

## A Technology to Turn Digital Readers into Clients



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The printed press is enduring a private crisis within the framework of the general economic crisis, and its leadership is responding with layoffs, restructuring, salary cuts and cost reductions as well as other survival methods. The hope is that the long-awaited “magic” business model emerges to make newspaper companies sustainable. The old New York Times is by no means an exception in terms of trying to find new ways of expanding its readership, bonding with its readers and making its online version a financial success.

Its latest formula is named “Time Reader 2.0”, an application that unites the printed version’s information resources, the web’s traditional agility, the Flash platform’s interactivity and the power of an innovative client application that is actually installed in the computer.

The result offers a user experience that is closer to the paper format while being more sophisticated and personal than that offered through previous web versions. A good example of this interactivity involves the famous New York Times crossword puzzle. This daily crossword is available in the free version (restricted to certain sections). This new way of receiving and using the newspaper is cost free for subscribers to the paper version, who need only pay \$14.95 a month.

Once downloaded and installed in the computer, the software is periodically synchronized with the content according to predetermined settings without having to use the web navigator. Readers can also use the offline mode. This Time Reader 2.0 edition is now based on Adobe AIR, substituting the initial edition that was based on Microsoft technology. Adobe AIR’s Windows version

was well received, but the Mac version did not meet the latter company's expectations. Time Reader 2.0 is now available in three systems: Mac, Linux and Windows so that the Times will not have to exclude any of its readers due to platform issues.

Other measures have been put in practice (none in Spain up to now), although the result of the Times' initiative will be closely monitored by competitors seeking to determine whether this tool's undeniable attractiveness will be enough to bring readers back into the ever-shrinking group of loyal clients. At first, the response was looking positive, but the fall of on-line advertising is now making the current free model unviable, especially for quality journalism that demands important investment. As such, an innovative technology may have to contribute to the medium's sustainability.

Time Reader is a NYT custom application based on AIR and developed with Adobe Flex technology, a new Adobe platform with a philosophy not unlike that of Java and directly rival to that of Microsoft Silverlight and Google Gears. It is free and easy to use for designers and developers of web applications (it uses tools that are typical of this environment such as HTML, Ajax, Flash and others). Adobe is responsible for updating bookstores and guaranteeing their compatibility with standards and operating systems. The result is a tool that unites the web's dynamic flexibility with the power of desktop applications.

However, the fact that the tool is gratis brings up an important question: What does Adobe gain by helping the press turn readers into clients? The answer is simple yet paradoxical: as long as the majority of developers put more and more trust in services offered as a formula to profit on offerings, Adobe hopes that AIR will open new horizons to tools such as Photoshop, Illustrator, Flash and others, as well as strengthening push data services such as Flash Media Server.