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# Prince Is Right: Stuff Gotta Be Free

Posted July 27, 2007 | 03:22 PM (EST)

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I just got an offer in the mail to buy a year's worth of *Entertainment Weekly*. As a former "EW" subscriber, I'm apparently entitled to the "alumni rate." (Have I missed the annual gatherings, the newsletter?) Instead of paying \$171.50 for the full cover price of 57 issues, instead of paying the standard subscriber rate (whatever that may be), I'm being offered a full annual subscription ... for \$10.

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Ten dollars? That's less than 18 cents an issue -- even with bulk rates, will that even cover the cost of mailing it? In short, *Entertainment Weekly* is practically giving itself away for free. How soon will it be before they offer to send me the magazine for nothing?

Prince is right, apparently. He gave away his new CD to readers of the UK paper the Daily Mail. Not for free, really -- the paper is paying Prince a chunk of change. But it works out great: the paper gets a ton of publicity, their readers get a free CD, Prince gets a guaranteed amount of money and reaches fans who might never have bought one of his CDs. That can only encourage them to buy a ticket to one of his shows, and buy a t-shirt or other merchandise, the areas where artists have made most of their profits for years.

So it's worth more to *Entertainment Weekly* to practically pay me to take their magazine. They get to announce a higher circulation and more eyeballs mean higher rates for their ads. Of course a lot of those ads are from Time Warner, the company that owns "EW." When they want to promote their movies or TV shows or CDs in their own magazine, they naturally like to have as many people reading it as possible.

You can already read lots of *Entertainment Weekly* content for free on their steadily improving website, just like you can read much of the *New York Times* and countless other publications. If they're giving it away online, why not give away the print edition too? For years, newspaper subscriptions have mostly just paid for the cost of delivery. The real profits come from ads, not from forcing people to pay for a print edition of something they can get online for free.

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And that's why seemingly bizarre changes like giving away *Entertainment Weekly* and other major magazines and newspapers are only a matter of time. You can get it for free -- or enough of it to satisfy you -- online. So why pay for it? And from their point of view, why force you to pay for a newspaper or magazine of whatever when if you read it, they'll make more money off their ads?

Twenty years from now, major magazines like *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly* will give themselves away for free. People will subscribe to music databases the same way they subscribe to cable TV. Big companies and little artists will make their money one way or another. And if you want the new Prince CD, all you'll have to do is go online and ask. Prince knows that just means more people will pay to go to his concerts -- one experience that can't be downloaded. Yet.

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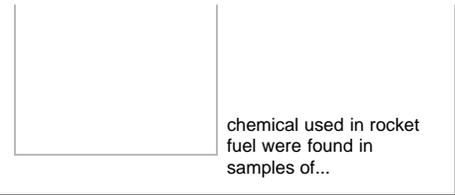
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