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## Insights

# Who Needs Another News App?

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**In a world swamped by free news sources, an industry-specific news app, customizable according to defined categories, stands out.**

### Important Details

The field for cloud-based news aggregation apps for company, product, and industry information is full of choices: from established players like NYT Now and The Guardian or web stalwarts like Google and Yahoo!, to more recent entrants like Owler and Circa. Especially in the technology space, a multitude of free and subscription-based options offer either proprietary content or analysis such as TechCrunch, re/code, and Pando Daily, or aggregated links to content from the open web. Northern Light, a provider of research portals of aggregated content to the enterprise, decided to enter the fray with a unique offering.

Instead of a firehose of news, Northern Light opted for a focused, industry-specific approach. Its first release is for IT product, marketing, and sales professionals, with planned releases for pharma, financial services, healthcare, and energy in the pipeline. According to the company, it draws on approximately 5,700 news sources and allows users to filter stories according to 12 main categories (e.g., Enterprise Computing, Internet of Things, Hot Topics, Smartphones, Big Data, etc.). Each of those categories is then broken down into subcategories to allow more granular filtering. For instance, the Internet of Things category has subcategories like Smart Cities, Smartwatches, Wearables, Connected Cars, etc. In all, the company claims news feeds on over 90 topics, with approximately 10 to 20 stories per day in each subcategory, substantially more than is available from the Technology sections of competitors like Flipboard, Circa, or Google News. There's also a Companies section, with news on about 60 tech-focused companies.

Available on all four major platforms (iOS, Android, Windows Phone, and Blackberry), Northern Light released its app with another twist – it's free to the public, no registration required, no ads, and no individual data collected on users. The company originally developed the app for its enterprise portal clients, and will link it with clients' existing subscription services, allowing end-users to integrate saved searches, along with content from the enterprise portal. Since Northern Light already invested in the development costs for its clients, it decided to release a free version to build brand awareness and goodwill, as well as to assess features and functions going forward.

## Implications

The release of a free version like this is certainly a novel approach. It's not often we see an app with this degree of functionality without a revenue model, or at least the ability to engage with a user base. Of course, the company will still be able to collect aggregate usage data on the topics searched, and usage patterns (i.e., time of day of use, duration, frequency, etc.), which will allow it to further refine its development, although without a registration requirement the ability to further engage (or eventually monetize) its user base is moot. The appeal of the app contains some key points for any news delivery service, whether a news vendor, aggregator, or IM manager delivering news to end-users:

- **Simplicity:** The app is elegant in its minimalism, and the user interface is quite intuitive; in fact, there is no need for any instructions – it's tap and go. After using the app on both an iOS smartphone and tablet for two weeks, we noticed very little duplication of news stories, which is always an issue with aggregation services.
- **Focus:** Instead of overflowing buckets of “technology” news, the ability to choose categories and refine them for greater clarity is a big plus. Yes, it's possible to set up a series of alerts in other news services, but again the simplicity of design wins out.
- **Multiple platforms:** While iOS and Android dominate the markets, end-users rely on multiple venues (even Blackberry!), so it's best to serve them, and this app does.

Time will tell whether Northern Light's app gains wide appeal, but its efforts to deliver focused news to IT professionals speaks to an understanding of end-users' workflow and needs.

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