories. Reference, World Locations (Tourism) and Business & Industrial stories receive the longest average active reading time, while Autos & Vehicles and Games stories receive the shortest.

### Average Active Reading Time by Story Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Category</th>
<th>Average Active Reading Time (sec)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Localities</td>
<td>69 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>55 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Industrial</td>
<td>48 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Communities</td>
<td>46 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies &amp; Leisure</td>
<td>43 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>43 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>42 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People/Society</td>
<td>42 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>42 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food &amp; Drink</td>
<td>41 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>41 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Entertainment</td>
<td>41 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>41 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>37 sec</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beauty &amp; Fitness</td>
<td>31 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books &amp; Literature</td>
<td>30 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>28 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home &amp; Garden</td>
<td>28 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers &amp; Electronics</td>
<td>25 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet &amp; Telecom</td>
<td>25 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets &amp; Animals</td>
<td>24 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs &amp; Education</td>
<td>20 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autos &amp; Vehicles</td>
<td>20 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>16 sec</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Average across stories within each category*
As explained earlier, advertisers in different industries should expect different levels of engagement with their content. For example, a Real Estate brand should be happy with around 70 seconds of active reading time, whereas a Telecommunications brand might be happy with half that number.

*Average across stories within each category*
On average, desktop readers spend the longest amount of time on a story compared to readers on mobile or tablet.

Desktop – 71 sec  
Phone – 66 sec  
Tablet – 62 sec

*Average across all reads
Average Active Reading Time by Source

Most sources drive traffic with similar average active reading times, with Twitter, LinkedIn and Search referees spending slightly longer on stories than those from other platforms.

Twitter – 71 sec
LinkedIn – 70 sec
Search – 69 sec
Pinterest – 66 sec
Facebook – 66 sec
Direct – 66 sec
Referral – 64 sec

*Average across all reads
Attention Benchmarks

Average Scrolled
In addition to the amount of active time a user spends reading the content, brands should take into consideration how much of the content was actually viewed and read. Average Scrolled measures what percentage of the content a user scrolled before leaving. Scrolling is a key indicator of content interest, and better content will mean higher average scrolled.

79%

The average amount of the page a user scrolled through
While the differences are smaller compared to Active Reading Time, content categories do make an impact on the Average Scrolled metric. Autos & Vehicles and Finance stories are scrolled down the furthest on average, with readers reaching 78% and 77% of the page respectively.

*Average across stories within each category*
Slightly more dramatic differences are seen between advertiser categories when you consider Average Scrolled. Advertisers in the Healthcare & Biotech and Hospitals industries clearly received the highest Average Scrolled percentage.

- Healthcare & Biotech – 87%
- Hospitals – 87%
- Tourism – 69%
- Automobiles & Transportation – 68%
- Consumer Products – 67%
- Associations & Government – 65%
- Nonprofits – 65%
- Construction & Building Products – 65%
- Real Estate – 65%
- Banks & Financial Services – 65%
- Food Service – 61%
- Sports & Entertainment – 61%
- Education – 59%
- Industrial Manufacturing & Utilities – 56%
- Marketing Agencies & Services – 54%
- Telecommunications – 52%
- Retail & Ecommerce – 52%
- Consumer Services – 52%

*Average across stories within each category
It seems that the screen size on which someone reads an article influences how far they scroll on it, with desktop and tablet readers scrolling further down a story on average than those who access branded content on a smartphone.

Desktop – 84%
Tablet – 81%
Phone – 76%

*Average across all reads*
Search referees scroll through the largest percentage of stories while Direct referees scroll through the smallest percentage. This difference is minimal, however, and most sources of traffic display comparable scroll rate percentages.

- Search – 84%
- Twitter – 84%
- Pinterest – 83%
- Facebook – 82%
- Referral – 81%
- LinkedIn – 80%
- Direct – 77%

*Average across all reads*
Sponsored content must be clearly labelled under the FTC’s Native Ad Guidelines, and it’s important for brands that their sponsorship be seen to improve consumer awareness and trust. On articles published through Pressboard’s platform, readers will see either the branded “Presented by” header at the top of a story or both the branded header and footer, which occurs at the bottom of the article.
The device a reader uses to read a story does not have a large impact on whether or not they view the brand sponsorship. On all three device types, most readers see one or the other. On a larger screen, however, there's more chance that a reader will see the branded footer.

Percentage of People That See Sponsorship Disclosure:

Phone – 92.8%
Desktop – 86.5%
Tablet – 92.2%

*Average across all reads
Conversion Rates
Conversion metrics analyze how exposure to each piece of branded content translates into traffic back to the brand's site, people in their stores and sales in their tills. A conversion is measured as a click on either the “Presented by” header or branded footer that accompanies every piece of branded content published through Pressboard's platform.

**1.9%**

The average conversion rate of a piece of branded content
Conclusion

Reflecting on the data we've collected over the past two years, it becomes clear that sponsored / branded content is a powerful tool for advertisers across all industries.

Engaged readers spend over $8x$ more time with branded content than with standard banner ads and over $96\%$ of readers see some form of sponsorship on the piece of content. On average, these stories have a $1.9\%$ conversion rate, driving readers to the sponsoring brand's site.

We hope that brands use the information in this report to examine how readers engage with different kinds of stories, as this knowledge can ultimately help them craft better content to meet their unique campaign goals.
About Pressboard

Pressboard is a story marketplace. We believe that when great brands and influential storytellers come together around interesting topics we can create powerful stories that people love to read and share. Pressboard has offices in Vancouver, Toronto, and New York and is co-founded by Jerrid Grimm and Tiam Korki.

Brands & Publishers We Work With

- Best Buy
- Budweiser
- Ford
- Gothamist
- Entrepreneur
- General Mills
- Telus
- Metro
- Nintendo
- Toronto Star
- VentureBeat
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info@pressboardmedia.com
pressboardmedia.com