

RIDDLE.COM

Mini-Games, Leaderboards & the New Engagement Playbook

How publishers, media companies, brands, and sports teams can drive retention, loyalty, and ad revenue with interactive mini-games - without overloading editorial teams.

For publishers, media companies, brands, and sports teams
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WHITE PAPER

5 strategies for retention, engagement, and revenue

The Challenge: Declining Organic Traffic

Publishers, media companies, brands, and sports teams all face a common pressure right now. Organic search traffic is dropping - fast. AI-generated summaries and answer boxes mean fewer clicks through to your site, even when your content ranks well. The audience is there, but the path to your door is getting narrower.

The response many teams reach for is more content. More articles, more SEO, more output. That often makes things worse - more cost, more effort, and still declining returns.

There is a different approach: give people a reason to come to you directly. Mini-games and leaderboards do exactly that. They create habits. They build loyalty. And they keep visitors coming back - not because they stumbled across you in a search, but because they want to play.

KEY STAT

Swiss publisher 20min.ch reported an 80% quiz start rate and a 20% lift in ad revenue after integrating Riddle interactive content into their editorial workflow.

80% start rate

Why Mini-Games Work for Publishers

Games solve three problems at once. And the evidence is no longer anecdotal - the New York Times has turned its games strategy into one of the most closely watched case studies in digital publishing.

1. Engagement

People play games. That is not a trend - it is human nature. A Sudoku, a crossword, a daily quiz: these pull readers in and keep them on your page far longer than a standard article. Time on site goes up. Bounce rate goes down. Ad impressions increase.

The New York Times' experience with Wordle illustrates the scale of what is possible. After acquiring the game in January 2022, the Times reported that Wordle brought **tens of millions of new users** to the platform in its first quarter - their best quarter ever for net subscriber additions to Games (TechCrunch, 2022). By 2024, NYT Games was recording **11.1 billion total puzzle plays** across its portfolio for the year, with Wordle alone accounting for 5.3 billion of those (New York Times, 2024).

KEY STAT

The New York Times recorded 11.1 billion puzzle plays in 2024. Wordle alone generated 5.3 billion of those - roughly 14.5 million plays every day. (Source: New York Times, 2024)

14.5M daily

2. Retention

Leaderboards change the dynamic completely. Once a reader has a score and a ranking, they have a reason to come back tomorrow. And the day after. A daily streak mechanic or a weekly leaderboard creates a habit that no newsletter or push notification can replicate.

Readers return to check their position. They try to improve their score. They compete with colleagues. You have moved from occasional visitor to daily active user - without spending anything on paid acquisition.

The NYT's own data makes the retention case clearly. Jonathan Knight, head of NYT Games, told CNN: *"Subscribers who engage with both news and games together on any given week have the strongest long-term subscriber retention profile of any at the Times."* Since Wordle's acquisition, the Times has grown from 8.8 million subscribers at the end of Q4 2021 to 11.43 million by the end of 2024 - with games credited as a core

driver of that growth. By Q4 2024, nearly a third of all NYT digital subscribers paid exclusively for non-news products such as Games, Cooking, and The Athletic (Press Gazette, 2025).

KEY STAT

NYT grew from 8.8 million to 11.43 million subscribers between Q4 2021 and end of 2024. By Q4 2024, almost a third of all digital subscribers paid only for non-news products - Games, Cooking, or The Athletic. (Source: Press Gazette / NYT earnings, 2025)

11.43M subs

3. Virality and organic growth

When a reader can share their score and invite others to compete, your audience becomes your marketing team. That is a referral - unpaid, authentic, and far more effective than a banner ad. It drives real new traffic from people who were already motivated to engage.

Wordle's shareable emoji grid is the clearest example of this mechanic at scale. By May 2022, **3.3 million people had tweeted about Wordle** for a total of 32.2 million tweets - with peak daily volume reaching 500,000 tweets in a single day (Twitter / TechCrunch, 2022). That kind of organic, score-sharing behaviour drove traffic directly to the NYT, helping deliver their best-ever quarter for Games subscriber additions. By Q1 2024, the Times had more single-product subscribers for non-news products than it had news-only subscribers - a fundamental shift in what kind of publisher the NYT had become (Sherwood News, 2024).

KEY STAT

NYT Games was played more than 8 billion times in 2023, led by Wordle with 4.8 billion plays. The NYT Games app was downloaded 10 million times that year - more than any other NYT app. (Source: Axios / NYT, 2024)

8B+ plays '23

What Riddle Offers: 37 Content Formats and Counting

Riddle is an enterprise platform for creating interactive content. It currently supports 37 content types - from personality tests and score predictors to live polls and automated contests. For publishers focused on games and engagement, the formats that matter most include:

- **Crosswords** - daily or weekly, automatically scheduled and embedded
- **Sudoku** - a familiar format that drives daily return visits
- **Guess it** - a Wordle-style guessing game where players use up to 4 clues and 5 attempts to identify a blurred image - shareable results and high replayability make it a strong driver of return visits
- **Typerush** - a timed challenge where players race to name items from a list (e.g. all 50 US states in 10 minutes) - simple, highly replayable, and naturally shareable
- **Quizzes** - news quizzes, sports quizzes, topic-based knowledge tests
- **Automated contests** - prize draws and competitions with built-in entry mechanics
- **Score predictors** - players predict match results or outcomes and earn points based on accuracy, connecting naturally to leaderboards for season-long engagement
- **Personality tests** - shareable results that naturally generate social traffic
- **Leaderboards** - track scores, times, and streaks across any format to give readers a personal stake in returning daily or weekly

These are not one-off pieces of content. With the right setup, they become a recurring feature of your site - a reason for readers to check in daily. But the formats alone are not the point. **The most effective games are built around your specific subject matter, audience, and brand.** A generic daily Sudoku will build some habit. However, a daily Premier League prediction game on a football site, a movie trivia quiz on an

entertainment brand, or a weekly financial literacy challenge on a fintech platform will build a much stronger one - because it is unmistakably yours, and it gives your audience something they cannot get anywhere else.

Case Study: JaneAusten.com

JaneAusten.com is a good example of what this looks like in practice - and it translates well beyond niche publishers.

The challenge they faced is one many publishers know: how do you turn casual visitors into engaged regulars, and engaged regulars into paying members? Passive content alone rarely does it. Readers arrive, consume, and leave without a particular reason to come back.

Building a library of interactive content linked to leaderboards

Using Riddle's quiz maker, JaneAusten.com has created more than 350 quizzes covering Austen's novels, characters, historical context, and film adaptations. That library gives the site a steady supply of content that keeps audiences coming back, rewards deep knowledge, and creates a natural pathway into their membership program.

Metric	Result
Total quizzes created	350+
Average quiz completion rate	79%
Average time per finish (public quizzes)	4 minutes
Members-only average time per finish	5 min 30 sec
Above platform benchmark	+43%

Strong completion rates and time on site

The numbers tell the story. JaneAusten.com is consistently delivering completion rates well above the typical range for online quizzes. Readers are finishing, and they are spending real time doing it. The platform average for quizzes and personality tests is around 2 minutes 48 seconds - JaneAusten.com's average of 4 minutes per finish is 43% above that benchmark.

The members-only content goes further still, with an average of 5 minutes 30 seconds per finish - 33% above the public quiz average, and 89% above the platform benchmark. For a site that depends on depth of engagement rather than volume of traffic, those figures carry real weight.

"Our audience has a real depth of knowledge about Jane Austen - and they want to test it. Riddle gives them a way to do that, and the leaderboards have turned what could have been a one-time visit into something people come back to regularly."

Daniel Dobinson, E-commerce Manager, Jane Austen Centre

Leaderboards, accounts, and the membership funnel

JaneAusten.com uses Riddle's combined leaderboards to show participants their average score, time taken, and rank across multiple quizzes. That ongoing competitive element gives readers a reason to return between visits - not just to take a new quiz, but to see how they stack up against the rest of the community over time.

To appear on a leaderboard, users need to create an account. That one step delivers three things:

- **Converts anonymous visitors** into identified community members
- Moves them one step closer to a **paid membership**
- **Builds a registered audience** without pop-ups or interruptive prompts

Premium membership unlocks access to exclusive quizzes. Rather than a feature listed on a pricing page, it becomes something people have a direct reason to want - because they have already seen what the quizzes are like and want more of them. Paying members complete at the same rate as the wider audience and spend significantly more time doing it.

"What surprised us most was how naturally the quizzes fit into our membership offer. Exclusive content is a much easier sell when people have already experienced what the quizzes are like."

Daniel Dobinson, E-commerce Manager, Jane Austen Centre

The quiz library is not a side project - it sits at the centre of how the site builds community, grows its registered audience, and converts readers into members. For niche publishers with a committed audience and rich subject matter to draw on, it is a useful model to follow.

Strategies for Retention, Engagement, and Revenue

<p>1. Daily Mini-Games with Leaderboards</p>	<p>LAUNCH TIMELINE 1 week to launch</p> <p>REVENUE MODEL Ad revenue + subscription upsell</p>	<p>EASY</p>
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A daily crossword or Sudoku is a proven driver of return visits. Add a leaderboard - tracking scores, times, or streaks - and you give readers a personal stake in coming back. It is no longer just a game; it is their game.

The mechanics are straightforward. A reader completes the puzzle. Their score is recorded. They can see how they rank against other readers. Readers can invite friends and family to compete - which means new signups, new traffic, and new ad inventory.

From an editorial standpoint, the lift is minimal. Once the puzzle is set up and scheduled, it runs itself. Your team focuses on what it does best; Riddle handles the mechanics.

Make it yours - not generic

The most important principle here is one that gets overlooked: **a game tied to your brand, your beat, and your audience will always outperform a generic one.** Wordle works for the NYT because the NYT has built an identity around words and puzzles for decades. Your equivalent should be just as distinctively you.

The question to ask is not 'what game should we add?' but 'what daily challenge would only make sense on our site?' The answer is usually obvious once you frame it that way:

- **News publisher** - a daily headline crossword, or a 'what happened this week?' round-up game that tests readers on your own coverage
- **Sports team or sports media** - a pre-match score predictor, a player stats quiz, or a 'name that season' challenge built around your team's history
- **Entertainment brand** - a daily movie or music trivia game themed to your coverage, with leaderboards that reward loyal fans

Finance or business media - a weekly markets quiz, an economics knowledge test, or a 'guess the chart' challenge tied to stories you have already published

- **Lifestyle or food brand** - a recipe match quiz, a 'know your ingredients' challenge, or a personality test that recommends products based on reader answers
- **B2B or trade publisher** - an industry knowledge quiz, a regulatory update test, or a CPD-style (Continuing Professional Development) challenge that gives professionals a reason to return regularly

The format - crossword, quiz, predictor, personality test - is less important than the subject matter. A crossword filled with clues about your niche will keep your audience far longer than a generic one, because it is testing knowledge they actually care about. And when readers share their score, they are sharing a badge of expertise in your subject - which is a much stronger signal to their network than a generic puzzle result.

Recurring leaderboards: campaigns and seasonal challenges

Leaderboards do not have to be always-on. Some of the most effective formats are time-limited campaigns - a 10-week summer Sudoku challenge, a World Cup prediction leaderboard, a winter quiz series running through December. These campaigns give readers a defined competition to follow, a clear start and end date, and a strong reason to keep playing until the final round.

For brands and sports teams, seasonal campaigns are especially powerful. A sports team running a 'Pick the Score' challenge across the entire season builds a habit that runs for months. The social sharing aspect compounds throughout - each week's leaderboard update is a natural moment for readers to share their position and bring new people in.

How to do this in Riddle

- Start by defining your game concept around your subject matter - *what daily challenge would only make sense on your site?*
- Create the game in Riddle using the relevant format - quiz, predictor, crossword, or personality test - and brand it to match your site's look and feel
- Enable leaderboards in your Riddle settings to track scores across readers
- For campaign leaderboards, set a defined start and end date - Riddle accumulates scores across the full campaign period
- Add social sharing buttons so readers can share their score and invite others to compete
- Use the embed placeholder feature to schedule the game to appear automatically each day or week
- Promote the leaderboard in your newsletter or on social to seed initial participation, then update readers on standings each week to maintain momentum

RESOURCES & HELP DOCS

[Help: Setting up leaderboards in Riddle](#)

[Help: Scheduling content with embed placeholders](#)

[Blog: Mini-games for publishers](#)

[Blog: Running successful leaderboard campaigns](#)

2. Embed Placeholders - Set It and Forget It

LAUNCH TIMELINE

1-2 weeks to configure

REVENUE MODEL

Editorial efficiency + consistent engagement

EASY

One of the most useful features in Riddle for editorial teams is the embed placeholder. You add a single piece of code to your template - or to a fixed spot on your homepage or section page - and Riddle automatically swaps in new content on a schedule you define.

That means your crossword refreshes every day, your weekly news quiz goes live on Monday morning, and your seasonal competition launches on the right date - all without anyone on your team manually updating the page. The game is always fresh. The experience is always live.

For teams managing multiple verticals - news, sport, entertainment, lifestyle - this removes a significant amount of repetitive work while keeping every section of the site active.

How to do this in Riddle

- Place a Riddle embed placeholder in your CMS template or directly in your page code
- In your Riddle dashboard, schedule which content appears in that placeholder and when
- Set up a queue of crosswords, quizzes, or games to auto-rotate on a daily, weekly, or custom schedule
- Combine with leaderboards so scores carry over between editions of the same game

RESOURCES & HELP DOCS

[Help: Using Riddle embed placeholders](#)

[Blog: Reducing editorial workload with automated content creation](#)

3. In-Game Ads and Ad Refresh

LAUNCH TIMELINE

1-2 weeks to set up

REVENUE MODEL

Direct ad revenue

MEDIUM

Games generate more time on page. More time on page means more ad impressions. That is the simple version. The more complete version is that Riddle gives you two additional ways to turn that engagement into revenue directly.

In-game interstitials

Riddle's ad block format lets you show an interstitial ad unit within the game flow - for example, between rounds of a quiz, or when a player completes a level of Sudoku. The reader is already engaged and in a positive mindset. The ad appears naturally, without interrupting their experience in a disruptive way. Completion rates for this format are consistently much higher than standard display ads – especially for high eCPM video ads.

Ad refresh on the surrounding page

While a reader is playing a game, the surrounding page can refresh its ad slots. A reader spending 8 minutes on a crossword might generate 4-6 ad impressions in the banner positions around the game - rather than the single impression they would generate on a standard article page. This increases your effective ad inventory without requiring more traffic.

Both mechanisms work together. More engaged readers, more impressions per session, and higher-quality ad placements. The result is a meaningful uplift in ad revenue from traffic you already have.

KEY STAT

Publishers using Riddle interactive content report significantly higher time-on-page compared to standard articles - directly increasing the number of ad impressions served per session.

More impressions

How to do this in Riddle

- Enable the ad block format in your Riddle settings to add interstitial ad placements within your games
- Work with your ad operations team to configure ad refresh for the page slots surrounding your Riddle embeds

- Set refresh intervals that balance revenue with user experience - typically 45-60 seconds for active game pages
- Track performance via your ad server to compare CPM and impressions per session against non-game pages

RESOURCES & HELP DOCS

[Help: Riddle ad/iFrame block format](#)

[Help: Ad refresh integration](#)

[Blog: 6 ways to monetize interactive content](#)

4. Zero-Party Data via Game Signups

LAUNCH TIMELINE

1-2 weeks to configure

REVENUE MODEL

First-party data + subscription revenue

MEDIUM

The data landscape has shifted. Third-party cookies are largely gone. GDPR and similar regulations mean that audience data collected without clear consent is a liability, not an asset. The publishers and brands that are best positioned right now are the ones collecting zero-party data - information readers choose to give you, explicitly, in exchange for something they value.

Mini-games and leaderboards are a natural mechanism for this. A reader who wants to save their score, appear on a leaderboard, or invite others to compete needs to create an account. That account gives you a name, an email, and - depending on your setup - interests, location, and preferences.

This data is clean, consented, and genuinely useful. You can use it for personalisation, for targeted advertising, for subscriber segmentation, and for building direct relationships with your most engaged audience.

Connect via your site's login system

If your site already has a login system, you can use Riddle's data layer to pass user information directly into the embedded game. Your site pushes data to Riddle - this can include a logged-in user's ID, their login status, or anonymous identifiers for users who haven't registered. Riddle uses that data to recognise who is playing, pre-fill leaderboard entries, and tie game activity back to existing user profiles in your systems - without asking the reader to create a separate account just to play.

This works for both logged-in and anonymous users. For registered readers, their identity is passed in automatically and the game experience is seamless. For anonymous visitors, a unique ID can still be passed through, allowing you to track engagement and match it to a profile later if they subsequently register or log in.

The 'remember user' feature

For readers who are not logged in, Riddle's remember user feature smooths out the experience considerably. Once a reader has entered their details to join a leaderboard or save a score, Riddle remembers them on that device. On their next visit, the entry form is either pre-filled or hidden entirely - they go straight into the game.

How to do this in Riddle

- Add a lead generation step to your game, asking readers to sign up before seeing their leaderboard position
- Configure the data fields you want to collect - email is standard, but you can add age range, interests, or location
- Connect Riddle to your site's data layer to pass through logged-in user details automatically - no separate sign-up required for existing members
- Enable the remember user feature so returning visitors on the same device skip the entry form and go straight to the game
- Connect Riddle to your CRM or email platform via the available integrations to put the data to immediate use

RESOURCES & HELP DOCS[Help: Lead generation in Riddle games](#)[Help: Data layer integration](#)[Help: Remember user feature](#)[Help: CRM and email platform integrations](#)[Blog: Zero-party data and GDPR compliance](#)**5. Auto-Generated and Auto-Refreshed Content****LAUNCH TIMELINE**

Immediate to 1 week

REVENUE MODEL

Editorial efficiency + always-fresh engagement

EASY

One of the most common objections to running daily games is the editorial workload. Who creates the crosswords? Who writes the quiz questions? Who makes sure everything is updated? For smaller teams, this feels like a barrier - and for larger ones, it is often just not prioritised.

Riddle's auto-generation and auto-refresh features remove most of that friction. More and more of Riddle's content formats are either generated automatically or refreshed on a schedule you define - with no manual intervention required once they are set up.

Auto-refreshed puzzles

Sudoku is the clearest example. You can configure Riddle to generate and publish a new Sudoku puzzle automatically - hourly, daily, or on whatever cadence makes sense for your audience. Every time a reader visits, there is a fresh puzzle waiting. You do not touch it. It just works.

AI quiz generation

Riddle's AI quiz generator can pull a new set of questions on any interval you define - daily, every few hours, or triggered by a content update. Your editors can paste in the URL of an article and the AI generates a related quiz in seconds: questions, answer options, and explanations. The editor reviews, adjusts if needed, and it is ready to schedule.

A process that might have taken 30-40 minutes now takes 5. For newsrooms where the editorial team is already stretched, that difference is significant.

Programmatic creation via AI, API, and MCP

For publishers, brands, and sports teams with a more technical setup, Riddle's API and MCP connector open up a further level of automation. Mini-games and quizzes can be created programmatically - generated automatically based on the content, topic, or context of your site.

In practice, this means a sports site can automatically generate a match preview quiz whenever a new fixture page goes live. A news publisher can trigger a topic quiz from their CMS when an article is published. The combination of AI and API means the games match your editorial output in real time - at scale.

Creating Riddle content directly via Claude

Riddle's MCP (Model Context Protocol) connector allows Claude to interact directly with the Riddle platform - creating quizzes, polls, personality tests, mini-games, and more without leaving your AI workflow. Any action available via the Riddle API can be performed by Claude through the MCP: building content, connecting leaderboards, configuring lead generation, and publishing - all from a single prompt. For editorial teams already using Claude for drafting and research, this means interactive content can be created in the same workflow, with no separate tool or manual build step required. Full documentation is at riddle.com/help/api/mcp.

How to do this in Riddle

- Set up auto-refresh for Sudoku and other puzzle formats - choose an hourly, daily, or custom interval in your Riddle dashboard

- Use the AI quiz generator to create quizzes from article URLs - set up a recurring generation schedule or trigger manually for key stories
- Place embed placeholders in your CMS templates so refreshed content appears automatically without page edits
- For programmatic creation, use the Riddle API to generate content based on your CMS data - contact the Riddle team to discuss your setup
- Use Riddle's MCP connector to create and publish interactive content directly through Claude - ideal for editorial teams already using AI in their workflow
- Combine auto-generated content with leaderboards so scores accumulate even as the underlying puzzles refresh

RESOURCES & HELP DOCS

- [Help: Auto-refresh for Sudoku and puzzle formats](#)
- [Help: AI quiz creation in Riddle](#)
- [Help: Riddle API documentation](#)
- [Help: Riddle MCP connector - create content via Claude](#)

Getting Started: A Practical Launch Sequence

You do not need to launch everything at once. A phased approach works well - and it lets you see results before investing more editorial or technical resource.

Phase	Timeframe	What to do
Phase 1	Week 1	Launch one daily game (e.g. Sudoku or crossword). Set up a leaderboard. Embed on your homepage using a placeholder.
Phase 2	Weeks 2-3	Add a weekly news quiz. Enable lead gen on game signups. Connect to your email platform.
Phase 3	Weeks 4+	Activate in-game ads and ad refresh. Add social sharing to leaderboards. Review data and expand to more sections.

Why Now

The search traffic decline is not a temporary dip. AI summaries, zero-click answers, and changing reader habits are structural shifts. Waiting for organic traffic to recover is not a strategy.

The New York Times understood this before most. Its investment in games - from the crossword to Wordle to Connections - has driven subscriber growth, lifted retention, and generated billions of plays. Crucially, those games are not generic. They are distinctively NYT: the crossword has been a daily ritual for readers since 1942; Wordle became the puzzle that everybody talked about; Connections has its own voice and editor. The games are inseparable from the brand.

That is the model worth following - not 'add some games' but 'build games that only we could make.' A football club's score predictor. A food brand's recipe quiz. A trade publisher's weekly industry knowledge challenge. Games that test what your audience knows and cares about, branded to your identity, embedded in your daily rhythm.

Riddle makes this practical. You do not need a games studio, a dedicated editorial team, or a custom development project. The tools are ready, the formats are proven, and the AI quiz generator means you can turn your existing content into interactive games in minutes. The combination of engagement, retention, zero-party data collection, and ad revenue makes this one of the better returns on editorial effort available right now - and the sooner you build that daily habit with your audience, the harder it is for anyone else to replicate it.

Why Riddle

There are other interactive content platforms out there. A few things set Riddle apart.

Feature	What it means
Fully accessible	All Riddle content meets WCAG accessibility standards, so your games work for every reader.
100% GDPR-compliant and secure	Riddle is ISO 27001-certified - built from the ground up with European privacy regulations in mind, with full data processing agreements (DPA) and no third-party tracking.
Unlimited everything	Unlimited traffic, data capture, and content creation on every plan - no usage caps, no overage charges.
One simple fixed price	Riddle is not metered by pageview, response, or embed. You pay a flat subscription and use it as much as you need.
37 content formats (and counting)	From crosswords and Sudoku to polls, personality tests, and score predictors - all on one platform.

Get started with Riddle

Try Riddle free at riddle.com - no credit card required. Our team is happy to walk you through any of the features in this white paper, or run a best practices session for your editorial team.

Questions? Email hello@riddle.com or book a 1:1 demo at riddle.com/contact-us