

# BuzzFeed gets in on the creator economy

Article

**The news:** BuzzFeed yesterday **launched** a creator payout program called the Summer Writers' Challenge, offering up to \$10,000 for community articles that go viral. The program will extend through August 15.

**How it works:** Instead of paying a set fee per article, BuzzFeed will pay creators based on page views, with compensation ranging from \$150 for an article with 150,000 views up to \$10,000 for articles that get more than 4 million. Data and page views were the lifeblood of BuzzFeed's business model for years, and the company is well-versed in outsourcing content, letting users create quizzes and listicles to post to its user-written hub, BuzzFeed Community.

(Community receives no editorial oversight from BuzzFeed, but editors do decide what content gets promoted to BuzzFeed’s homepage.) There are **rewards** for high-performing posts in the form of “internet points” and “trophies,” but there’s been no monetary compensation until now.

**What this means:** The competition format is similar how social media platforms have been luring creators. **Snapchat**, for example, has been splitting \$1 million a day among creators that get the most views on its TikTok competitor Spotlight. It was a resounding success, with more than 175,000 videos **posted** a day on average as of March 2021. That success led **YouTube** to **opt** for a similar method when it launched Shorts, setting aside \$100 million in payouts for top-performing content.

BuzzFeed may be the first big news publisher to employ this social-media-inspired monetization model, but it’s not the first time news and the creator economy have mingled. **Substack** is perhaps the best example of the increasing “creatorfication” of news, though it uses a more sustainable subscription model instead of paying for content ad hoc.

**What’s next?** The question of sustainability is a big one for BuzzFeed. The “summer” portion of the challenge’s name implies BuzzFeed doesn’t intend to pay for content for long. That might work for social platforms—once creators have built a following and users have formed habits, it’s easier to keep them around. But BuzzFeed will need more incentive for users to continue writing community articles once the payouts are done. There are two possibilities for where the platform could go:

- 1. It’s likely a pilot for future revenue-sharing programs.** Snapchat only planned to keep payouts going until the end of 2020—but it’s been such a success that midway through 2021, the program is going strong. Similarly, BuzzFeed could be looking to gauge the success of creator payouts before implementing them long term, whether in a competition format or via subscriptions or tips, for example.
- 2. The company could also be planning to make its Community hub more social.** Writers already have profiles that collect all their published articles, show quiz results, and display their trophies and “internet points.” There’s currently no way to follow individual users or interact socially, which dulls the incentive to actually collect those points. But if BuzzFeed opts to make Community more like a social network instead of a publishing platform, it could encourage users to write more to amass a following.