

Bluesky surpasses Threads and X as a referral traffic source

Article

The news: Bluesky's publisher-friendly approach is **generating significantly higher engagement than competitors**. Some publishers report traffic and conversion rates three to four times higher compared with platforms like **Threads** and **X**, despite Bluesky's smaller user base.

Key stats:

- **The Boston Globe** reports three times more traffic from Bluesky compared with Threads, along with 4.5 times higher conversions to paid subscriptions.
- Multiple major publishers including **The Guardian** and **The New York Times** report substantially higher user engagement on Bluesky.
- Smaller outlets have benefited as well; **EUobserver** received 3,800 unique visitors from Bluesky (with 3,300 followers) compared to 1,320 from X (with 203,000 followers) in a recent week, and independent tech outlet **Aftermath** reports its Twitter-to-Bluesky referral ratio has improved from 9-to-1 to nearly 2-to-1 in just three months.

Why it matters: Platform policies are reshaping publisher strategies.

- Bluesky explicitly welcomes link sharing, positioning itself as “a lobby to the open web.”
- The company’s COO **Rose Wang** explicitly states the platform’s publisher-friendly stance: “Unlike other platforms, we don’t depromote your links.”
- Bluesky’s open approach contrasts sharply with other platforms’ restrictive policies. X’s recent changes have made it increasingly hostile to external link sharing, and the platform has confirmed it demotes posts containing external links.
- Publishers are finding higher-quality engagement despite smaller audience sizes.

Our take: While Bluesky’s user base remains relatively small at **23 million** users against X’s **260 million**, its publisher-friendly policies and high engagement rates are driving significant results.

- The platform’s approach to external links and sustained visibility offers a compelling alternative to larger networks that restrict publisher reach.
- SEO professionals are finding the platform particularly valuable for content distribution, aided by starter packs and curated feeds that facilitate industry-specific discussions.

For publishers and brands focused on driving meaningful traffic and conversions, Bluesky’s quality-over-quantity approach, combined with consistently higher engagement rates, could represent a significant shift in social media strategy.

Traffic Share of Select US Publishers, by Channel, July 2024

% of total traffic

	Direct	Organic search	Social	Referrals	Display ads	Paid search	Email
Fox News	59.7%	29.5%	6.0%	4.7%	0.1%	0.1%	<0.1%
CNN	55.4%	33.9%	6.3%	4.4%	<0.1%	<0.1%	<0.1%
New York Times	54.5%	35.2%	5.6%	4.3%	<0.1%	0.3%	0.1%
New York Post	35.5%	45.6%	12.0%	6.9%	<0.1%	<0.1%	<0.1%
USA Today	27.5%	58.6%	8.1%	5.7%	<0.1%	<0.1%	<0.1%
NBC News	25.0%	57.1%	10.8%	6.9%	<0.1%	<0.1%	<0.1%
Newsweek	15.0%	56.5%	22.4%	6.1%	<0.1%	<0.1%	<0.1%

Note: represents data tracked by Similarweb, broader metrics may vary; includes desktop and mobile web; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Similarweb, Aug 21, 2024

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