

Snapchat ends awkward exclusion, finally opens Fusion to US users

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Snapchat put startup cable network Fusion in an awkward position early this year.

Fusion received a slot in Discover, the coveted area within Snapchat that features articles and videos from about a dozen media companies. But Snapchat made Fusion stories visible to users in every country except the U.S. and the United Kingdom. The decision was strange because Fusion targets U.S. millennials, and it left the company's content and revenue opportunities constrained.

Now, Snapchat's loosening the tether. Fusion's Discover channel became accessible in the U.S. and U.K. Monday, the start of a weeks-long test run in its home market.

"It's a game-changer for us," said Daniel Eilemberg, chief digital officer at Fusion, a joint venture of Walt Disney Co. and Univision Communications.

Snapchat declined to comment on why Fusion got a boost, and Eilemberg only offered a guess.

"I think they realized that's the place we're going to do the best," he said. "When we talk about police brutality, race relations or gender and equality, those things are going to hit with a U.S. audience much better."

Interesting a broad, international audience in one sweep had been "a

challenge," Eilemberg said.

Fusion tried experimenting, like creating content in Spanish and Portuguese. While that would increase viewership in, say, Brazil, it would decrease traffic from users elsewhere. Still, as Fusion considers international expansion, Snapchat provided lessons; for example, content dealing with sex and women's health did particularly well.

Fusion also doesn't have an international ad sales workforce, so it hasn't been able to run ads in its Snapchat channel until now. But investing in Snapchat efforts has been worth it because there's "enormous" value in getting your brand discovered by a big audience, Eilemberg said, calling Discover "prime real estate."

Fusion's upgrade leaves four brands in Discover barred from U.S. users: Sky, News.com.au, Bleacher Report and MTV.

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