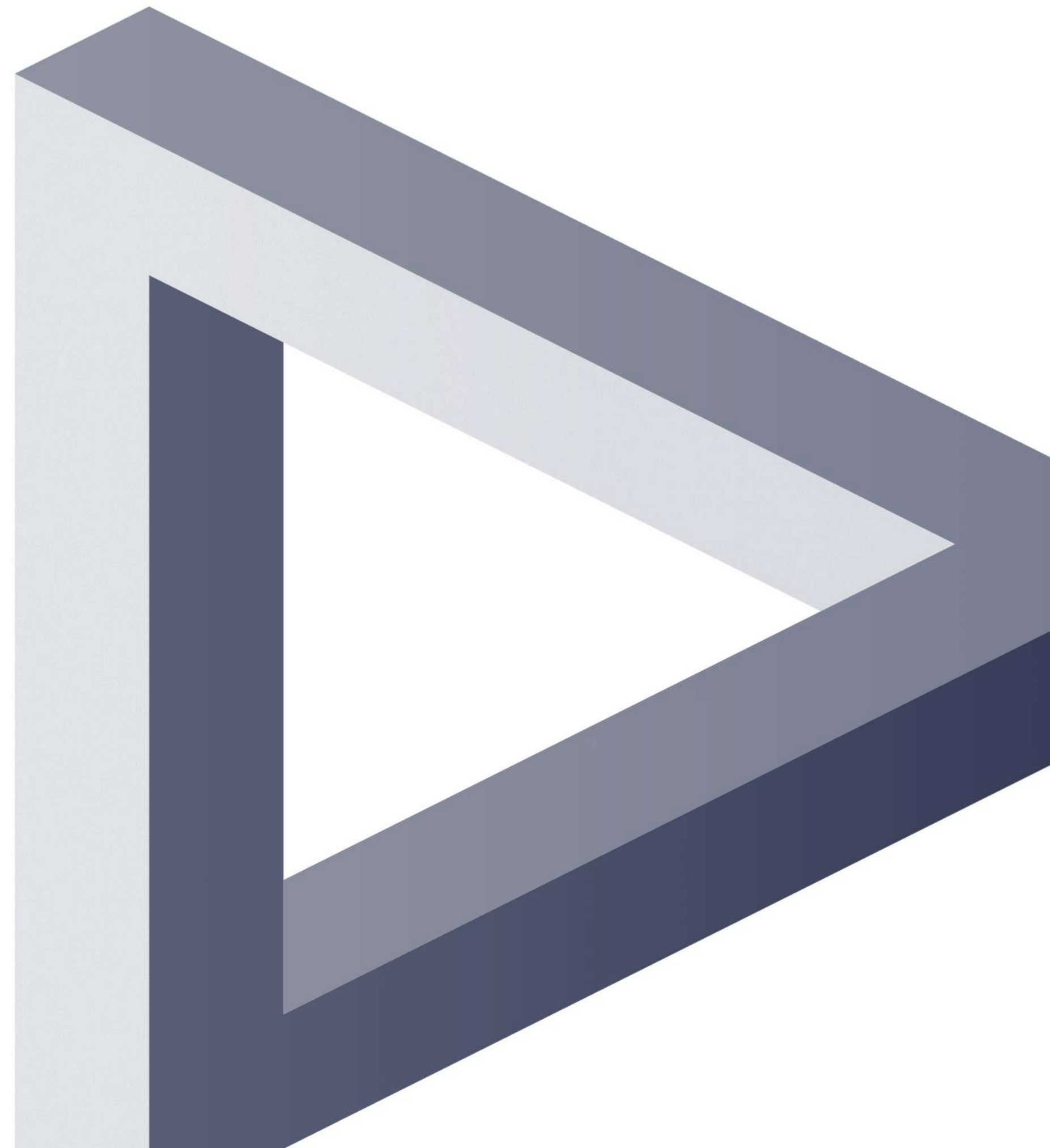




How Bonnier Corporation offered
users a taste of something new with
its premium ad-light experience

The publisher turned to Piano to launch the new
subscription-based service at Saveur, Popular Science
and Flying — with plans to expand it even further.



In 2018, Bonnier Corporation, one of the largest special-interest publishing groups in the U.S., with more than 200 special interest brands — including titles like Field & Stream, Outdoor Life, Cycle World, Popular Science and Saveur — made the decision to add to their audience offerings and build new revenue streams through the addition of premium online experiences. The company’s websites attract a combined average of 17 million unique visitors per month.

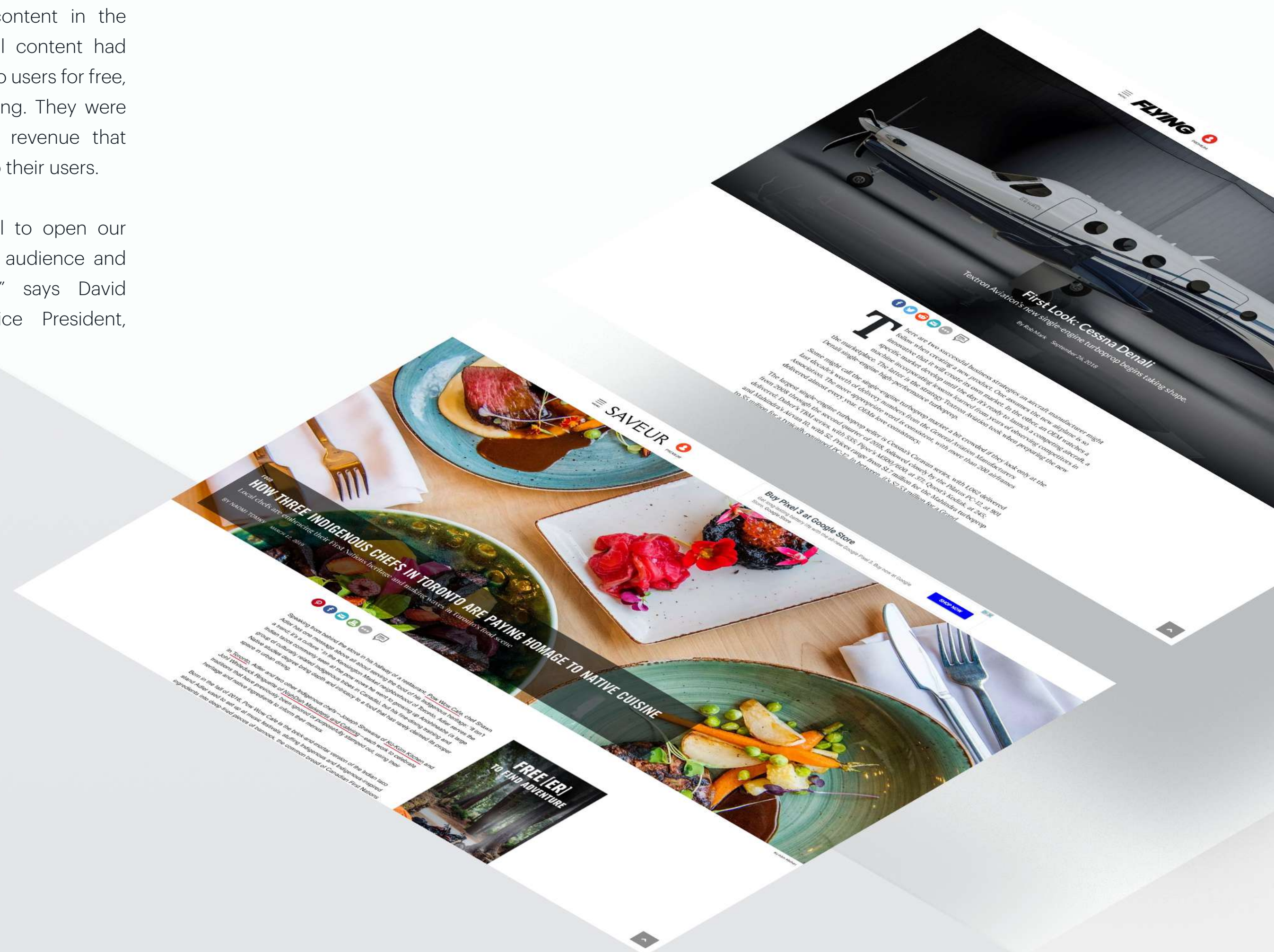
While the company had experimented with paid premium content in the past, their core digital content had always been available to users for free, supported by advertising. They were looking for additional revenue that didn’t wall off access to their users.

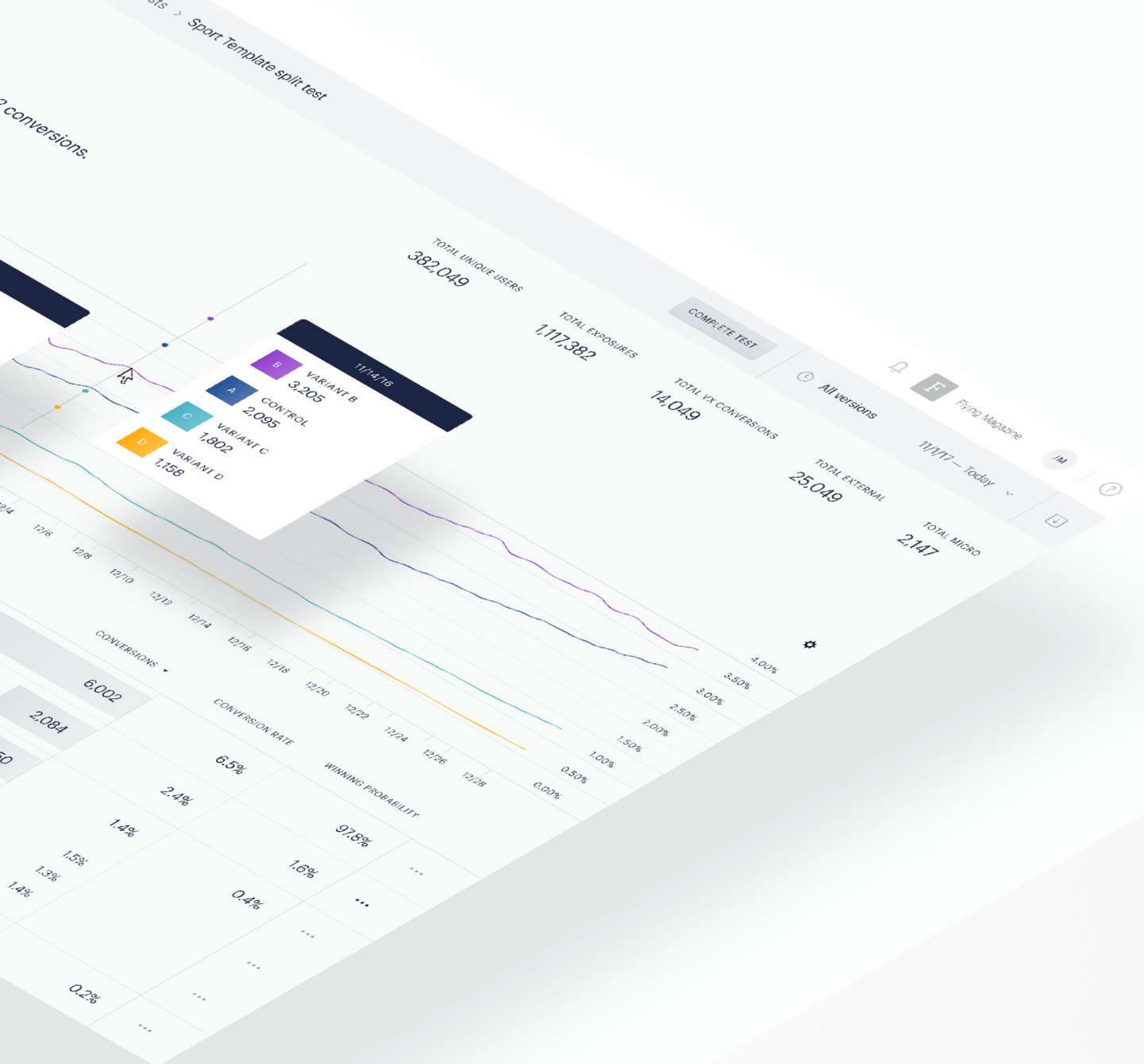
“We saw the potential to open our properties to different audience and monetization models,” says David Ritchie, Executive Vice President, Bonnier Subscriptions.

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The initial rollout

While the Bonnier team had several ideas on how to accomplish their goals, they opted to first introduce an ad-light experience, available through an annual paid subscription. The new offering would present users with the option of experiencing Bonnier’s content with limited ad exposure. This new experience would be rolled out first through three of their most popular titles: Saveur, Popular Science and Flying.

“Display advertising has always been our principal source of revenue from digital content, but that ad experience does produce some consumer angst,” Ritchie says. “Users demand from us improved online experiences, but the question is — are they willing to contribute to the quality of that journalism? That’s a question newspapers have been grappling with for years, but within our niche markets, where passion rules over breaking news, we are just beginning to evaluate that value exchange.”

To bring their plans to fruition, the publisher needed the right tools to power the subscription and trial offers they had planned,

as well as ad blocking detection capabilities that would let them get in front of users with ad blocking technology already in place. They decided to use Piano’s Composer, VX and ID solutions. Having worked with Piano before, Bonnier was already familiar with the company’s diverse experience and the depth of functionality the platform offered, and trusted them to help roll out the new ad-light experience while supporting future goals of expanding Bonnier’s premium offerings.

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A new user experience

Bonnier introduced the new premium ad-light experience with Piano at its three pilot publications in October 2018. Piano was able to help fuel the subscriptions and trial offers and detect users with ad blocking enabled. Upon identifying those users, Bonnier is now able to prompt them to turn their ad blocking off — offering the option to either experience their content with ads alongside, or to subscribe for the ad-light experience instead. “It’s up to the users which experience they would prefer, but we’re trying to be transparent in explaining that our journalism requires funding and support from our audience, and we’re trying to be very flexible in offering multiple ways for them to do that,” Ritchie says.

In the ad-light experience, ads are removed from the frames of all pages, with only limited pre-roll video ads and content recommendations. It’s “a much faster-loading, smoother reading experience,” Ritchie adds, but it still provides Bonnier with a baseline revenue

stream to support quality journalism. It’s also proven a success with users. Implemented with only modest site marketing in place, the new offer saw more than 1,300 initial trial subscriptions at Saveur within four months of launch. Flying and Popular Science followed at a similar ratio. As those trial subscriptions began to expire, users began converting to annual subscriptions at initial rates varying between 70 and 80 percent, depending on the brand.

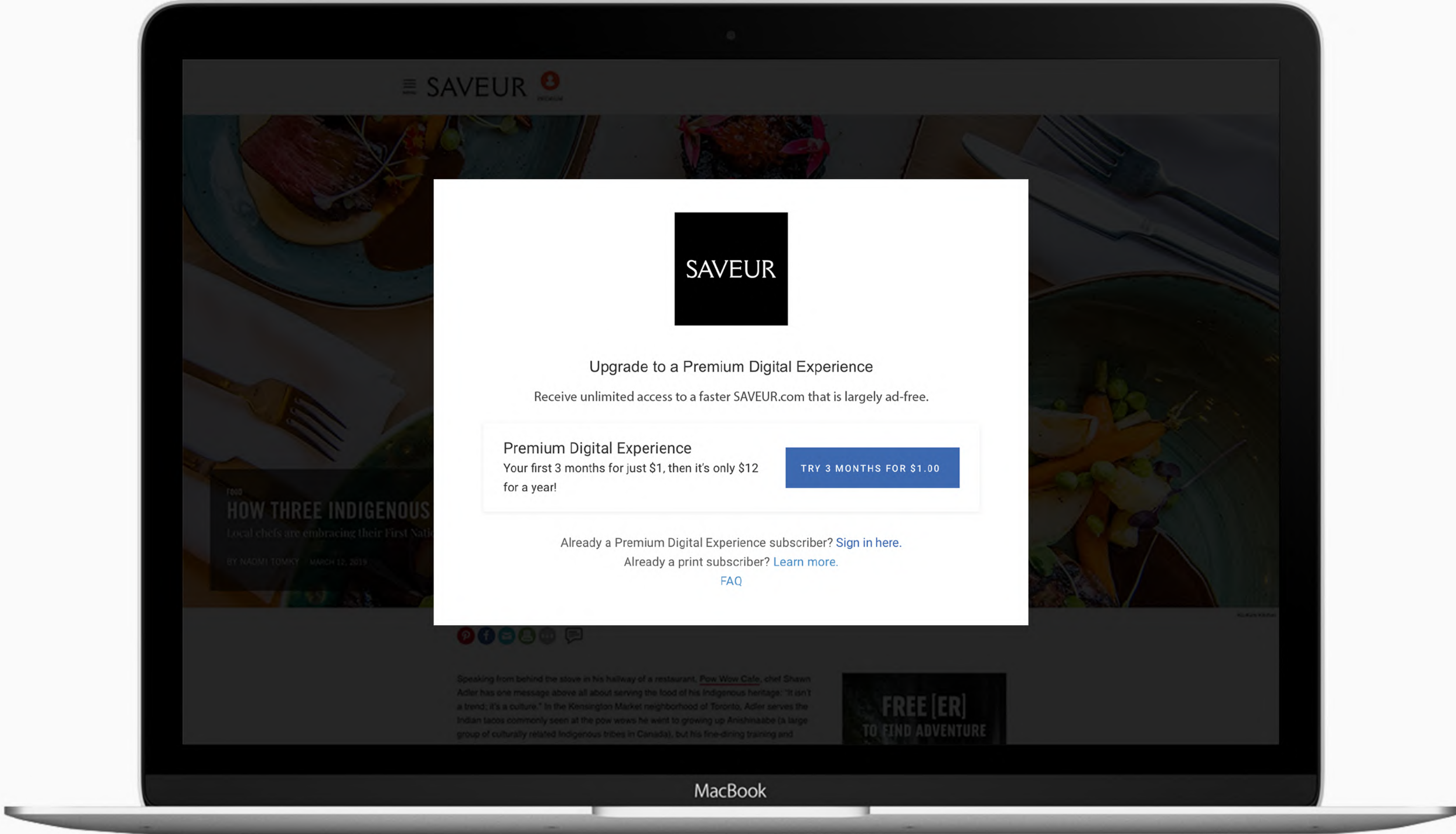
“The response has been encouraging. We’re recovering significant advertising revenue from users who turn off their ad blockers, we’re converting high percentages of users who click on our subscription offers, and now seeing high percentages of those moving to annual subscriptions.” says Ritchie. “We’ve received some questions and cancellations, and that’s to be expected, but we are learning quickly how to refine and improve the experience for our users.”

↑ 1,300

Initial trial subscriptions within four months of launch on Saveur's website.

↑ 80%

Bonnier saw initial subscription rates of 70% to 80% of trial users converting to annual subscriptions.





Next steps

Introducing an ad-light experience at three key sites was a major first step to reaching Bonnier’s business goals. They plan on building on the success they’ve seen at those publications by rolling out the same ad-light experience at four additional sites later this year.

That’s just the start, though. Bonnier envisions tiered offerings throughout their brands to provide a premium experience to readers. That may mean offering premium content across their publications, including anything from original articles and galleries, to premium access to buyers’ guides or recommended products from their editorial team. Bonnier is also considering bundling their print and ad-light digital subscriptions, with different

conversion funnels and offers. They also want to experiment with price points and personalized messaging based on how visitors have discovered their sites and the amount of time they’ve spent there.

“Piano is not a one-trick pony,” adds David Ritchie, Bonnier Corp.’s Executive Vice President, Bonnier Subscriptions, who led the initial integration efforts. “It is a well-developed platform that is looking at monetization models for publishers that are very flexible, realizing that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Every publisher has different audience needs, different content capabilities and a different focus. How that gets leveraged in terms of a premium offering is going to vary.”

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