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Is it too late to charge?

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Now that the debate about micropayments for online content is back and at full steam, USA Today Publisher David Hunke thinks mobile news is ideally suited for this strategy as well, reports AP. "I'm not sure we realized what we had," he said about the successful iPhone application of the daily. "I think that is a value readers will be willing to pay for."

The USA Today free iPhone application was launched at the end of December and has been heavily downloaded since. The newspaper also offers 'USA Today Crosswords' in the App Store to download for US\$ 4.99. (See an interview with Matt Jones, vice president of Mobile Strategy and Operations for USA Today/Gannett Digital, about iPhone applications and more of the company's mobile strategy [here](#) [1].)

The Wall Street Journal has gone a step further and started polling iPhone subscribers to the paper's content to find out their proclivity to pay for the application. The quick survey asks: "If full access to Mobile Reader required a paid subscription, how likely would you be to subscribe?" Answers go from "definitely yes" to "definitely no" with some middle ground. Rupert Murdoch, CEO of News Corp --owner of the WSJ-- , had already said the group intends to charge "handsomely" for its WSJ iPhone and Blackberry apps eventually.

With the latest iPhone software update, Apple offers new billing options that could be interesting for publishers. Previously, companies only had the option to charge once for an application, but now they can require subscriptions. They can also offer the app for a flat-rate and then charge more for additional content within the app.

The questions now: Is it too late for other newspapers that are launching applications these days to start charging for these products? Can newspapers that have already launched a free app go back and charge from now on for it?

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