

Flipboard magazines not just for mobile anymore

February 10 2015, by Michael Liedtke



In this photo taken Thursday, Jan. 22, 2015, Flipboard founder and CEO Mike McCue poses with a laptop computer displaying his digital magazine at his company's headquarters in Palo Alto, Calif. McCue's digital magazine publishing service is expanding on to PCs for the first time with the Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2015 debut a version especially designed for Web browsers. Until now, Flipboard's full selection of 15 million magazines could only be read through a mobile app. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

Smartphones and tablets have been pushing the personal computer aside,

thanks in part to popular apps made by mobile-first entrepreneurs like Flipboard CEO Mike McCue.

Just don't tell McCue the desktop is dead.

In fact, the PC remains the mode of choice for many readers, especially during business hours. McCue is catering to that preference with Tuesday's launch of a Web browser version of Flipboard's digital magazine service. Until now, Flipboard's 15 million magazines could only be read through a mobile app.

"There is a whole group of people who don't do that much browsing on their phones. That's what they use their computer for," McCue said during an interview at Flipboard's Palo Alto, California, headquarters.

Besides winning new converts with the expanded access, McCue is also hoping many of Flipboard's 50 million existing users will visit the service more frequently now that it's on PCs.

PC sales have been slumping for the past two years, though there have been recent signs the worst of the decline is over. Meanwhile, sales of mobile devices are still surging despite a recent slowdown in the tablet market. Worldwide PC shipments declined 2 percent last year to about 309 million machines while smartphone sales climbed 28 percent to 1.3 billion devices and tablet sales increased 4 percent to 230 million, according to the research firm International Data Corp.



In this photo taken Thursday, Jan. 22, 2015, Flipboard founder and CEO Mike McCue gestures while viewing his digital magazine on a desktop screen at his company's headquarters in Palo Alto, Calif. McCue's digital magazine publishing service is expanding on to PCs for the first time with the Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2015 debut a version especially designed for Web browsers. Until now, Flipboard's full selection of 15 million magazines could only be read through a mobile app. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

All but a few of the magazines in Flipboard are free. They are created through links culled from users' social media accounts or put together by other Flipboard users interested in sharing their interests and expertise with other readers, as well as professional publishers trying to expand their digital audiences. Flipboard lists the magazines under 34,000 different topics.

Flipboard was originally designed for tablets, but smartphones now account for about 70 percent of user activity, McCue said. That figure

seems likely to change now that it's been tailored for the desktop. PCs remain the most popular way to access Internet services during the weekdays when most people are at work, with smartphones running second, according to data from comScore Inc. It isn't until the evening when tablets become the leading Internet-connected device, with peak usage occurring around 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Flipboard isn't the only popular mobile app making the leap to the PC in search of new users and deeper engagement. Last month, Facebook's mobile messaging service WhatsApp offered a version for Web browsers, although a user's smartphone must be on and online for the syncing to work. The trend reflects a growing realization among mobile-focused apps that they can't ignore PCs if they want to connect with users as much as possible, said Forrester Research analyst Frank Gillett. "It doesn't make sense to users if they up show up to a service on a PC and get ignored, but get all this magic if you show up on a mobile device."



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Flipboard's Web browser version, built over the past 18 months, is designed to detect and automatically adjust to the different screen sizes of PCs. The largest canvas of PC screens allows Flipboard to rearrange the way the content appears on desktops so compelling pictures are showcased in bigger sizes and different layouts than on a smartphone, or even a tablet. For now, the magazine pages on Flipboard's PC version are

scrolled through with a mouse instead of flipped through with a touch as on the mobile apps.

Coming to the PC fulfills McCue's original vision for Flipboard when he came up with the idea in 2009 shortly after leaving Tellme, a voice-recognition service that he started and eventually sold to Microsoft for \$800 million. After concluding that Web browsers and chips at that time were too clunky to produce digital magazines that looked as snazzy as print editions, McCue and Flipboard co-founder Evan Doll turned their attention to the iPad before moving on to smartphones.

"Our users sitting in front of their PCs can finally stop wondering why they can't use Flipboard," McCue said.



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