

THE AUTHORITY REPORT

The Rebirth of the Homepage

A couple of years ago, several sites reported on “the death of the homepage” after taking a look at an analysis published in *The New York Times*’ Innovation Report showing a 50 percent decline in traffic to www.nytimes.com. But, now it’s 2016, and the homepage is still alive and well.

According to data from Parse.ly’s network of more than **600** digital publishers, the importance of the homepage varies widely. For each publisher, we calculated the percentage of article referrals generated by the homepage. For over half of publishers, this number was less than **10 percent**, indicating that they rely more heavily on social or search referrals than homepage referrals. On the other hand, for one in ten publishers, this number was over **25 percent**, and for sites with especially loyal audiences, this was as high as **50 percent**. See the histogram below for a more detailed breakdown. To get a sense of the absolute volume of traffic that homepages handle, consider that top news sites on the web receive around **2,000 views per minute** to their homepages during peak times.

So what role does the homepage *realistically* play for digital publishers today, and how can they use the homepage to meet their content goals?

HOMEPAGE TRAFFIC ACROSS
THE PARSE.LY NETWORK

11%
of referrals to posts come
from a homepage

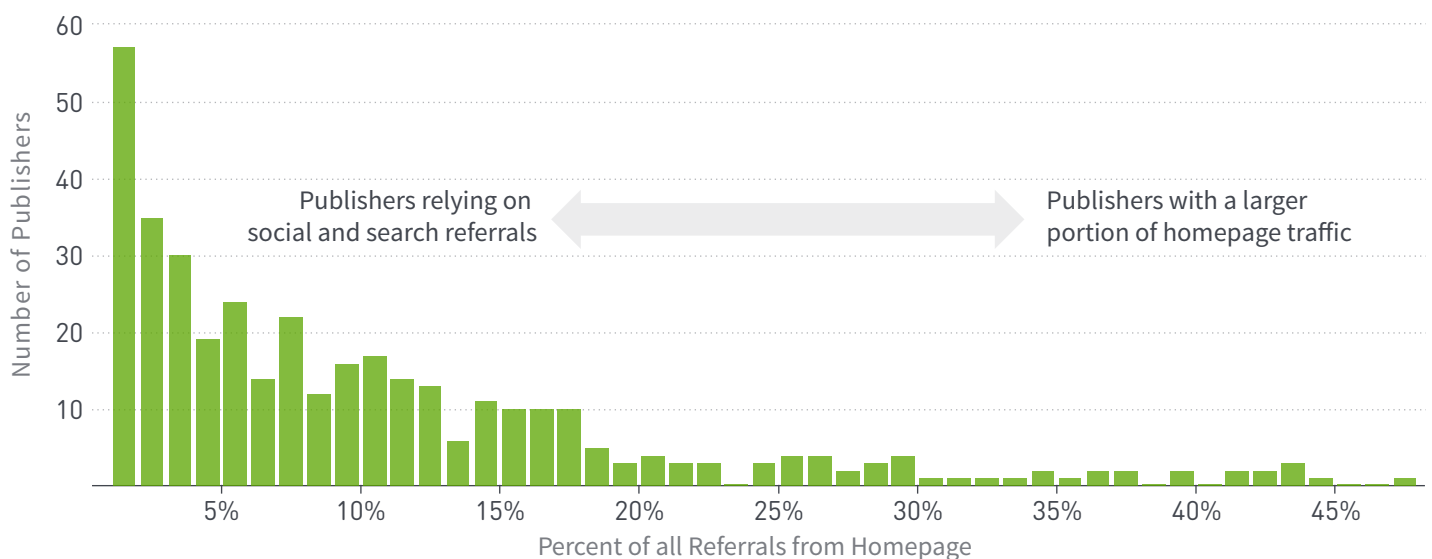
80%
of homepage visitors are
return visitors

2x
the number of visits to a
homepage from desktop
compared to mobile

30 seconds
or fewer spent by visitors on
a homepage before clicking
on a post

10%–50%
conversion rate for links on the
homepage

Importance of the Homepage Across the Parse.ly Network



The Anatomy of a Homepage

Where you place content on your homepage matters! Top slots receive **5%–20%** of a homepage’s total clicks. Combined, the slots above the fold typically receive between **15%–50%** of the homepage’s total clicks. Slots in the “second fold” typically receive **80 percent** fewer clicks than those at the top. Slots in the “third fold” receive **90 percent** fewer clicks than those at the top.

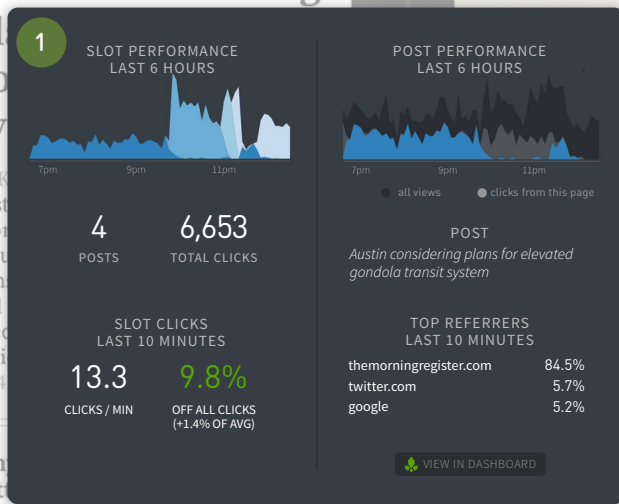
The insight here is that users don’t typically scroll much on homepages. That means links at the top of your homepage are precious real estate; use them wisely!

Below is a representation of a homepage and Parse.ly’s Overlay extension that reveals top-performing content placement.

HOME NEWS POLITICS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT LIFE TECHNOLOGY OPINION

Austin considering

Latest News



Leader Posts

The leader post gets the most attention. A homepage’s top slots typically receive between **50 and 100 clicks per minute**, or around **10%–20%** of all the homepage clicks.

Above the Fold

Slots above the fold typically receive between **15%–50%** of all the homepage clicks.

Below the Fold

Posts ‘below the fold’ (i.e., not visible without scrolling) often receive no more than **one or two clicks per minute**, even on high-traffic homepages.

Parse.ly Overlay

Parse.ly clients use the Overlay extension to identify the rank of slots on their homepage and track posts as one replaces another.

The Infinite Scroll & Beyond

Digital publishers have long experimented on the best way to format their homepages for maximum effect. Slate, for example, works with Parse.ly to provide readers with relevant and targeted articles, one after the other, in a logical, simple way.

Since implementing its infinite scroll technology, Slate has seen a significant increase in page views per visitor:

Slate

2.96 → 3.36
0.4 page views/visitor increase

on desktop browsers after launching their site with infinite scroll

14%

of all traffic on article pages lead to scrolled page views

Seeding for Social

Using the Homepage to Help Your Content “Go Viral” on Social Networks

It’s a beautiful thing when content goes viral on social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, but is it really possible for editors to proactively drive social referral traffic from the homepage? According to our research, yes!

After placing an article on the homepage, editors can quickly get a sense of whether an article will take off on social by comparing the number of social referrals to the number of homepage referrals. If homepage referrals generate few social referrals early on, then the article will probably never do well on social (we call this type of piece “**social-negative**”). On the other hand, if homepage referrals generate lots of social referrals, this trend is likely to continue (“**social-positive**” articles).

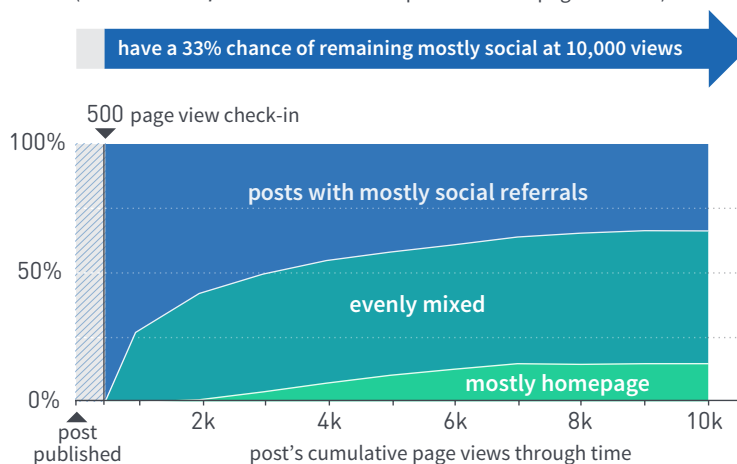
The figures to the right illustrate the strength of this trend. To construct them, we checked in with **20,547** articles when the sum of each post’s homepage and social referrals equaled **500**. If at this point over two-thirds of an article’s referrals came from social, then we labeled it a **social-positive** article. On the other hand, if over two-thirds of an article’s referrals came from the homepage at this first check-in then we labeled it a **social-negative** article. Otherwise, we labeled the article **social-neutral**. As you can see, knowing whether an article is social negative, neutral, or positive after **500** combined homepage and social views is a strong predictor of which category it will fall into after **10,000** combined homepage and social views.

Thus, if your goal is to use a particular slot on your homepage to drive social, you can do so by placing a new article in it and checking in early on to determine which category it falls into. If it’s a **social-positive** article, great—leave it there as long as it’s timely. If it’s **social-negative**, though, you should remove the article from the slot and try your luck featuring a new article.

Where is your post after 500 combined social & homepage page views?

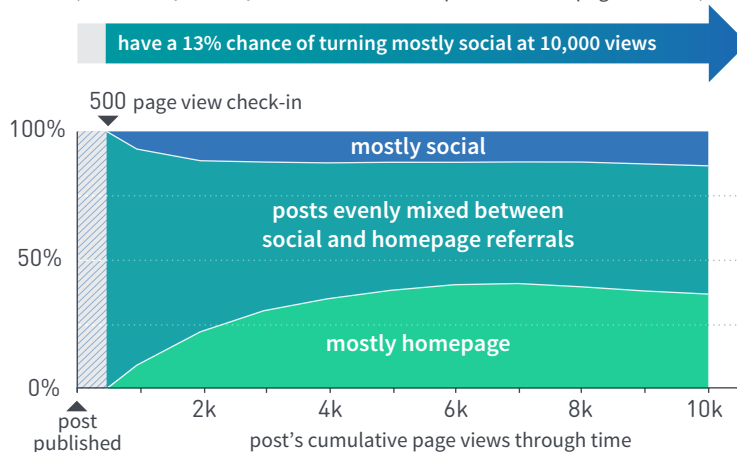
● Posts with Mostly Social Referrals social-positive

(Greater than $\frac{2}{3}$ social referrals compared to homepage referrals)



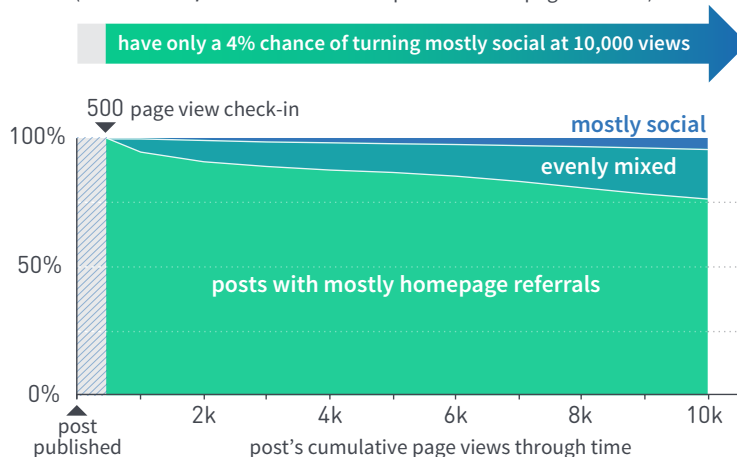
● Posts with Evenly Mixed Referrals social-neutral

(Between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ social referrals compared to homepage referrals)



● Posts with Mostly Homepage Referrals social-negative

(Fewer than $\frac{1}{3}$ social referrals compared to homepage referrals)



Data-driven Advice for Homepage Editors

Your homepage audience is your most loyal audience. Based on the data we analyzed, you can give them more reasons to visit your homepage multiple times per day or week by keeping the following in mind:

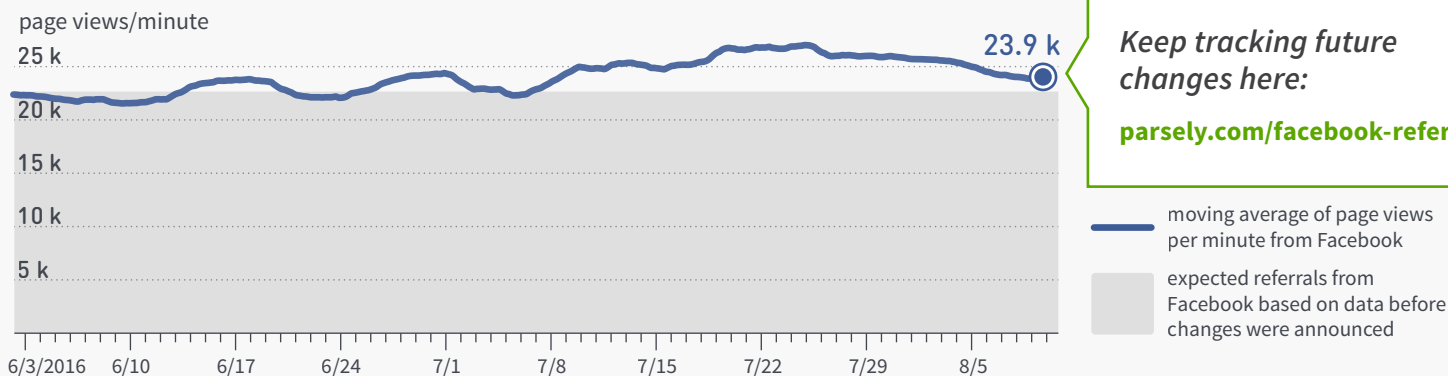
- **Treat your homepage as a representation of your brand.**
Don't order your posts chronologically by publish date, as not all posts will be interesting to your readers. Instead, think about what stories will benefit most from being featured and feature them.
- **Choose photographs and headlines carefully.**
Bad headlines and junk photos on your homepage not only will convert poorly, but will also prevent users from coming back.
- **Use analytics to cycle out poorly performing content.**
You may think it's wise to put your most popular posts on the homepage, but are they the most popular posts because they have gone viral from you featuring them there two or three hours ago? If so, your loyal audience may have already seen them.
- **Keep it simple.** On the web, a simpler format is usually better. You only have a few seconds to convince a reader to convert from homepage into a story, and it is rare that they will peruse all the links you have on offer. They want a few choices, not a plethora of choices.

Facebook's Algorithm Change: An Authority Report Referral Update

Historically, Parse.ly has included information on the top known referral sources to our network of sites at the end of each Authority Report. However, Facebook recently publicized some changes that have the potential to impact digital publishers and we wanted to address these here:

- On **June 29, 2016**, Facebook announced that it would change its algorithm to focus on posts from users' friends and family. Digital publishers were concerned that this would impact the number of referrals they received from the social media giant.
- On **August 4, 2016**, Facebook publicly described its plan to eradicate clickbait from the site—potentially impacting the amount of traffic that digital publishers receive from the platform.

Referral Traffic from Facebook to Parse.ly's Network



About Parse.ly

Thousands of writers, editors, site managers, and technologists already use Parse.ly to understand what content draws in website visitors, and why. Using our powerful dashboards and APIs, customers build successful digital strategies that allow them to grow and engage a loyal audience.

