

Is Mobile Affecting When We Read?

January 12th, 2011

[Read It Later](#)

Printed media used to allow us to read in the places we found most comfortable. When you imagine yourself reading the newspaper it's probably in your favorite chair, at the breakfast table, or at the cafe with an orange mocha frappuccino in your hand.

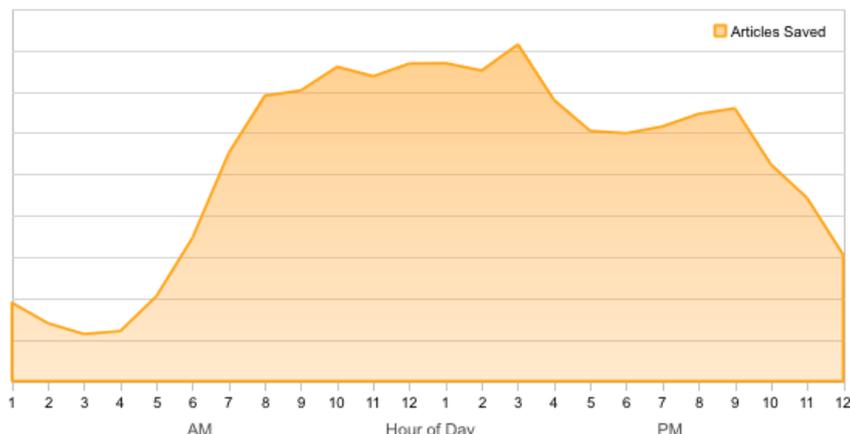
Unfortunately, as news and media moves online, it moves us away from these places and into our desk chairs. Even worse, consuming content is no longer on our own schedule. The flood of content disrupts us all day as if we have an maniacal paperboy throwing new editions on our doorstep every 15 seconds.

However, after studying Read It Later's own data, it seems that this trend is being reversed. I've found that as devices become more mobile, it's not only changing where we read, but when. Today, I'd like to show you some of the data behind this movement.

Today's data source: 100 million articles saved by Read It Later users across all major web and mobile platforms.

Constant Bombardment

Before looking at when we read, we should look first at when we encounter new content:



This chart shows the **number of articles saved** to Read It Later each hour (adjusted for timezones). As you would suspect, it is steady throughout the day as we are bombarded with content **every waking hour**.

So how are readers dealing with the deluge of information?

Time Shifted Reading

Readers are saving content for a better time.

People are busy. It's unrealistic that we are going to consume all of this content the exact moment we discover it. So we leave dozens of tabs open, we email ourselves links, or we use Read It Later to hold on to the content until we are ready to consume it.

Let's take a look at when different users get around to reading the content they save during the day:

Computer Users

Trends

Trends explores the data behind [Read It Later](#) in search of answers about online and mobile reading.

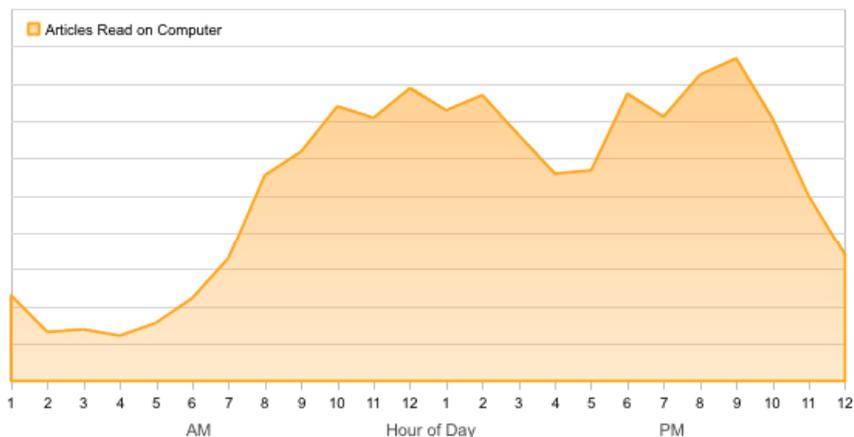
Dataset: One of the world's largest digital reading platforms, RIL's 3M registered users have saved over 100 million articles and read on every major web and mobile platform.

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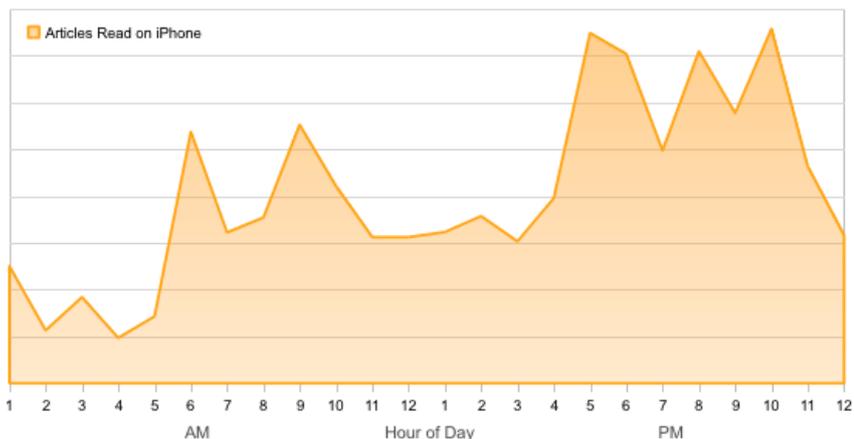


This graph shows the **number of articles read** each hour by Read It Later users **on their computer**.

Compared to the times articles are saved, you can see that a significant amount of content was shifted towards the end of a user's day (6PM – 9PM). The graph is not as flat either. Where the number of saves remains fairly constant between 8AM – 4PM, the number of reads grows more sharply until noon and then begins to fall off until after work.

Overall though, this graph isn't a dramatic departure from the times we are saving content. It seems that while on a computer, we are more susceptible to discovering additional content throughout the day.

iPhone Users

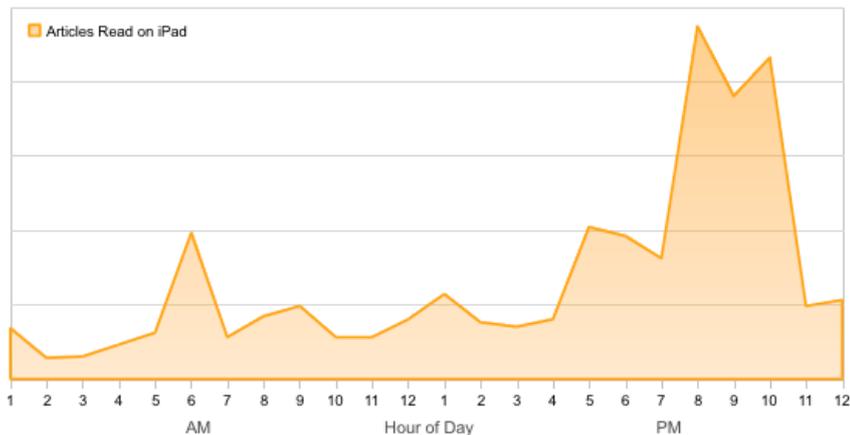


This is where it gets interesting. You'll note four major spikes when most of the **reading on an iPhone** is done:

- **6am** - Early morning, breakfast
 - **9am** - The morning commute, start of the work day
 - **5pm – 6pm** - End of the work day and the commute home
 - **8pm – 10pm** - Couch time, prime time, bed time
- In reality, this really is a graph of whitespace time. Whitespace is the time between A and B. It's the time on the subway or bus. It's the time standing in line. It's a spare moment.

It is during these moments between tasks and locations that people reach for their phone. These are perfect times to knock an item or two off of your reading list. By saving content for later, readers are able to consume content during the voids in their day without interrupting the day's normal flow.

iPad Users



The graph of **when users are reading on the iPad** shows the biggest time for reading: **personal prime time**.

This is generally the most relaxing time of day. After a long day, work is done, dinner is resting in your belly and there is nothing left to do but put your feet up and relax. This time slot is the same one coveted by television. When the majority of people are consuming content it seems perfectly natural that people would use this time to do their reading as well.

Not surprising, if you look back at the graphs for computer and iPhone reading, you'll see spikes during this same time (8 – 10 PM) appear on all graphs.

How the iPad is Changing Online Reading

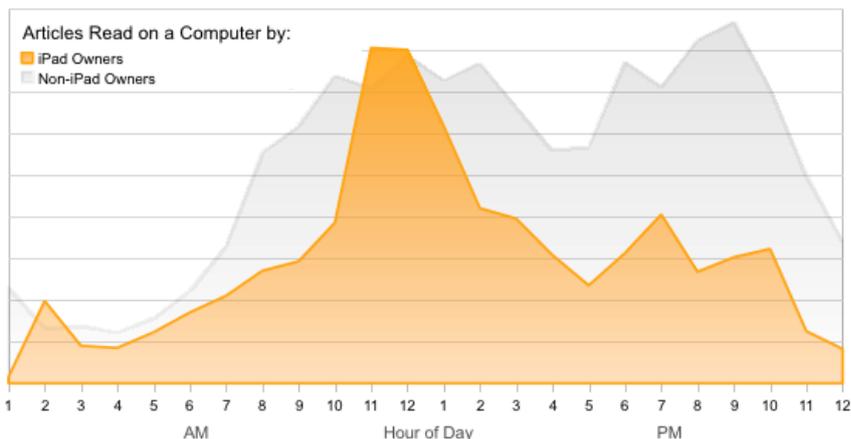
While many have speculated that the iPad is going to replace printed newspaper and magazines, it is already changing the way we read *online* content too.

The newspaper/magazine paradigm suits tablets extremely well. They are portable while still being large enough to make reading enjoyable.

As I started by saying, the newspaper's portability allowed us to read in the places we found comfortable. More importantly, it let us read the day's content on our own schedule.

The iPad is doing the same.

Look what happens if we rerun the **number of articles read on a computer** but **only for users who own an iPad**:



Aside from a quick lunch hour at their desk, **iPad owners are no longer doing the majority of their reading on their computers**. They are saving it for their personal prime time, when they can relax comfortably, iPad in hand and burn through the content they found during the day.

What This Says About the Future of Reading Content Online

When a reader is given a choice about how to consume their content, a major shift in behavior occurs. They no longer consume the majority of their content during the day, on their computer. Instead they shift that content to prime time and onto a device better suited for consumption.

Initially, it appears that the devices users prefer for reading are mobile devices, most notably the iPad. It's the iPad leading the jailbreak from consuming content in our desk chairs.

As better mobile experiences become more accessible to more readers, this movement will continue to grow. Readers want to consume content in a comfortable place, on their own time and mobile devices are making it possible for readers to take control once more.

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