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## Why Tina Brown Might Not Be Crazy to Kill Newsweek.com

**Awful for Newsweek Brand, but the Beast Is Stronger Site if You Look Past Simple Traffic**

By [Matthew Creamer](#)

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For some time now, the best way to understand Newsweek, est. 1933, has been through the microblog Tumblr, est. 2007. Earlier this year, while the newsweekly was struggling to turn around a dismal digital strategy while going through an unspeakably distracting sale process that had publicly valued it at a whopping \$1, its Tumblr -- witty, quick, everything a big old print brand wasn't -- won it rare acclaim. And, shortly after, when the man who ran that feed left Newsweek to head to, wait for it, Tumblr, that bit of news was evidence of talent exodus hitting the embattled publication.



Newsweek.com

So it's no surprise that after hearing that the newly merged Newsweek Daily Beast Co. will solve the problem of having two websites with a solution that shocked the media business, a staffer there took to Tumblr to protest the closing of Newsweek.com. With one anonymous post and just over 200 responses, [SaveNewsweek.com](http://SaveNewsweek.com) has yet to create the sort of groundswell that might change Tina Brown's mind on folding the website, but it has proven a reminder of the difficult decisions that arise in marrying print and digital content operations. Here's the key passage in that post:

*If Newsweek.com should cease to exist, here's what we wonder: What will be the ramifications for Newsweek's web presence in terms of SEO? For branding? For our partnerships with MSNBC and MSN? What happens to Newsweek's (still-unleveraged) archives? How do you preserve a "national treasure" (as [Newsweek buyer Sidney] Harman has called it) without a web presence bearing its name?*



SaveNewsweek.com

Wondering pretty much the same things, I asked a number of search-engine optimization experts for their take on the decision. Knowing how to play with Google and the other search engines is vital to publishers because, thanks to intense competition for readers'

eyeballs, they can no longer count on being treated as destinations that audiences will show up to out of habit or lack of choice. And big structural changes, like instituting a paywall or, as in Newsweek's case, folding one site into another, can wreak havoc with how the search engines see and value all that content.

I figured search would be the biggest impediment to making this work, but I was wrong. Just about no one I talked to claimed to understand this from a brand perspective. After all, the iconic Newsweek brand isn't going away; it will still exist in print and will need digital support. Probably inspired by Politico.com's success, the commercial notion behind the merger is to add the heft of a print magazine, which commands higher ad rates even as it brings more cost, to the Daily Beast's growing savvy digital brand. But even if Newsweek is in the mix because of its relatively pricey ad pages, its brand is still made in no small degree online. The title currently has about 1.5 million subscribers, while its website pulls in about 7 million users each month. And numbers aside, the notion that a domain like Newsweek.com will simply redirect to, let's face it, a website plenty of people have never heard of, is straight-up weird.

### **Haven't we learned?**

"This seems like a decision being made to try to make a longstanding brand hip for the internet age," said Josh Stylman, who co-founded the search-engine marketing firm Reprise Media and left the company last year. "Haven't we learned this strategy doesn't work? I'd tap into the expertise of the people running the Daily Beast, while leveraging the Newsweek brand, which may still be meaningful, or at least familiar, to a lot of people in the mainstream."

But maintaining two sites poses its own problems. "Two websites means two chances for a ranking for the same keyword search," said Robert Cavilla, managing partner of UpWord Search Marketing. "However, two websites also means diluted link popularity, content quantity, freshness, and now two websites to manage. In this case, Newsweek does not benefit from the same story being posted on two separate domains. Better to consolidate the same story on one domain and consolidate content authority, link popularity and web publishing resources."

Following the decision to keep only one domain, there's the question of which one should survive. Mr. Cavilla's analysis goes like this: Daily Beast has roughly three times as many pages indexed by Google as Newsweek does, which makes the redirection of Newsweek stories an easier project. But Newsweek, thanks to that well-known brand, has many more links into its site -- and that's hugely important with Google.

### **The links that matter most now**

However, a link is not a link is not a link. "TheDailyBeast.com's links may be more relevant to today's news and they may include more keyword targets in the links and

they may be on social media sites instead of web directories," said Mr. Cavilla.

Finally, there's the issue of freshness, which, again, is very important to Google and its new algorithm, dubbed Caffeine. "Old articles may not hold as much weight as new articles, especially new articles that are shared via social-media outlets," Mr. Cavilla said. "Even if Newsweek has more published content over 77 years it may not necessarily mean it has more online SEO authority than articles in the last two years on TheDailyBeast.com."

Search isn't the only way to look at this. The Daily Beast works as both a smart aggregator, with social-media savvy and some nicely organized newsletters, and as a content originator adept at picking its spots with big-name writers. That mix feels more appropriate for the world we live in, at least looked at next to the more or less by-the-numbers news summaries appearing on Newsweek. Compared to Newsweek, Ms. Brown's Beast has a leaner, meaner feel and a model that might end up assembling a large, loyal audience with not a lot of cost.



Nancy Kaszerman

Tina Brown

### **How TheDailyBest.com is better**

At this point, Newsweek, with its 7 million visitors a month, dwarfs the Daily Beast's 4 million or so. However, a closer look at traffic loyalty shows the Beast's relative strength in community-building. On average, Newsweek visitors come to the site about 1.5 times a month and click on just over three pages, according to Quantcast. Daily Beast visitors come to the site 2.3 times a month, looking at close to 7 pages each visit. (Gawker.com by comparison gets 2.3 average monthly visits and 8.59 page views, while Time does 1.5 and 7.7, respectively.) All this suggests that the much younger site, despite that smaller aggregate audience, is doing a better job getting readers to hang around longer and come back.

None of this makes for a slam-dunk case for shuttering Newsweek.com. And it erases neither the crucial brand challenge, nor the ham-handed announcement of the site's imminent demise that's led some to question whether Ms. Brown and company understand what's entailed in shutting down a site, nor the emotional defense made by that anonymous Newsweek staffer on Tumblr.

Ms. Brown, for her part, [tweeted yesterday](#) that Newsweek.com "live on under its own banner & in URLs on the new site."

### **The tweet that didn't quite satisfy**

"Not shutting down, combining," she said. That still sounded a lot like shutting down Newsweek.com.

But as counterintuitive as it might seem, you can begin to see how a new company that's the destitute union of two money-losing publications and probably doesn't want to pay for two web teams might be tempted to shut it down, Tumblr and all.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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