

UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2022

Media Sustainability Essentials

*Building Resilience in
a Time of Disruption*

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About the Guide

Media Sustainability Essentials was created under the Strengthening Civil Society Globally (SCS Global) Program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under a Leader with Associates (LWA) Cooperative Agreement, led by FHI 360. SCS Global works across sectors to offer USAID Missions and Operating Units a flexible, worldwide platform for designing and implementing projects that strengthen civil society and independent media organizations to advance DRG objectives and other development goals.

SCS Global's purpose is the identification and development of evidence-based approaches to strengthen civil society and media in support of DRG and other development results in open and closing environments.

The Media Sustainability Essentials guide was developed to help media managers identify and choose the most relevant business models and practices that fit with their missions and operating conditions. It provides a common language around core concepts of media business functions and provides leads to further resources. It offers practical, straightforward guidance on growing audiences and diversifying revenue sources.

Funding for this guide was provided by USAID. The contents are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. government.

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About USAID



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About Internews



Internews is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard.

Learn more about Internews at www.internews.org.

About FHI 360



FHI 360 is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving lives by developing, implementing, and evaluating locally driven integrated solutions to health, education, economic development, environment, and civil society challenges.

Learn more about FHI 360 at www.fhi360.org.

About News Consulting Group



News Consulting Group (NewsCG) is committed to strengthening the resilience and business performance of independent news media. It operates in emerging countries and contexts where media operate under constraint or threat. With a consulting team of senior and deeply experienced media professionals, it brings a diverse range of practical expertise to address the complex issues facing news media today.

Learn more about News Consulting Group at www.newsccg.com.

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Media Sustainability Essentials

What is this Guide?

This guide helps media managers identify and choose the most relevant business models and practices that fit with their missions and operating conditions. It provides a common language around core concepts of media business functions and provides links to further resources.

It offers practical, straightforward guidance on growing audiences and diversifying revenue sources. The guide is written through the lens of news media and is written by media managers experienced in many different contexts. It includes topical overviews, case studies, interviews, guest essays, and practical hands-on tools.

Who is it meant for?

The primary audience is media managers who seek to make their organizations more resilient by growing their audiences and developing diverse sources of revenue.

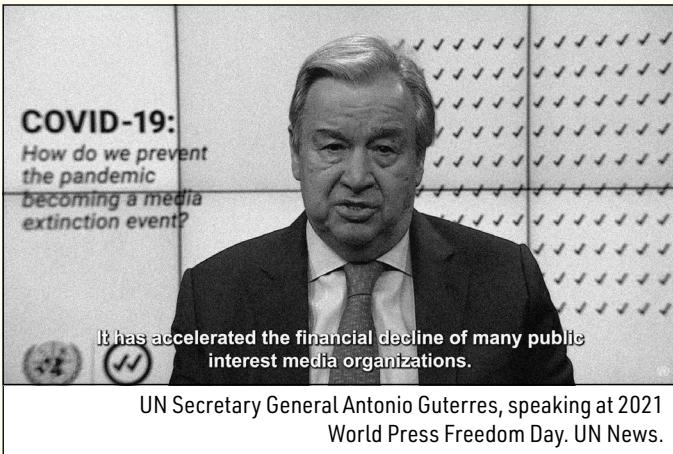
A secondary audience is the funders who support media outlets financially and through technology, tools, and training.

Finally, the guide is intended to be useful to program designers who are crafting interventions designed to improve the resilience, viability, and sustainability of media ecosystems around the world, and the professionals who ultimately do the work.

WHAT THE GUIDE IS	WHAT IT IS NOT
<p>Relevant to independent news media in emerging, developing, and constrained environments</p> <p>Focused on helping media managers make strong decisions about their organizations</p> <p>Useful, with practical with tools and examples</p> <p>Helpful to funders, consultants, trainers and others in providing a common language and set of core ideas about the business aspects of news media</p> <p>Thoughtful, in its links to leading resources and research on topics important to news media</p>	<p>A generic guide to management or strategic planning; those exist in abundance elsewhere</p> <p>A step-by-step manual. Rather, the guide offers managers the ability to review and select what is appropriate for their markets, their organizations</p> <p>Exhaustive. Each topic is covered in enough depth for users to understand the contours of the topic, but does not represent a “master class” for expert audiences</p> <p>A guarantee of success. As the case studies indicate, each media market is different, every context of opportunity and constraint is different. It requires innovation, experimentation, and determination to select the best path forward for your media organization.</p>

Framing the Problem

“As budgets tighten, so too does access to reliable information”



To mark World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd, 2021, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet highlighted the importance of free, uncensored, independent media as a “cornerstone of democratic societies, conveying life-saving information, improving public participation, and strengthening accountability and respect for human rights.”

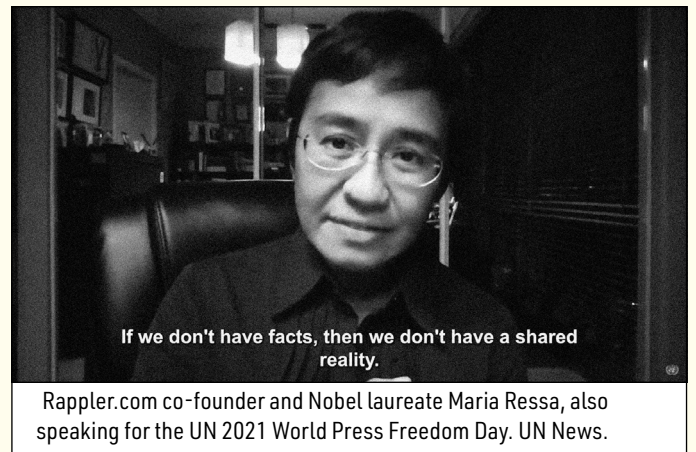
UN Secretary-General António Guterres elaborated that “[free and independent journalism is our greatest ally in combating misinformation and disinformation.](#)” He also noted the personal risks media workers face, including restrictions, censorship, abuse, harassment, detention and even death, ‘simply for doing their jobs,’ and that the situation continues to worsen.

Guterres further recognised the financial challenges of news media, commenting that “as budgets tighten, so too does access to reliable information. Rumors, falsehoods and extreme or divisive opinions surge in to fill the gap,” he said.

When independent news media — those free from influence by state or political interests — are absent, accountability is lost. “If we don’t have the facts, then we don’t have a shared reality,” said Maria Ressa, co-founder of independent Philippines-based news outlet [Rappler.com](#) and recipient of the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize, who was found guilty in 2020 of ‘cyber libel’ and now faces a six-year prison sentence.

Without this shared reality, markets become unstable, conflicts arise and human suffering increases.

For democratic spaces to remain open, independent news media must stay in business. And for them to stay in business, they need to make money, even in the face of core market challenges.



Market Challenges

The global digital advertising market is growing, so why are independent news media struggling to capture that revenue?

In the past two decades, there has been a shift in news consumption from print and broadcast media to digital platforms with personalized targeting and increased advertising efficiency — this has left most independent news media outcompeted for audiences and revenues. Technology giants, such as Facebook and Google, win by aggregating audiences and applying algorithms to large datasets of content consumption behavior to drive ever-increasing engagement and loyalty.

For online, independent news media, the result is that advertising revenues are increasingly challenging to capture. Globally in 2020, the \$628 billion dollar

advertising market had grown by 5.1% compared to 2019, [with digital spend growing at more than double the pace at 11.1%](#). However, in this burgeoning digital sector, [Facebook, Google, and Amazon collected 62% of digital ad spend](#). In the UK, Facebook and Google alone captured [almost 70% of digital ad spend](#).

Coronavirus accelerated the shift to digital and the financial pressure on news media

Coronavirus has accelerated the shift to digital news platforms, as newspaper distribution faltered, and physical delivery became less feasible during lockdowns.

Businesses froze their advertising, while major brands used broad keyword blocking to avoid advertising agencies with COVID-related news topics, resulting in most digital news media being excluded from their targeting. This [slashed at least 30%](#) from their traditional revenue base.

Coronavirus has been attributed as the cause for large numbers of news media closures and staff cutbacks since March 2020, with [65 media outlets closing](#) in the United States. For many other countries, equivalent data are hard to find, although there are reports of media outlets across Africa closing their print operations in favor of digital operations. However, many of these outlets [“have not figured out how to make money online.”](#) Numerous media have needed to downsize or close. For example, media in Kenya were particularly affected, with major independent news media like [Nation Media Group laying off large numbers](#) of staff.

What are the challenges to sustainability in freedom-restricted environments?

A primary method of suppression for authoritarian governments is controlling the flow of information via news media. They gain and retain power through establishing crony networks of aligned media, controlling state media, and capturing independent media. Those not aligning with them face impediments to their businesses and their market access in many forms: exclusion from newspaper distribution networks; exclusion from TV and radio broadcast

licensing; cyber-attacks; tax inspections; advertiser intimidation; audits of user databases; personal targeting; and even social exclusion. Often, these tactics are accompanied by censorship and the creation of a self-censorship culture.

Further, when independent media operate in freedom-restricted countries, they rarely have the same access to broadcast and print distribution channels as state-aligned media, and therefore lack the ability to cross-promote between online, print, and broadcast distribution and to deliver multi-channel campaigns to advertisers.

Despite the indispensable public service they perform, independent news media in these constrained contexts face extreme existential threats. The problem is widespread; of 180 countries measured in the [2020 World Press Freedom Index](#), only 47 achieved a ranking better than ‘problematic.’ In some of the most restricted countries, such as Azerbaijan, Eritrea, and North Korea, there are no independent news media operating domestically, as their journalists are forced to report from exile out of fear of imprisonment or worse. In 2020, [50 journalists globally were killed](#) in connection with their work while a record high of [274 were imprisoned](#).

A further, increasing problem is the rise of disinformation, with malign actors distributing misleading information and branding unfavorable coverage as ‘fake news.’ With increasingly sophisticated distribution, disinformation often spreads more quickly than fact-checked reporting, stealing public opinion and advertising revenues away from trusted news media. This has contributed to a [‘raging infodemic’ globally that feeds mistrust](#).

What are more widespread challenges?

In less overtly oppressive contexts, sometimes the economics of producing news are just difficult to balance. Local, hyperlocal, and community media can lack the addressable market size to sustain teams of salaried, professional journalists. The economics worked in the past decades for print and broadcast media, but the highly targeted, digital age brings information and advertising efficiencies that such media were not designed for. Further, many media outlets, especially those rooted in activism, have capacity shortages in knowing how to run a successful media business.

Even in highly developed media markets like the United States, which was listed only as 45th in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index, local news is facing extinction. There are now [1,300 communities with no local news coverage](#) at all.



Media business models based on advertising revenues are unreliable in subsistence and unbanked markets (East Timor).

What about revenue from consumers?

Whereas print and broadcast media have historically been funded by a combination of audiences paying for access and businesses paying for access to those audiences, the culture of free information online has exacerbated the sustainability challenge for news media as users increasingly consume news online. While 72.5% of internet users now pay for content online, [only 10% of those pay for news](#). Activating any consumer revenue is much more dependent on audience trust, loyalty, and visit frequency than advertising is, so in these winner-takes-most markets, smaller and medium-sized independent media are left chasing advertising revenues and diversifying into activities that are not necessarily related to their news-gathering business. As the purely advertising-driven business model increasingly fails to support digital news media, there is growing acceptance among consumers of the need to pay for online news. While this is now more common in some countries, [with 42% of consumers in Norway paying for online news content](#) in 2020, the UK was at just 7%.

What is the result?

When independent news media globally face myriad threats from the shift to digital, algorithmic audience engagement, the rise of disinformation and a pandemic, financial sustainability is far from assured. In freedom-restricted markets, the business interference and censorship they face intensify the challenges.

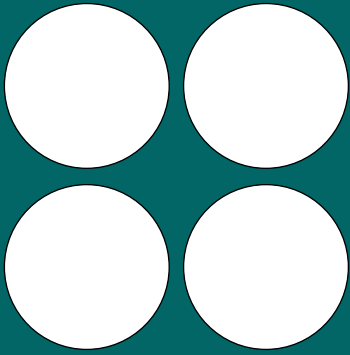
In the face of these changes and challenges, can news organizations find business models that work?

Yes.

News organizations are mission driven. As such, they are resilient, tenacious, and employ capable people. While there are some contexts in which there is little possibility of creating sources of revenue, other markets offer opportunities for teams that embrace change, innovate, and experiment. As the [case studies in this guide](#) show, even in poor and constrained markets, strong media managers have uncovered new opportunities, diversified their businesses, and professionalized their organizations.

While these case studies offer inspiration, there is no one-size-fits-all approach that works in every market or every community.

Viability in the digital era requires a broad-based understanding of how to manage a media organization as a business while still fulfilling a strong news mission. This guide introduces the basics of organizational structure, business models, research, audience development, and revenue diversification, all designed to help managers plan for a more vibrant financial future.



1

Strategic Business Planning

1

Strategic Business Planning

What is Possible? Assessing the Media Environment & Committing to Action

Strategic business planning is fundamental to building media sustainability, especially as media markets continue to rapidly evolve. The growth of digital media, the disruptions to advertising markets, and the growth in paid subscription services have all changed the landscape. So has the increase in efforts to constrain news media using business laws rather than outright censorship. In light of these many factors, managers need to constantly assess and analyze where their media organizations sit within this very dynamic environment.

strategic planning. It is also a core element of determining which organizational structure best fits the needs of the media organization within its context, which includes deciding whether it will be incorporated as a **nonprofit**, for-profit, or hybrid organization.

Once media managers have a clear idea of this context, they will then need to consider the business model which will allow for long-term sustainability given the structure of their organization. A business model is how a company converts the value it creates into revenue. It is the company's answers to the questions:

- Who is the customer?
- What does the customer value?
- How can we make money doing that?
- Will that be profitable?

This lays the foundation for how products, services, and value are created to attract customers. It also clarifies how to acquire those customers, sell to them, and make money. In a nonprofit environment, it is how an organization fulfills the mission entrusted to it by stakeholders and generates sustaining funds. While seeking donor funding remains an important revenue source for many news organizations, this guide primarily focuses on business planning with a variety of revenue models, rather than on finding grant opportunities or proposal writing.

The Need for New Business Models

Many organizations praise their leadership and credit them with doing well against all odds. But can a good boss or a dynamic leader overcome a bad business model? Or one that is out of date? No.

News media have been profoundly affected by disruptive innovation, which is when a better business model is introduced into an existing market. Here are some examples:



SCS Global hosts a Civil Society and Media conference in Myanmar with a focus on sustainability.

All media markets and ecosystems have unique characteristics that shape news organizations. To succeed, media organizations need to assess their own media environments and operating contexts and incorporate that knowledge into their strategic thinking. This type of factual assessment helps anticipate challenges, uncover opportunities, and set achievable goals. It helps the organization know what is important to do, and what is not. It is the foundation of strong

- Digital media have disrupted print
- Mobile phones have disrupted landlines
- Social and digital media have disrupted legacy news media
- Programmatic advertising has disrupted direct advertising
- Streaming has disrupted cable and broadcast television



Successfully converting legacy media operations to digital-first requires internal restructuring and structural change in the overall media environment.

Considering these, news media in many environments have faced near-extinction. Businesses do not stand still and neither do markets, competitors, or customers. The best media leader in the world could not forestall the fundamental restructuring of the news media during the past 20 years.

Media managers did not suddenly become incompetent. After all, they had been successfully managing complex businesses for years. But there is a tendency when under threat for organizations to try and to do *more or better* of what they already do, rather than trying something *different*, or to cut costs and try to maintain profit levels while delivering lower customer value. At some point, this approach fails.

Thus, different business models have been urgently needed, and many news organizations are finding positive and powerful new ones. It is vital to continue innovating, reinvesting, and creating competitive advantages.

The collapse of advertising as the primary revenue source of news media, while painful, is also leading to the identification of hopeful new avenues.

A shift to greater reliance on consumer-generated revenues is reshaping every aspect of the news-media environment.

Until the digital era, news media were heavily reliant — or dependent — on advertising revenue. It generally represented about 80% of newspaper revenue and 90–100% of broadcast revenue. Thus, news organizations focused their efforts on creating audiences highly valued by advertisers. This pursuit shaped the entire media ecosystem. Nielsen ratings and “[sweeps weeks](#),” with their inflated audience ratings, were used to convince advertisers that they could reach their target audiences within certain time slots and programs on both television and radio. Time slots with high and desirable audiences charged premium prices; those in the middle of the night or weekends were discounted.

Newspapers sought to increase audiences in advertiser-desired demographics, including affluent and well-educated adults. They created special sections to create advertiser-friendly environments with themed content.

These approaches became, and to an extent remain, the basis for advertising pricing. Audience measurement underpinned advertising and allowed ad buyers to make comparisons among different media. Even billboards used drive-by demographic estimates as the logic behind their pricing strategies. However, the landscape has shifted, and with that, so has the way news media organize themselves and deliver value, with changes in both B2C (Business-to-Consumer) and B2B (Business-to-Business) methods.

Many media are now using consumer-first digital models based on digital subscriptions and memberships. That fundamental change is reshaping media organizations around the world and unlocking the potential of their content. Instead of focusing on audience research as a justification for ad pricing, audience insights are used to inform better reporting and create deeper engagement with users. Consumer revenue models are discussed more in depth in [Chapter 5: Business-to-Consumer Marketing](#). In the Business-to-Business space, the advertising sales department has also been reinvented. News media have moved away from selling undifferentiated display advertising to selling marketing services and solutions. Instead of selling space on a page, or 30-second time

slots, advertisers are being presented with more comprehensive and creative marketing solutions. Advertising revenue models are discussed more in depth in [Chapter 4: Business-to-Business Marketing](#).

Diversifying revenue streams can also mean developing a hybrid business model. News media have operated with hybrid business models for years, and the range of options has only expanded in the digital environment. They create robust marketing opportunities employing multiple components, including both **B2B (Business-to-Business)** and **B2C (Business-to-Consumer)** methods, and sometimes **C2C (Consumer-to-Consumer)** and **B2G (Business-to-Government)** strategies.

Key Terms

- **Business-to-Business (B2B):** Selling advertising, marketing services, events, training, translation, and sponsorships to other businesses

- **Business-to-Consumer (B2C):** Soliciting membership, creating crowdfunding opportunities, and/or selling subscriptions, merchandise, and personal advertising to individuals

- **Consumer-to-Business (C2B):** Selling services such as freelance reporting

- **Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C):** Creating marketplaces for the exchange of goods and services such as automotive, real estate, or job sites

- **Business-to-Government (B2G):** Selling services such as advertising and training

- **Nonprofit:** Works to achieve a social purpose or mission, is often funded by philanthropists, donors or contributors, and any revenues that exceeds expenses must be committed to the organization's purpose

Learning Objectives

This chapter will serve as the foundation for the ideas, resources, and concepts explored in the guide ahead. To make the most of the information in the following chapters on analytics, branding, and marketing approaches, it is critical to recognize how the operating environment, media market, structure, and business model of your organization have an impact on both your daily operations and vision for the future. Building an understanding of these concepts will allow you to begin strategic planning towards media sustainability in a dynamic digital age.

In this chapter, you will:

1. Learn how to **assess the media ecosystem** in which your news organization is situated and how it compares to competitors.
2. **Examine key considerations** in deciding between different media organization structures and business models in varying contexts.
3. Learn how to **frame your organization's unique value**, and use tools you can use to begin organizing your own media business strategy.
4. **Explore case studies** about how other news organizations have experimented and innovated towards their objectives after setting a North Star goal.

1.1 Assessing the Environment

There are many types of analyses that fuel good **strategic planning**. There are three that are fundamental for most media organizations:

- An operating environment assessment that analyzes the important external forces and trends that affect the organization: a PESTEL framework is a good tool for this.
- An information ecosystem assessment developed by Internews to research and analyze the relationship between information supply and information demand.
- A competitive positioning analysis or **organizational assessment** that looks at how the news organization performs relative to its market potential, its customers, and its competitors: using a Strategic Triangle framework is helpful in this case.

While each of these has different pieces, all three are important and are frequently used together.

Operating Environment Assessment

Tolstoy's opening line to *Anna Karenina*, that "happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," can be extended to the shape of different media environments.

Strong media environments have many aspects in common: laws that support a free press, a regulatory environment that fairly allocates the broadcast spectrum, opportunities for diverse voices to be heard, and financial paths towards organizational sustainability.

Weaker media markets can be constrained using a wide range of unique and market-specific tactics, from the blunt force of outright censorship to more nuanced limitations on media business operations, distribution, and marketing. They can become anti-competitive when media ownership is concentrated and hidden. And they can be undermined by larger economic, financial, and technological trends.

PESTEL Analysis: A common starting point of assessing the operating environment is to conduct a PESTEL analysis, which is a tool that identifies the large, external forces affecting an organization. Media organizations, with their deep connections to the markets they serve, are influenced by each of these forces.

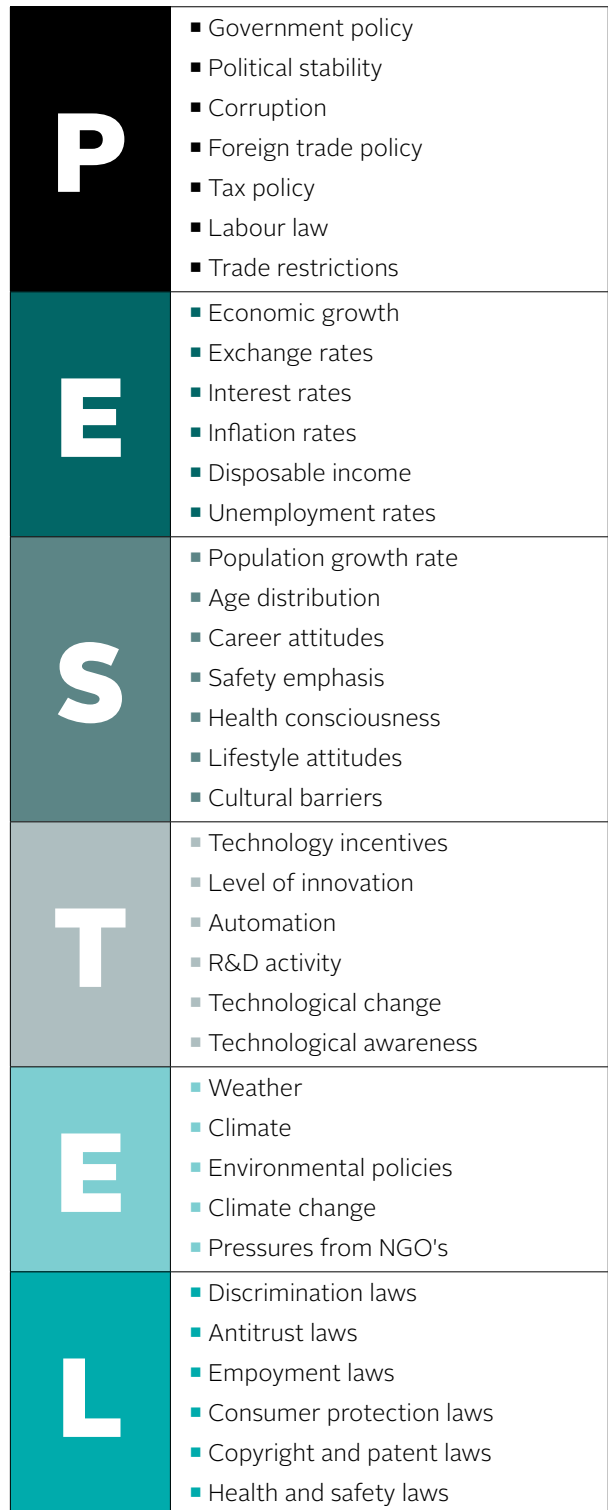
PESTEL stands for:

- **Political Factors:** How and to what degree a government intervenes in, or influences, your environment.
- **Economic Factors:** These include trends and economic factors that affect your business, your audiences, and the broader community. They can include economic growth, interest rates, currency fluctuations, the number of people working in the informal economy, unemployment, inflation rates, and consumer purchasing power. For news media seeking advertising revenue, it is helpful to understand the total size of the advertising market and how it is allocated, or the **market share**.
- **Social Factors:** These factors are important in describing your market. What are the important population trends? What are the demographics of the market — does it skew young or old? Are there disparities among ethnic, regional, or language groups or between urban and rural populations? Are the characteristics of youth quite different from those of seniors?
- **Technological Factors:** To what extent is technology influencing the media environment? What is the level of technological adoption and how affordable is its use? Are people equally technologically literate? Are there groups that exist in technology deserts?
- **Environmental Factors:** How will media distribution channels be affected by weather pattern changes? Or the ability of journalists to report? Will publishing resources be at risk?

■ **Legal Factors:** In media markets, legal factors play a significant role in how media function and succeed. Legal considerations include rules concerning how media businesses can organize; ownership and licensing requirements; and journalist registration requirements. An increasing trend has been to create business laws unique to media that define how they can, or cannot, operate. More broadly, like in other industries, media must comply with employment, tax, and other business laws.



Volunteers and citizen journalists are an important resource for community media (Kenya).



Sample PESTEL diagram. Source: [Business-to-You](#)

Example: The Business Environment for News Media in Zimbabwe

Internews' [The Business Environment for News Media in Zimbabwe: 2021 report](#) provides an example of a comprehensive assessment of the broad context in which news media organizations are situated. This table organizes the themes explored in the report in a PESTEL diagram, demonstrating how a variety of factors can have an impact on media businesses:

Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Government corruption and persecution of critics and journalists ■ Government issuing new licenses for community radio ■ Local daily newspapers and national broadcast media tightly controlled
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Currency instability, inflation, and high interest loans ■ COVID-19 led to water shortages and increased poverty with key economic sectors struggling ■ Majority of workers in informal economy ■ Slim advertising market captured by government-aligned media organizations
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Multiple local languages spoken ■ Strong interest in locally produced content and radio
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Opportunity in digital broadcast conversion ■ Majority of Zimbabweans have a mobile connection and an increasing number are gaining access to the internet and social media ■ Dominance of WhatsApp as an information distribution channel ■ Growth of mobile and digital payments for ecommerce
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Repeated droughts leading to food insecurity ■ Damage from natural disasters: flooding and storm damage
Legal/ Regulatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Media market requires licensing that is often expensive ■ Restrictions on journalism, and particularly political reporting ■ Changes to Access to Information and Privacy Protection (AIPPA) bill and proposal of new media and data regulations

Information Ecosystem Analysis (IEA)

The [IEA framework](#) was developed by Internews to assess and analyze the relationship between information supply and information demand. The framework provides a useful example on how to capture contextual data on the supply side of the information ecosystem, and the broader environment in which media organizations operate. This includes gathering data on the business environment for media and the telecommunications and advertising sectors, the legal and regulatory landscape governing the media sector, and mobile and internet penetration and usage. An IEA also examines the content and reach of traditional and digital media, the role of social media platforms in the ecosystem, and the capacity of media organizations within a specific context. This detailed form

of ecosystem analysis can lead to critical insights on the opportunities and constraints of media markets in a variety of political, economic, and social contexts.

For an example of how this framework is used, read the 2021 [Georgia: An Information Ecosystem Assessment report](#). In Part 1 on Context, Infrastructure, Regulation, and Revenue, the authors explore the supply side of the information ecosystem in Georgia, covering physical and institutional infrastructure related to media, governance and legal frameworks, and advertising and media revenue in the country. Part 2 on Production, Distribution, and Consumption of Information focuses more on audience demographics, media preferences, language and access, and social media platforms.

Explore more information ecosystem assessments from across a diversity of media markets, [here](#).

Competitive Positioning Analysis

The Strategic Triangle: Customers, Competitors, and Your Organization

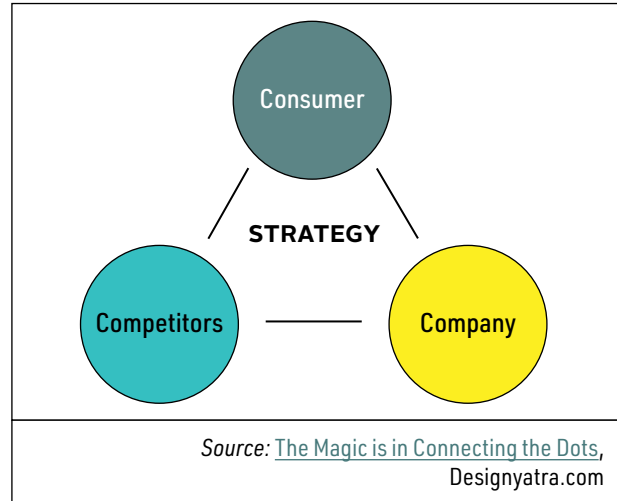
While these factors shape media markets, they are incomplete as a basis for developing your own organizational strategy. Media organizations operate within the real-world marketplace of customers and competitors, audiences, and advertisers.

Kenichi Ohmae, the strategy genius who helped reshape the global automotive industry, observed that businesses operate within a triangle defined by a company, its customers, and its competitors. The closer you are to your customers, the further away it drives them from your competitors ... and vice versa.

- **Customers:** News media have two different sets of primary “customers”:
 - **Audiences**, who may — or may not — pay for the content they consume
 - **Businesses**, selling them access to those audiences through advertising, events, and sponsorships, and selling direct marketing services
- **Competitors:** These are businesses and offerings that compete for those customers
 - **Direct competitors:** Other news media compete for advertising or sponsorship revenue. They also compete to attract audiences and their associated revenues
 - **Indirect competitors:** There are other “competitors” that directly affect news media, such as non-news social media and entertainment that compete for people’s time and attention
- **Your Company:** This is your business, how it is organized, operates, and competes

These are dynamic relationships that can shift almost overnight.

Thinking about customers and competitors focuses an organization on what it needs to do to be — and remain — competitive. It is a way to stay grounded in the present and anticipate the future.



Another framework to consider in assessing an organization’s standing with competitors is a **SWOT analysis**, in which you analyse your organization’s strengths and weaknesses relative to, and in the context of, its opportunities and threats.

For a case study highlighting how one organization uncovered new insights into its brand strength while doing a competitive analysis, [click here](#). In this case, the staff of [Ziarul de Gardă \(ZdG\)](#), one of Moldova’s first investigative news organizations, gained confidence after realizing the strength of its reporting and reputation in the broader market, leading to more investments in analytics and creative marketing campaigns.

Outcomes: Committing to Action

Analysis is the starting point of **strategic planning**. Strategic assessments should result in **baselines** of the current situation, **conclusions about** the environment, organization, and situation ... that in turn lead to **actions**, including:

- Creating a strategic plan
- Aligning vision, mission, and brand
- Setting specific readership and business goals
- Identifying important target audiences
- Quantifying revenue prospects and goals
- Implementing marketing and promotional strategies
- Preparing reality-checked financial projections and planned investments

Example: The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

Market assessments help define not only the business strategies on news organizations, but also point to their editorial missions, as well. In troubled times it is vital to know where one stands. The ABC released its [Five Year Plan, 2020–2025](#) during the economic catastrophe of the pandemic. Pages 14-28 of its plan outlined findings from a deep examination of its operating context. What did it look at?

- The ABC evaluated its economic, financial, competitive, technological, and work environments. It reviewed the national and global media environments.

- It looked at important trends, such as audiences’ use of media in general and its own platforms.
- It examined how social media is changing the Australian media market overall.
- And it examined larger trends of declining trust in news.

It then reviewed its own products, platforms, and offerings within that context. From there, its management team crafted a plan forward. Here is a summary of its conclusions and promises to its audiences and, beyond that, to its nation.

Vision: The home of Australian stories – accessible, bold, creative

The ABC has been an essential part of Australian culture and society for more than 85 years. Its creative ambition is to be the place where every Australian will find stories that reflect, shape, and enrich their lives.

The ABC intends to:

- Give audiences entertaining content featuring Australian voices, places, and stories.
- Allow Australians, wherever they are, access to an independent, comprehensive, and local news service.
- Help to keep audiences informed during fires, floods, storms, and other emergencies.
- Support and promote Australia’s creative industries.
- Raise awareness of science and enable lifelong learning through educational content.
- Provide Australian perspectives on issues and events to global audiences.
- Serve as a foundation for, and the benchmark of, Australian media.

Pillars

Reflect contemporary Australia.	Build a lifelong relationship with Australians.	Continue to earn the trust that audiences place in the ABC, safeguarding ABC independence and integrity.	Provide entertaining, culturally significant, and on-demand content.	Make sustainable choices in allocating resources.
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Priorities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Deliver personalised digital experiences. ■ Remain Australia’s best and most trusted source of news and information. ■ Strengthen local connections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prioritise quality over quantity. ■ Invest in the workforce of the future. ■ Be creative, flexible, efficient, and accountable.
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Source: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, [2020–2025 Five Year Plan](#) (p. 27)

Key Terms

■ **Operating Environment Assessment:** A review of the external environment within which media organizations operate. A review of the various laws, environmental factors, trends, demographics, and market conditions that support, empower, constrain, or define its performance. Often conducted using a PESTEL analysis.

■ **Organizational Assessment:** A review of the internal operating environment, staffing, performance, and capabilities of a specific media organization.

■ **Strategic Planning:** A process that relies on the above assessments and stakeholder inputs that helps the organization create a direction for its future and identify ways to achieve it. As noted in the two examples above, it is also created within the context of an organization's broader vision, mission, and values.

■ **Strategic Plan:** The tool that comes out of that process. It is a map to get to the organization's desired results. It typically includes specific goals, objectives, baselines of performance, and plans for achieving the goals and financial resources.

■ **Market Share:** A metric that shows how large a specific market is and how it is divided among different businesses or offerings. For media, a common metric is audience share. Nielsen and others define that by measuring the total number of people or households tuned into a specific station relative to all people viewing at that time. If 100 households are watching television at the same time, and 30 are watching a specific station, it has a 30% share.

However, market share for local news media is often used to estimate what percent of all local ad revenues a media organization is capturing. If there is a \$10 million advertising market, and a media house generates \$1 million in ad revenue, it has a 10% market share. This is an important variable to track. If that same media market is growing 15% a year, but the news organization only increases its ad revenue 3%, it is losing ground relative to the market. It would achieve only 9% market share.

■ **SWOT Analysis:** Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. This is a method used by many organizations to prioritize their activities. Many marketers recommend assessing a market's opportunities or threats first before considering an organization's strengths and weaknesses. A perceived strength could be irrelevant in the context of market opportunities.

Resources

Deutsche Welle Akademie developed its comprehensive [Media Viability Indicators \(MVIs\)](#). Released during a period of intense disruption to news media, its set of indicators is designed to be used by media managers, media development experts, and academics. Its discussion paper calls for using these indicators to fuel fact-based discussions of media ecosystems and as a tool that media organizations can employ to shape their own strategies.

FHI360, in conjunction with JSI Research and on behalf of Advancing Partners & Communities, has developed an [Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool](#). It provides thorough and practical checklists that identify strengths and gaps in an organization's management. It can be used as a self-assessment tool.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has produced its [Media Ownership Monitor](#) to help bring transparency to media markets by answering the question, "who owns the media?". Media ownership is a central issue in any media market assessment, as it offers clues into how competitive or anti-competitive the field is.

Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), with the European Committee for Standardization and RSF, released its [agreement on journalism standards](#) that is intended to establish a framework for promoting principles of ethical journalism, encourage news providers to adapt professional norms, and help the public distinguish between credible and false news sources. It covers essential elements of a professionalized media environment, including ownership transparency, disclosure of revenue sources, and both internal and external accountability. Learn more about the [Journalism Trust Initiative](#).

UNESCO has a set of overarching [Media Development Indicators](#) that look at aspects of the media environment structured around laws and regulation; plurality and diversity of media; media as a platform for democratic discourse; professional capacity-building; and infrastructure capacity sufficient to support independent media.

[Article 19's](#) work supports Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ("Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.") Its legal experts track trends and report on various attempts to side-step rights.

1.2 Deciding on an Organizational Structure

While much attention focuses on laws concerning press freedoms and journalists' rights, media businesses must understand the business laws they operate within to make good decisions about the structure of their organizations.

It is essential to select the proper legal structure for your organization based on its goals, the market, and priorities. A good structure will help media organizations grow; protect their owners and employees from personal economic and legal liability; and allow them to operate transparently. Which structure is best? Many decisions about structure are based on your expectations for the future ... and your understanding of the present, including an assessment of the following:

- If your organization receives donor funding, is it legally required to have tax-exempt status? And will donors always fund you — or will you need to transition off donor funding at some point?

- If you are putting money into the company, do you want an ownership stake in it?
- If the organization makes money, how should that be used?

However, the first and most basic question to be asked is whether the organization seeks to be registered as a tax-exempt **not-for-profit** entity, a profit-seeking one, or a combination of both? The laws regulating these vary by country, but there are three fundamental distinctions in these models. They differ in these significant ways:

- How an organization is owned
- What sources of capital are available
- How funds and profits can be used

The following chart breaks down key differences in these areas between for-profit and nonprofit organizations.

For-Profit vs. Nonprofit Organizations

	For-Profit or Profit-Seeking Organizations	Nonprofit Organizations
Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Organizations in business to make profits for their owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Organizations that work to fulfill a social or other mission as its primary objective
Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Owners seek to drive the organizations towards profits ■ Owners are not held personally liable in the case of fines or judgements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Not owned by a specific person; collectively, the organization represents the stakeholders who share in the organization's mission. ■ Founders, board members, and employees are typically protected from personal responsibility or liability for its debts or lawsuits
Capital & Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Receive funding from owners, investors, and lenders — and return profits to this group ■ Can make money from products and raise money from investors and by selling company stocks ■ If the organization dissolves, assets belong to owners of the business and are distributed to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Receive funding from grants, foundations, contributions, donations, philanthropy, and other means of charitable support, which can be tax-deductible ■ Can also generate revenue directly through sales and membership fees ■ If the organization dissolves, may be required to donate — not sell — its assets to other nonprofits
Taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pay any applicable national, regional, local, and property taxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can be granted tax exemptions
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Flexibility in operations with freedom in employee compensation, investments, and new lines of business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can require restrictions on board member/director compensation or activities

Hybrid Corporate Structures

Choosing a business structure does not have to be an “either-or” decision. Your organization does not have to choose to be either 100% nonprofit or 100% for-profit. If structured carefully, it can be both — a corporation with both profit and non-profit entities.

If the organization is large enough — and the market will support this — it may wish to consider having a holding company or other legal structure that allows it to operate both nonprofit and profit-seeking businesses. For example, many public service media own other corporations or businesses that produce revenues which, in turn, help pay for their news content. It is common for media companies to own bars, restaurants, or event venues that generate revenue. They also provide training, translation, and technology services.

In Paraguay, El Surtidor is an example of a nonprofit media outlet that has diversified its revenue sources by selling the staff's expertise in visual journalism. Through for-profit communications consulting and a regional newsroom training program, El Surti is able to fund its nonprofit journalism work. To explore this case study and learn more about El Surti's structure, [click here](#).

Examples

The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) has succeeded by forming a parent *nonprofit* company and a *for-profit* organization that, in turn, has diverse businesses underneath it. Those businesses leverage the organization's brands (programs and content) and capabilities (production skills, distribution networks) for commercial benefit.

[BBC Studios](#) is an example of a hybrid model. It is a commercial subsidiary of the BBC, and operates as a global business that funds, creates, distributes, and commercializes premium content. The company monetizes BBC brands, and sells BBC and other British programming for broadcast overseas. It can also produce custom content for others, using its strong production capabilities and robust services. It can help a client with every step of the process, from conceiving an idea through to its creation, branding, marketing, and distribution. It reinvests revenues back into the BBC's public service mission and helps support British creative industries in general.

In addition to nonprofit media companies owning for-profit subsidiaries, a different model is emerging in which nonprofit foundations and institutes own for-profit news media.

Christian Trejbal, in his Seattle Times opinion essay [Nonprofit Newspapers Might be One Path to Sustainability](#), offers this example of how a nonprofit board or institute can own and fund a profit-seeking news organization:

“The [Philadelphia] Inquirer mostly became a nonprofit in 2016 when its owner, Gerry Lenfest, donated 99% of the stock to a nonprofit institute that now bears his name. The remaining 1% is held by a board of the for-profit newspaper. It doesn't actually generate a profit these days, instead putting all revenue into staff and operations....The Inquirer sells ads and subscriptions to fund operations. The Lenfest Institute receives support from hundreds of donors, many of whom earmark their contribution for the newspaper.” The Inquirer is now the largest U.S. newspaper that is operating as a public benefit corporation.

Creating a Board

Boards of Directors play important roles in both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. A board is the governing and oversight entity; it is not, however, involved in day-to-day management or operations. Boards are first and foremost fiduciary in nature, overseeing the financial well-being of the organization, its assets, and its security.

That said, a board's role is not merely fiduciary: it contributes to — and protects — the organization's culture, direction, and mission. Boards are charged with being ambassadors and advocates for the organization, and with providing it with vision and insight.

Different places have different board requirements. Laws vary by country and state about whether organizations must have a board in place, its composition, and their reporting requirements. That said, whether required or not, boards offer strong benefits to their organizations. For-profit organizations that have strong boards benefit from increased investor confidence; nonprofits gain valuable oversight and increased credibility.

What are typical board responsibilities? All boards oversee the governance of the company or organization, establish corporate policy, appoint officers, and set executive salaries. They oversee finances and review financial reports and audits. They approve budgets and set goals. They hold the organization accountable for achieving goals and being compliant with legal and ethical standards.

That said, the roles of for-profit vs. nonprofit boards are somewhat different:

- A board of a for-profit company is responsible to the company's shareholders. It has an important role in setting financial goals for the company. Board members are usually compensated for their service.
- A board of a nonprofit is responsible to the community served by the organization. It has a strong role in fundraising to ensure the organization's ongoing stability. When selecting board members, it is important that this factors into the decision-making process and that members are selected who are effective communicators and have influential networks. Board members are usually volunteers who support the organization's mission and seek to advance its cause.

A board usually includes officers and other members who serve for a specified period. The officers include the board chairperson, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer. The board meets at least annually, and usually more often, whether in its entirety or in separate committees.

Members are drawn from diverse sources and serve fixed terms, often set at staggered five- year periods to ensure board continuity. It is generally helpful to have an odd number of members to avoid tied votes. Small organizations are recommended to have no more than seven board members, but no fewer than five so that occasional absences or vacancies will not impede the board's ability to function. The organization's Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer are usually the only employees on the board, and act as non-voting members.

Boards are often organized into committees, such as an executive committee, finance, fundraising, governance/compliance, or nominating committee. The CEO/Executive Director reports to the board and is

overseen by the executive committee which reviews their performance and determines compensation.

Limited-term task forces can complement standing committees to examine special issues or respond to a crisis or opportunity.

Board members of media organizations can play many important roles. Often, media organization leaders have news rather than business backgrounds, and need mentoring as they adapt to a broader role of managing an organization. Media organizations can come under threat, and they may need behind-the-scenes support from key influencers.

Thus, enlisting board members who have diverse skills is vital. While some may have news backgrounds, the majority of members should come from non-news environments. The organization can benefit most from members who have forward-looking and specialized expertise outside their own realm. Those could include technologists, financial managers, representatives from the advertising community and/or financial markets, community activists, and/or legal experts. This group should be diverse in its skills, but unified in its support and belief in the organization.

Please note: The information here is general. It is not legal advice. When deciding on what structure best meets your organization's needs, you must consider your local context, laws, and regulations. You should seek sound legal counsel when formalizing your structure.

Resources

[The Council on Foundations](#) examines the specific laws governing nonprofit organizations in many countries, and also offers comprehensive guidance on managing nonprofit organizations.

[The United States Chamber of Commerce](#) has a good description of the differences between nonprofit, not-for-profit, and for-profit organizations in the U.S. It also has guidance on forming a board of directors [here](#).

For insights into the broader legal context for media organizations:

- [The Center for Internet and Society at Stanford Law School](#) is a public interest technology and policy program at Stanford Law School. It examines the intersection of law and technologies to examine how they can either help or harm innovation, free speech, public commons, and privacy.
- [Centre for Law and Democracy](#) is a non-profit organization that works to protect, promote, and develop the core human rights underpinning democracy. It reviews and comments media-specific laws in many countries and evaluates whether they will adequately protect and support free speech and enable news media to operate.

[Can Nonprofit Ownership be an Answer to the Crisis Facing Local Newspapers?](#) In this article, journalism professor Dan Kennedy examines how nonprofit foundations and institutes may help preserve community news organizations by owning and supporting them.

[Should Your Small Business be For-Profit or Non-profit](#) is a brief essay on some of the differences in setting up these different forms of organizations.

[Cantor Consulting](#) offers a blog on nonprofit management and best practices. It has addressed issues related to managing during the coronavirus pandemic.

The [NEO Law Group](#) of San Francisco, a firm that provides legal guidance to nonprofit organizations, has published [guidelines](#) about operating a hybrid nonprofit/for-profit organization. While U.S. laws are likely to be different than those in other contexts, this blog offers high practical considerations when getting started.

The [National Council of Nonprofits](#) has guidelines about the composition of a nonprofit board of directors.

1.3 Creating a Value Proposition

A **value proposition** is at the center of your business model. It describes concisely and clearly what you are offering, who you are offering it to, what benefit they will receive, and how it is different from others. It is focused outward, on customers, rather than inward, on operations.

Here are some examples of how some media organizations frame their value:

- **GK**, a media outlet in Ecuador: “deep journalism and social impact on three axes (transparency, gender, environment). All with a focus on human rights.”
- **Eye Radio**, a station in South Sudan: “a ‘one stop shop’ where South Sudanese listeners can tune in seven days a week, 24 hours a day and hear local, national and international news and sports”
- **Mongabay**, a US-based environmental journalism site: “Reader-supported news and inspiration from nature’s frontline.”

It is common for companies with hybrid business models to offer multiple value propositions within their differing customer groups. One of the most recognizable is Amazon.



Source: [Amazon Press Center](#).

Amazon’s core value proposition is to offer low prices, fast delivery speed, and “Earth’s biggest selection.” This value proposition applies globally and is relevant across its many product lines. Those sub-brands offer unique value propositions in line with their own target audience and distribution channels:

- **Prime (Amazon membership)**: Anything you want, quickly delivered
- **Kindle (Amazon e-readers)**: Easy to read on the go

- **Amazon Essentials (clothing line)**: Good quality basic clothing at affordable prices

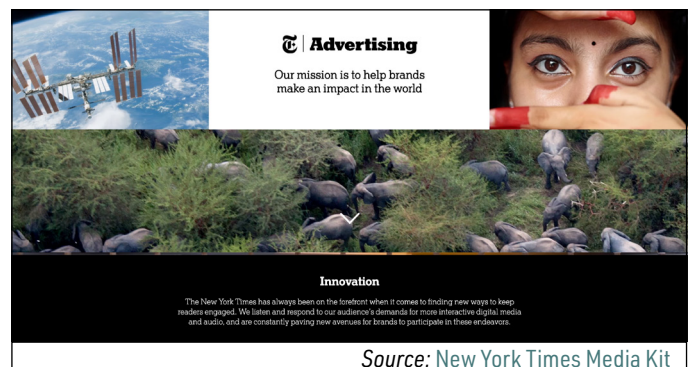
News media, although different in scale, are like Amazon: they frequently have a central value proposition for their main brand, and separate value propositions for their sub-brands.

The New York Times’ core value proposition is “[Seek the truth and help people understand the world.](#)” While that is its mission statement, it also serves as a value proposition. The emphasis on credibility and completeness informs its diverse products for both audiences and advertisers.

For audiences, in addition to its hard news and lifestyle reporting, The Times also targets specialized audience segments. It offers content designed to entertain and educate. When The Times launched [NYT Cooking](#), Editor Sam Sifton wrote:

“Seek the truth and help people understand the world. That’s the mission of The New York Times. It holds true for NYT Cooking as well, where we look at everything through the prism of home cooking and write up our findings as recipes.” In his [poignant essay](#), he discussed the overall reporting of the Times and how NYT Cooking shares the overall values and mission of the larger organization.

For advertisers, The Times’ value proposition is to [help brands make an impact in the world](#). It does that by offering a wide range of marketing services, including advertising, conferences, trade shows, custom content, newsletters, and premium ad placements.



Advertising
Our mission is to help brands make an impact in the world

Innovation
The New York Times has always been on the forefront when it comes to finding new ways to keep readers engaged. We listen and respond to our audience’s demands for more interactive digital, media and audio, and are constantly perring new avenues for brands to participate in these endeavors.

Source: [New York Times Media Kit](#)

Getting Started: Identifying Your Organization's Value Proposition

A good way to start to define your organization's value proposition in each market it serves is to write a statement using this formula.

"We help (X) do (Y) by doing (Z)."

This simple format helps place the value proposition in precise language that any customer could understand. Careful thinking should go into each of these areas:

- **"We help" refers to relevance:** it is the promise you are making to customers
- **"(X)":** is your target customer or audience
- **"Do (Y)" refers to your value:** what specific benefits they will receive and at what price
- **"by doing (Z)"** refers to your differentiation: how it is different and better from competitors' offerings

For example, here are sample value propositions that could apply to news media:

- We help communities identify and solve problems by producing investigative reporting.
- We help businesses deepen their engagement with their target customer groups by providing a wide range of compelling in-person marketing opportunities.
- We help citizens engage more deeply in their communities by providing smart, informative, and factual content on government activities.

Do this with your team. Typically, a media management team would discuss this framework together and form various ideas. They then craft it into a sharp, short message.

Run it past some customers. The next step is to run it past people in the target customer group. Do they understand it? Do they agree?

Refine. Once tested, if your value proposition fails to excite your customers, try again until there is a better match.

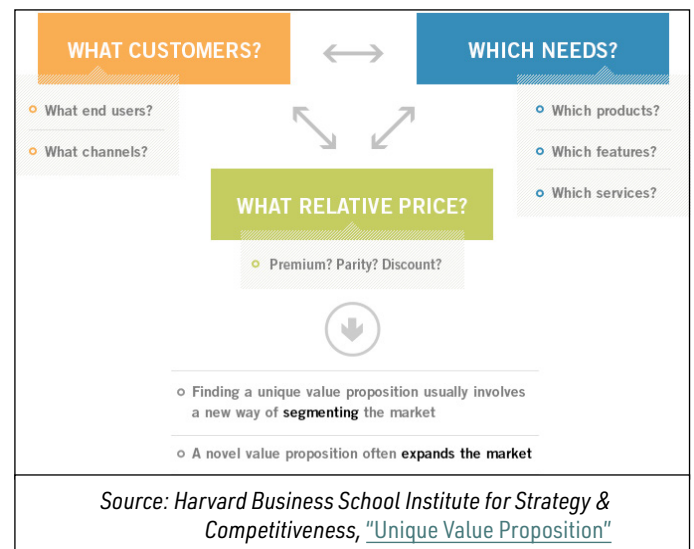
Resources

For guidance on writing a value proposition, explore [value proposition examples](#) and a [guide to creating a unique value proposition](#).

Harvard Business Review offers guidance on creating [a strong value proposition](#).

Harvard's Institute for Strategy & Competitiveness has elaborated on how to think about the different components of a value proposition in its essay on ["Unique Value Proposition"](#).

Amazon's value proposition changed, and so did its logo and brand presentation. Here is a [case study](#) showing how its logo reflected its evolution.



1.4 Choosing a Business Model

How do news media outlets generate revenue?

There are three primary ways for an online media outlet to generate money. The first, most traditional way, is to sell advertising. The second is by generating revenue from consumers. The most common forms of this are memberships, subscriptions, and donations.

The third method is to diversify into other areas of business. For some media companies, this can include setting up e-commerce ventures, creating niche media brands (e.g., related to cooking or automobiles), managing events, and selling their in-house production skills to other organisations (e.g., producing sponsored or branded content to advertisers). Other media, especially those in less developed or freedom-restricted markets, might diversify into business activities not directly related to media (e.g., farming, hospitality).

For this reason, news organizations often operate in many environments, often involving diverse stakeholders including audiences, advertisers, community members, funders, donors, sponsors, and philanthropists. Most business models start with a sense of the various marketplaces they compete in:

- **Business-to-Business (B2B)**, by selling advertising, marketing services, events, training, translation, and sponsorships to other businesses
- **Business-to-Consumer (B2C)**, by soliciting membership, creating crowdfunding opportunities, and selling subscriptions, merchandise, and personal advertising to individuals
- **Consumer-to-Business (C2B)**, by selling services such as freelance reporting
- **Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C)**, by creating marketplaces for the exchange of goods and services such as automotive, real estate, or job sites
- **Business-to-Government (B2G)**, by selling services such as advertising and training
- **Nonprofit**, by being funded by philanthropists, donors, or contributors

These are often interrelated. For example, holding an event might generate B2C revenue from ticketing, merchandising, and registrations, while B2B revenue could come from sponsorship, signage, and advertising. A news organization could also operate in the online B2C and Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C) spaces by operating an online car sale website.

Are you clear about which environments you are operating in? Or could? That is the foundation for picking the right business model tools out of your toolbox. Having the right model for your business and keeping it fresh through innovation and reinvestment is the most basic and essential decision a business leader must make.

The following tools, a Business Model Canvas and a Guide to Media Business Models, are useful in determining what factors you need to consider in your business planning and the diversity of opportunities for revenue streams available to your news organization. Marketing for different models will be discussed more in depth in [Chapter 5: Business-to-Consumer-Marketing](#) and [Chapter 6: Event Marketing](#).

For an example of how one news organization, Kakheta Khma in Georgia, diversified its revenue sources with different business models, [click here](#). The staff at Kakheta Khma have sold paid press releases, public relationships announcements, and video content to other businesses, and also operate a professional training center and wine garden.

Business Planning Tools

The Business Model Canvas

How do you choose which business model(s) work for your organization? Swiss business theorist and entrepreneur Alex Osterwalder created the [Business](#)

Model Canvas, a tool that helps organizations think through their business model or models. The canvas was developed in conjunction with more than 400 practitioners from 45 countries.

It is a template that helps organizations identify ways to create value for their differing customers or audience segments, align their operations to meet those needs, and make money. Working through it helps identify what business model — or models — would likely work best.

Most important in this process? Starting with the customer and your **value proposition**. Those two elements — the customer and the value proposition — are at its heart. Everything else flows from that.

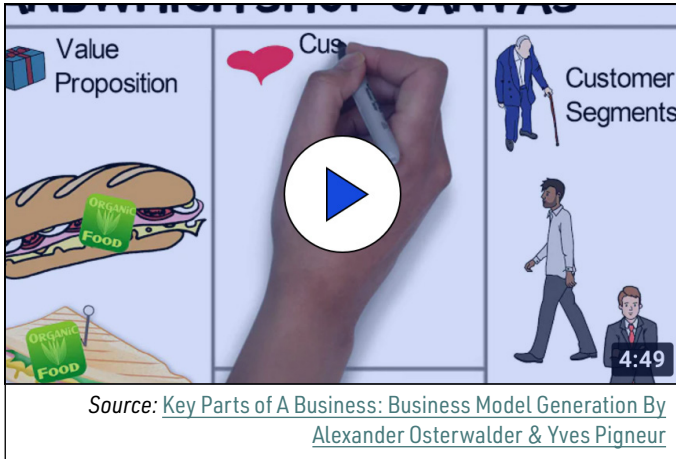
Your organization’s management can work through this template, whether you are in a start-up or a robust legacy media house. It organizes all the customer-facing activities of the business and helps align **external opportunities** with **internal activities**. The canvas has nine areas that managers should research and discuss.



News media that actively develop multiple revenue streams are more likely to succeed (East Timor).

Key Partners	Key Activities	Value Propositions	Customer Relationships	Customer Segments
	Key Resources		Channels	
Cost Structure			Revenue Streams	

What goes in each of these boxes? This video walks through the Business Model Canvas and how to think about each piece:



The Business Channel has another good video about how to use the Business Model Canvas. There are also numerous downloadable templates when searching on 'Business Model Canvas.'

Guide to Media Business Models

To remain competitive, news organizations have to constantly diversify revenue streams and refine their business models in response to operational conditions. Below are some example business model approaches for media organization. Which of the following models does your organization already employ as part of its activities, and which could be potential opportunities to explore?

Type	Name	Description	Examples
B2B + B2C	Multi-sided model	A company that provides services to both consumers and other businesses	Newspapers, LinkedIn , event marketers
B2B or B2C	Freemium	When a company offers a mix of free content or services, with premium services requiring payment. It is often used to begin a relationship with a customer.	New York Times , Malaysiakini , Zoom
B2B or B2C	Subscriptions and micropayments	A subscription model allows customers to get content, services, or products by paying a fixed amount on a regular basis. Based on the type of subscription, the commitment could be weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually, with longer terms usually rewarded with discounted prices.	Netflix , Amazon , print and digital newspapers, SMS text messaging services. An interesting example in media is Substack , which allows individual writers to develop and monetize an audience.
B2C	Membership	A membership model is one where people who are committed to a brand voluntarily pay a recurring fee to support the organization and/or access something of value. For news media, it can include content, conferences, newsletters, or private events.	Texas Tribune , National Public Radio , Malaysiakini
B2C, B2B	Contributions	People and groups are often willing to support efforts they believe in. News media can generate contributions from loyal users and supporters to support in-depth local or investigative reporting.	Patreon is used by media houses to solicit contributions. The Guardian has become a model of effectively raising contributions from users.
C2B	Crowd-funding	This is an investment model that relies on individuals who believe in an organization. It raises a small amount of money from many people and offers a variety of returns. Some crowdfunding efforts are loan-based and require repayment. Others have shareholders who share the risks and rewards of investment. Others offer emotional rewards to investors, such as access to content, or being named in a movie or book.	Representative tools for crowd-funding include: Indiegogo , Crowdfunder , Kickstarter , Seedrs , Crowdcube Investigative journalism often seeks this type of investing since its content, while socially vital, can be high-risk for advertisers.

Type	Name	Description	Examples
B2B	Consulting & training	Organizations provide consulting or training on specialized competencies, such as using technology, writing native content, or preparing effective videos. They are priced by the hour or by the achievement of a specific goal.	News media that sell commercial translation, technology services, and/or website development. Texas Tribune (US), with funding from the Facebook Journalism Project, created Revenue Lab , a local news revenue training lab for 14 other publishers.
B with B	Network Effect	Users typically only pay to subscribe to one news publication. To offset this, local and regional publishers have formed alliances allowing users to pay one subscription price and consume media from within that network.	Amedia (Norway) launched +Alt with access to more than 70 newspapers. 180,00 users signed up initially, with 70,000+ upgrades sold to its live-streamed sports brand, Direktesport .
B2B	Technology	Media businesses can offer IT licensing services and related training to their peers.	Examples include Svenska Dagbladet (Sweden), Washington Post (Arc CMS and Zeus revenue management tools), Quartz, and The Atlantic (US)
C2C	User-Generated Content (UGC)	This is a fast-growing model that allows consumers to create and share information about a brand. It includes videos, reviews, and testimonials, and usually appears on social media or a brand's website. UGC is harvested by researchers and remarketed to brands as consumer insights.	YouTube, TripAdvisor, Reddit
C2C + B2C + B2B	Marketplaces and e-commerce models	Digital marketplaces that allow buyers and sellers to connect directly through an online platform. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many traditional retailers quickly shifted to e-commerce models. In print, Classified ad sections served this purpose until largely disrupted by digital competitors.	Well-recognized marketing places include Alibaba , TaoBao , Cars.com , Walmart Publishers, with their deep histories of operating Classified advertising, have launched vibrant marketplaces, including Adevinta by Schibsted. Cars.com and Homes.com were both founded by a group of news publishers.
B2B, B2C	Bundling	Companies bundle together several products and/or services to provide a complete value offering to a customer with one simplified price. For news media, this includes bundling a variety of services together for a business, such as events, advertising on digital and legacy platforms, sponsorship, and event marketing. It has the side benefit of locking up market share and preventing budgets from being easily reallocated to competitors.	Amazon bundles free delivery along with Amazon Video and Kindle. Other examples include McDonald's Value Meals and Microsoft 365 (which bundles its most popular office software products and then sells them as a subscription — including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint)

Type	Name	Description	Examples
B2B, B2C	Unbundling	When a product or service does only one essential thing.	Substack is a platform that gives writers a place to promote their unique content. Many have been columnists or writers for major news media. On this platform, they offer only their own content.
B2B	Data Services	With the increase in privacy laws and the elimination of third-party cookies, first-party data from publishers is increasingly valuable to advertisers.	Examples include Schibsted (Norway) and ProPublica (US)
B2B	Specialized Services	News media can offer services taken from their core strengths and offer them as a unique offering to other businesses. This can include producing native content or offering fact-checking.	The Quint (India) has an IFCN-certified fact-checking effort for its own reporting and sells their expertise in fact-checking to Facebook.

Resources

[NiemanLab](#), the Nieman Journalism Lab, is dedicated to helping journalism figure out its future in the internet era. Its website has various “hub” topics, including business models, mobile & apps, audience & social, aggregation & discovery, and reporting & production. Content is free and users can browse case studies on the site and [register](#) to receive newsletters.

Harvard Business Review (HBR) wrote a classic piece on business models, noting that they are often a combination of both art and strategy. [What is a Business Model?](#), January 23, 2015.

[MDIF](#), the Media Development Investment Fund, is home to the [Membership Puzzle Project](#), a strong and comprehensive resource for media organizations considering a membership model.

[INMA](#), the International News Marketing Association, is a member organization that offers some free content and newsletters to non-members. It offers expert resources, conferences, and webinars on news media business models, with special emphasis on reader-revenue models.

Innovation Media Consulting Group offers [11 Business Models for Publishers](#) along with thoughts about the virtuous cycle of media businesses.

The [Business Strategy Hub](#), a website filled with content about business models, strategy, and analysis, has created a list of 50 different types of business models that are worth knowing and brainstorming how they might relate to your organization.

Crowdfunding is often being used to launch start-ups. Here is [a guide to crowdfunding for small businesses](#).

[Krautreporter](#), an independent German news organization that was started with a crowdfunding investment of €1 million from 17,000 supporters in 2014, remains a successful journalism project. You can read about [its journey here](#).

The International Trade Center has prepared [an analysis of e-commerce and marketplaces in Africa](#), along with recommendations about ways it could expand.

1.5

Setting a North Star Goal: Aligning people, processes, and resources

Most news media organizations have limited human and financial resources. Often, they exist in competitive markets where larger media brands have ample resources to compete for audience attention and revenue. In constrained markets and contexts in which press freedom is limited, it is crucial to develop clear goals and strategies to maintain operational resilience and build towards long-term sustainability. Independent news media succeed when they focus, and align their resources against their goals.

Clear goals have power. They motivate and empower people to achieve great things, even in media markets that are challenging to navigate. A clear vision of success frees people to experiment, act independently, and achieve better results.

A **'North Star' goal** should be a single, clear goal that keeps an organization on course, much as sailors are steered by the North Star at night. It should be a lofty goal, driven by the organization's mission, purpose, and values. It should address the issue of what your business does and why it exists. It is supported by a framework designed to prioritize swift and well-informed decisions, support internal communication, and focus teams on results and growth.

It has the benefit of making other efforts less important, leading to resources being concentrated on achieving what is most important. It clarifies what to do, and what to let go of. A north star goal also shapes budget decisions, as it forces the organization to prioritize investments and resources to achieve what is most important.

Case Studies

Here are stories from four organizations that have set aspirational goals or changed course — and how they made it work.

Audience Insights and a Strong Brand: Foundations for Growth: In Moldova, where the commercial market for media is small and dominated by political elites, digital-native [Agora.md](#) grew its audience 77% in three years, reaching 3.8 million viewers in 2020. Its North Star goal is becoming financially independent so that it can retain its editorial independence. To do so, audience insights have fueled its product development while the company has strategically diversified its revenue sources.

Creating Somalia's Largest FM Network: In Somalia, [Radio Daljir's](#) North Star goal is supporting the national peacebuilding effort through informing and empowering citizens, especially women and youth. It has built the country's largest FM network that now operates as a multi-media organization with diverse revenue sources.

Holistic Management of a DRC Start-Up: In DRC, [Actualite.cd](#) was founded in 2016 with the North Star goal of becoming the global source of trusted news from the country. Thus, becoming financially independent was integrated into the larger objective of editorial independence; the two remain intertwined. All other decisions were linked to achieving those objectives, including hiring practices, the uses of technology, developing marketing services and support for advertisers, and creating the Kinshasa News Lab.

Ukrainian News Start-up Challenges the Status Quo with Savvy Technology and Marketing: In Ukraine, a group of young journalists had a vision for a new kind of news organization, focused on solutions journalism, to compete with oligarch-operated media. [Rubryka](#), in Ukrainian, Russian, and English now receives more than three million visits per month. One of its hypotheses was that the larger media organizations optimize all their content: to succeed, they would need to compete on that front. Learn more about their experiments in this case study.

Developing a North Star Goal

In all of these cases, achieving success required iteration, collaboration, and developing an organizational strategy. In a period of disruption and digital transition, achieving internal alignment is difficult. It is hard to stop doing something that has been successful in the past. However, the past is not always prelude, and what made media companies successful previously is no longer a guarantee of future performance — and may actually hinder progress. As the case studies demonstrate, achieving big things often requires restructuring an organization and reallocating both staff and resources.

Yet organizations often falter over issues of internal alignment. In an [analysis of failed startups](#), researchers found that of the top 20 reasons the companies went under, only a few were related to product development. The majority were caused by the internal failure to share common goals and achieve common purpose.

Here are examples of North Star goals:

- Become a reader-revenue-first company with 50,000 paying subscribers by December 31, 20XX
- Become a customer-focused marketing services company with topline revenue of \$1 million

A common goal that was embraced by news media organizations beginning in the 1980s falls short of being a North Star goal:

- Increase shareholder return X% year over year

This fails the “aspiration” test: shareholder returns, unless it’s a family-owned business, are unlikely to motivate and empower frontline employees.

Elements of a North Star Goal

- **Clarity:** An organization has a single, shared objective. There may be hundreds of steps and processes to achieve that goal, but employees and investors know where they are heading. It should be connected to the tasks of research, targeting, design, technology, testing, and marketing. It is a goal that becomes a journey of learning and growth for the organization.

- **Outcomes:** The specific achievements and key benchmarks of progress towards that goal and what success ultimately looks like.
- **Hypotheses:** Managers and employees use data from many sources (performance metrics, environmental assessment data, reader insights, and competitive analyses) to develop testable hypotheses.
- **Experiments:** People develop bottoms-up experiments that test their effectiveness in proving — or disproving — hypotheses. This requires a culture of experimentation, where “learning” and “testing ideas” replace “failure”.

How to Start Designing a North Star Goal

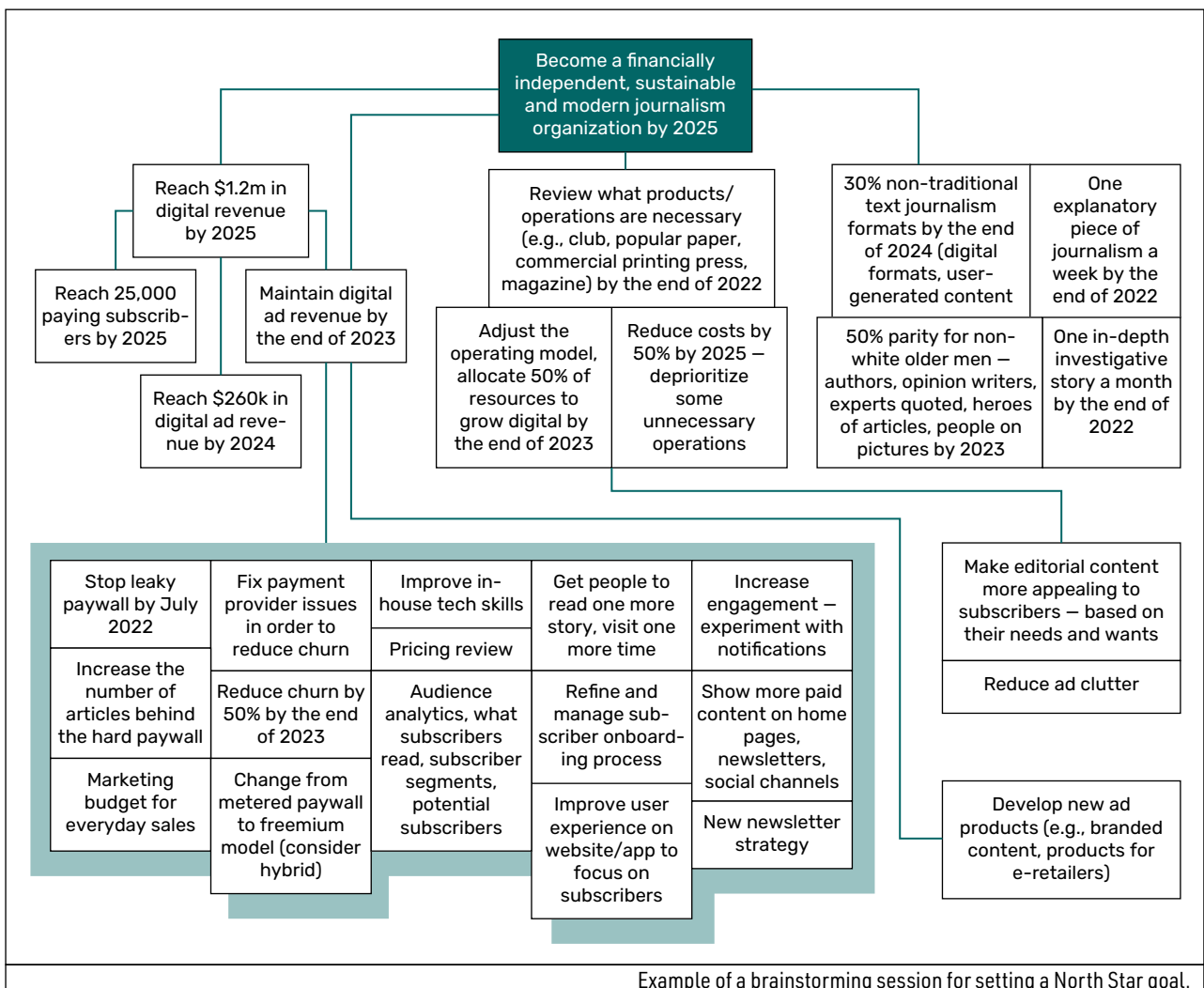
North Star goals work when people in the organization help create them, understand them, and buy into them. By the time your organization is ready to identify its “true north,” it will have already assessed its environment, competitive position, and key performance metrics - and shared those findings with managers, editors, and groups of front line employees.

It is vital that the company’s executive and financial leadership participate. These people should come together to brainstorm, discuss, and debate the organization’s North Star goal and what it takes to get there. It is helpful to have a diverse group, representing different ages, gender, jobs, experience, and passion.

Some organizations find it useful to have an external moderator help steer the conversation. Many use a whiteboard ([digital](#) or Post-it notes) to capture the group’s thought process (an example of this brainstorming is shown on the next page). If it is a large group, the moderator may want to break them into smaller teams to enable everyone’s participation. Here are a few steps to follow for this process:

- Discuss and debate among the group what the North Star goal should be. This can be a lively conversation, but if the team has understood all the data and the company’s internal and external data, the goal can take form quickly. It should be a single statement that is aspirational, specific, measurable, and has a clear deadline. It could:

- Be a financial target, such as reaching \$2 million in revenue by 2024.
- Focus on a specific achievement, such as becoming a reader-revenue first organization by 2025.
- Be linked to a higher social purpose, such as supporting the growth of democracy during the 20XX elections.
- Ask people to identify and brainstorm what actions and accomplishments will move the organization towards achieving that goal. It is important to hear from all participants, even those who are often quiet in group settings.
- The moderator should put those up where people can see them.
- Then, with input from the group, the moderator should move the suggestions into various boxes or groupings. Are they:
 - Outcomes,
 - Hypotheses, or
 - Experiments that prove or disprove the hypotheses?
- Do people agree that these are the right areas of focus and steps?
 - Management needs to signal its approval of the goal and, once refined, share it widely, refer to it often, and use it as the framework for decision-making.



Example

In 2020, the [Google News Initiative](#), [INMA](#), and [FT Strategies](#), a digital growth consultancy created by the *Financial Times*, launched a subscriptions lab to support news publishers in strengthening their reader revenue in a time of disruption. [The 2020 Subscriptions Lab report](#) includes the following example of one publisher's North Star framework. It shows the concrete steps needed to achieve:

The overall goal (10 m € subscriptions revenue in 2024)

- The objectives (reach 85K subscribers in 2023)
- Identifying hypotheses (offer personalized newsletters)
- Testing and experiments (test a newsletter based on users' content history)

From their collaboration, the team developed this matrix of outcomes, hypotheses, and experiments.

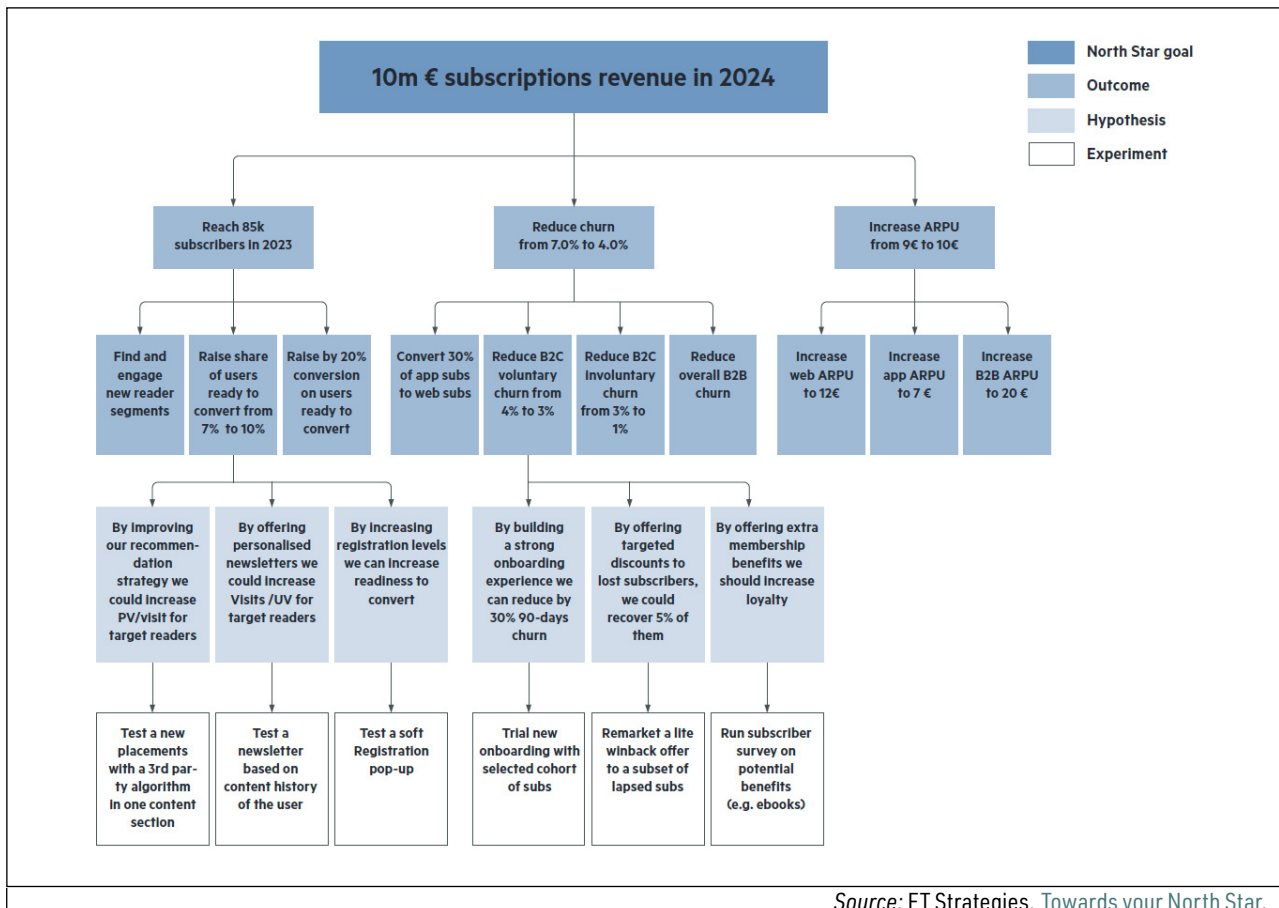
Resources

[Towards your North Star: Report on the Outcomes of the European GNI Subscriptions Lab 2020](#): This report (produced by FT Strategies and supported by the Google News Initiative and INMA) offers guidance on setting North Star goals.

New York Times [Product Discovery Activity Guide](#): How the company researches its readers and tests prototypes.

[The Top 20 Reasons Startups Fail](#), CB Insights: After conducting analysis on 101 startup failures, CB Insights assessed why. It found that in most instances it was not a product failure but rather a process failure — that the organization never fully aligned to achieve its goal.

[Brand Assimilation: Aligning Your Employees Around Your Brand](#)



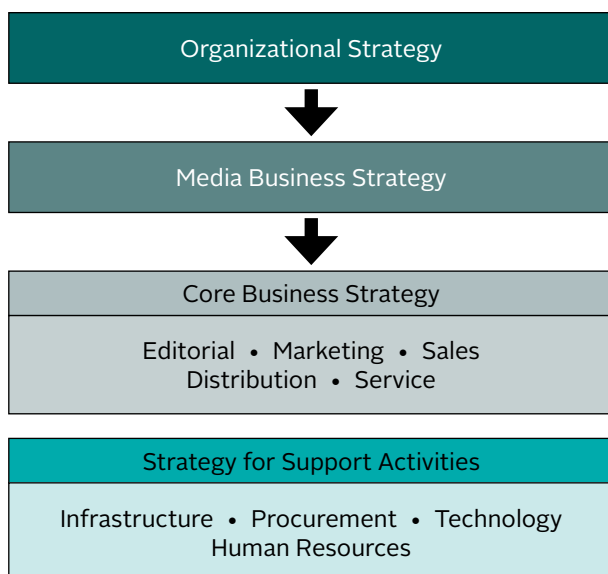
1.6

How to create a Media Business Strategy

As shown throughout this chapter, managing a sustainable media business requires a strategy that can guide decision-making across the organization. The following approach to creating a strategy is specifically adapted to address the issues facing independent news media in restricted operating environments, such as those in which freedom of expression is limited, or in which there are major obstacles to reaching businesses, consumers, or both.

The aim is to continuously be on a path towards running a media business that survives and thrives. The most obvious way to run a healthy business is to make at least as much money as you spend. If the business cannot cover its costs from self-generated revenue, its potential to raise funds from donors stems from enabling *fact-based news and information*, and delivering the impact of *positive societal change*, for defined target audiences.

There are a few different levels of strategy for media businesses:



What does each strategy represent?

Organizational Strategy

A corporate strategy (which we refer to as the *Organizational Strategy*, as many independent media are non-profit or informally gathered) is the overarching strategy of your business, which sets the decision-making framework for everything else the organization does, and which should include all of its diverse activities. If your organization offers things to its markets other than content and the audiences that generates (e.g., a commercial printing business, event management, production services), those things — and how they complement your business — should be covered in the Organizational Strategy. As described in [Chapter 1.5](#), this organizational strategy should reflect your North Star goal — a single, clear aim that should keep the entire organization on course.

Media Business Strategy

The focus of this guide, your Media Business Strategy, is centered around goals and on:

- **Who** your media outlet will reach — the audience segments, businesses and other stakeholders that are important to its success. Try to be as specific as possible, defining your audiences by age, gender, location, interests, and behaviours. If you will sell advertising, which advertisers will you target?
- **What** products and services you will offer them — such as newspapers, websites, apps, TV, and radio stations, and social media. What type of content will you deliver?
- **How** you will create and distribute those products and services, and how you will achieve financial sustainability, growth and impact.

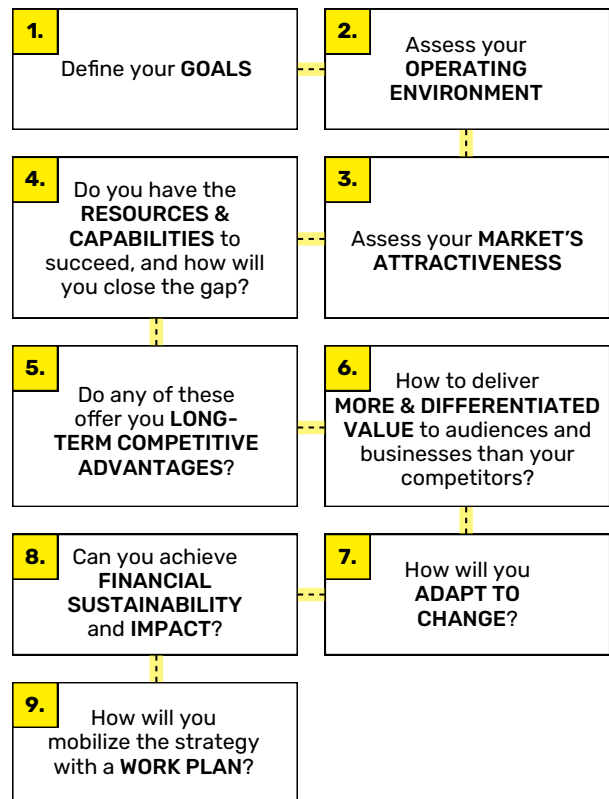
Strategies for core business operations

- **Editorial:** How you will create content that attracts, engages, and retains audiences.
- **Marketing:** How you will differentiate, position, and promote your offering to your chosen markets.
- **Sales:** What you are selling and how you win customers.
- **Distribution:** For a media company, this is primarily about how you will reach audiences via digital, print and broadcast channels. It can cover issues such as licensing, distribution logistics, etc.
- **Service:** How you will support customers and retain them. This could be ensuring advertisers are supported in achieving great results with you, or subscribers being guided in using your online platforms.

Strategies for support activities

- **Infrastructure:** Buildings, power, remote working tools, security
- **Procurement:** How your company engages with suppliers (e.g., website hosting providers, paper and ink suppliers, or consultants)
- **Technology:** Devices, networks, software, and tools
- **Human resources:** Ensuring you have the people on board, and creating a culture and environment in which they can give their best

Here is our recommended process for arriving at your business strategy:



The following are the different sections that should make up your media business strategy:

Executive Summary

This should be 1–2 pages long and summarise the rest of the document so that, if the reader doesn't have time for the full document, all the analysis and recommendations are summarised. This section should be written last.

Strategic Time Frame

State the time period of this strategy. Smaller companies in more dynamic environments tend to look 2–3 years ahead whereas larger, more established companies can look five years ahead. You can always review the strategy if necessary, but it should be something you can explain to staff, arrive at with your management team, and agree with your board of directors or trustees.

1. Define your Goals

Define your goals to include **WHO** you are reaching, **WHAT** you offer and **HOW** you will create the offering.

Tip! Be as specific as possible when setting your goals. Unless you are a large, well-resourced news business, there is a risk that if you try to be all things to all people, you will fail to connect strongly with many of them. Discuss your goals with colleagues and allow plenty of time to craft the goals well.

2. Operating Environment Assessment

P Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Authoritarian government ▪ Forthcoming elections
E Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weak economy ▪ Few advertisers
S Sociological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low literacy ▪ Urban-rural divide
T Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low rural internet access ▪ Our website is blocked
E Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk of crop failure, leading to economic hardship ▪ Installing solar panels can reduce cost and carbon footprint
L Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Media laws weaponised to censor us

The PESTEL Analysis discussed in [Chapter 1.1](#) is a bird's eye view of your market seen across **P**olitical, **E**conomic, **S**ociological, **T**echnological, **E**nvironmental, and **L**egal pillars. The aim is to **assess your operating environment**. Especially in restricted or changing markets, this is useful in clarifying the inherent obstacles and opportunities you might encounter,

such as censorship and business interference. It is simple to complete and should be shown as a table with commentary afterwards to explain the key points. The chart above has some common items that you might include, but you should consider your own market and add your own items.

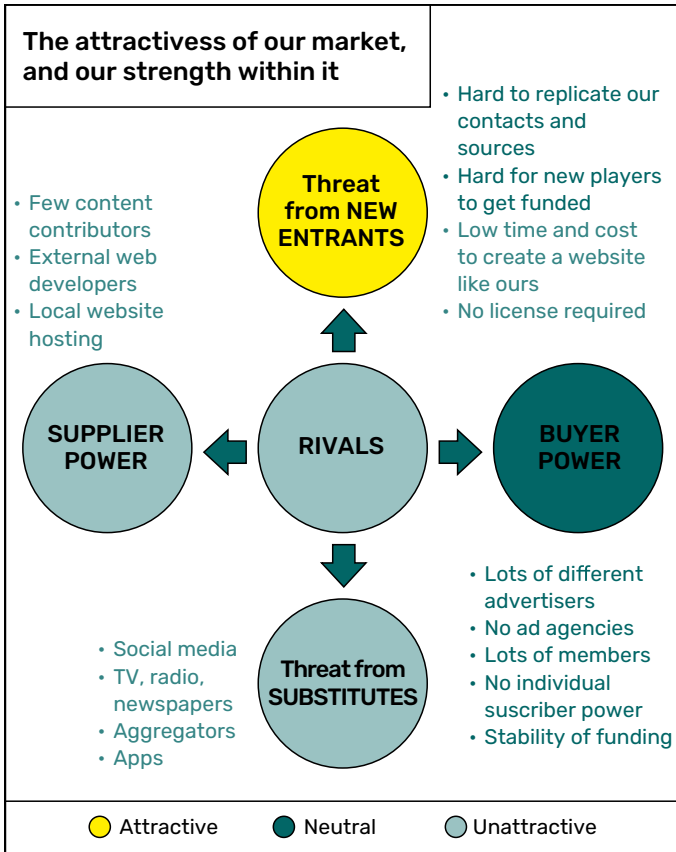
In this section of your strategy, comment on the key points and anything you believe might change during the period of your strategy. The PESTEL analysis should acknowledge the stability or volatility of the market you are in, which you largely have no control over. It gives you and your stakeholders a clear picture of risks you need to mitigate and scenarios you need to be ready for.

Also worth considering using are the [Media Viability Indicators](#), developed by Deutsche Welle Akademie as a detailed adaptation of the PESTEL model, specific to media businesses. Make sure to read the methodology first, before applying the indicators. We recommend using this if a very detailed analysis of your market is necessary. If you do not use the entire framework, it can still provide a very useful list of factors to check in your markets.

3. Market Attractiveness Assessment

After examining your operating environment using the PESTEL Analysis or Media Viability Indicators, it is useful to **assess your market's attractiveness**. The [Porter's Five Forces analysis](#) reveals how attractive and untapped your specific market is, and how strong your position is within it. It looks at how your market is now and what you expect it to be in the next 2–3 years. Untapped markets with high potential are referred to as 'blue oceans' in which your organization has all the market-level conditions it needs to be successful. The theory is that — if the market is worth competing in — all blue oceans eventually turn 'red', as competitors enter the market and attack each other for dominance. As competition intensifies, it is often harder to differentiate your offering from others and be financially sustainable. For media businesses, a blue ocean might exist where no other media outlet is trying to reach the same audience segment as you, in the same way you are.

The following is an adaptation of this standard business tool (video explainer [here](#)) to be specific to an example media business.

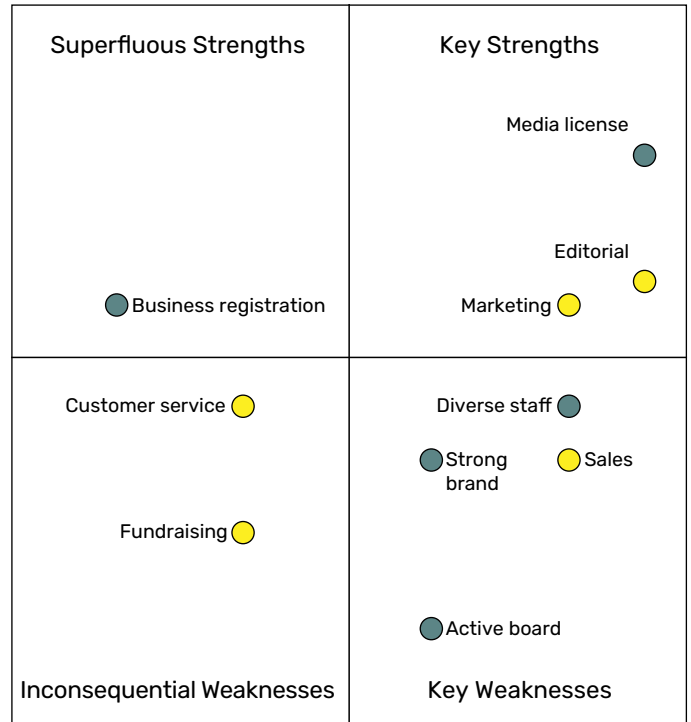


A template for making your own version of the Five Forces Analysis is below.

4. Resources & Capabilities

Do we have the resources and capabilities to succeed, and how will we fill in the gaps? This analysis allows you to illustrate all the things your organization needs to *have* (i.e., Resources) and *be able to do* (i.e., Capabilities) to be successful. For the Media Business Strategy, think of your resources and capabilities at an organizational level; you can repeat this analysis for your sub-strategies with items related to those (e.g., include ‘a great website’ as a resource required in your Digital Strategy).

For each resource and capability, give a score between 0 and 10 for both their strategic importance and your current strength. Then plot them on a chart like this:



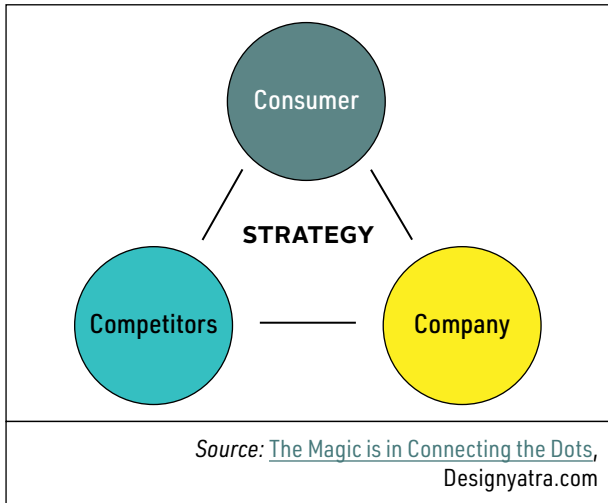
In this chart, the resources and capabilities you need are on the right of the chart, and those you need less are on the left (if you invest time and money in these, you can consider reducing or eliminating that). All items in the bottom-right of the chart are things you need to strengthen to make your strategy work.

You can generate the chart for your media business using this template:

5. Long-Term, Competitive Advantages

Do any of these resources and capabilities offer us long-term competitive advantages? Maintaining competitive advantage is key to long-term success. The more advantages you can identify, develop, and maintain, the more your future business will remain relevant by offering something unique and compelling to its target audiences.

To establish which of your organization’s key strengths can deliver long-term, competitive advantage, use the VRIO Analysis.



You can also use the Strategic Triangle Tool outlined in [Chapter 1.1](#) to analyse your media organization in terms of its customers and competitors.

6. Value

How can we deliver more and differentiated value to our audiences and businesses than our competitors? As a media business, you are not just delivering content. You are creating value — for people, advertisers, staff, shareholders, stakeholders and — hopefully — society at large.

But how do you illustrate your position in the market relative to competitors? The Value Curve analysis is very useful to create and include in your strategy document.

7. Adapting to Change

How will we adapt to change? In this section, describe the key factors that would cause your organization to reassess its strategy. It can be useful to refer back to your PESTEL analysis for external factors that your organization does not control.

8. Financial Sustainability and Impact

How will we achieve financial sustainability and impact? This does not need to be a full summary of your financial forecast, but rather a simple overview of

how your organization will generate income, control costs, and deliver impact.

As discussed, it is important to include work towards diversifying sources of revenue — both funding and self-generated — and ideally increasing the percentage of self-generated revenue. If your organization is successful in securing funding, this can be an ideal time to focus on diversification and innovation.

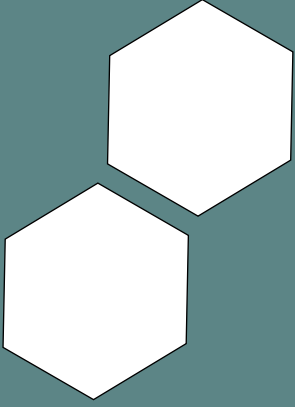
This strategy should be followed up with a business plan and financial forecast, which illustrate the financial sustainability of the organization.

9. Work Plan

How will we mobilise this strategy with a work plan? In this section, you should provide a breakdown of your organization's goals along with specific activities towards achieving them, timelines, and the resources you will need.

Goal: [description]				
Task #	Task	Lead	Estimated Deadline	Resources Required
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Together, these elements will make up the core of your media business strategy and provide a plan for how to move your business forward. The chapters ahead will provide resources and guidance on how to use audience analytics, market your organization to businesses and consumers, and develop diverse revenue streams. As you begin to build out your strategy, consider how you can improve your current operations, incorporate any new ideas you come across into your media market, and fine-tune your media business strategy along the way.



2

Audience Insights, Analytics & Targeting

2

Audience Insights, Analytics & Targeting

Media managers and journalists have rich data sources that help them to understand their current and potential audiences. Audience data, in conjunction with other data, are used strategically and in real-time to make and refine content, market effectively, and plan. They support the testing of different approaches and clarify what works and what does not. And they help refine what stories are covered, how they are reported, and which formats are most effective.

These data, in conjunction with first-hand market experience, are used to identify target audience groups. A target audience group is one that your organization seeks to engage with and create an ongoing and (perhaps) profitable relationship. Your organization identifies ways to meet its needs, market to it effectively, acquire it as a user segment, and deepen its engagement with both your content and your brand.

Understanding your Audience

Whatever your media organization's goals, understanding the dynamics of your audiences and customers is essential. Differing goals require different priorities for using data to identify target audiences and their behaviors.

Suppose a media organization has a **business-to-business** core model, reliant on advertising or **sponsorship** revenues. In that case, it typically seeks to expand audience reach among the consumers who offer the most value to their advertisers. Often, this includes women and youth audiences because of their significant influence on consumer spending. Thus, audience research focuses on ways to expand reach, increase reading frequency, and deepen engagement among those target audiences. It likely includes audience data from social media platforms that drive audiences to owned websites. The greater the audience in those desirable segments, the more they can be sold to advertisers.

On the other hand, if a media organization operates a consumer-revenue-first model, it will seek to increase reach and engagement among readers with the greatest likelihood of paying for content or other services. Heavy users who spend more time on a website are more likely to subscribe. Those audiences often have a different profile from those who are targeted by advertisers, and social media audiences may be less relevant.

Donor supported media may have different requirements. Donors may seek to increase audience reach among specific gender, age, religious, regional, or ethnic groups.

Thus, in a world awash in data, before identifying target audiences and which data to review, it is important to establish what your organization's objectives are for understanding them. That will then guide which types of research are appropriate for your organization and how the data are measured.

Common types of audience data include:

- Demographic data that describe audiences
- Behavioral data that describe their interests and activities
- Usage data that show how users engage with content
- Audience data measuring how people use a wide variety of media (compiled using statistically valid survey research)

Those data may shed light — on both a large scale and in detail:

- Who audiences are and are not
- Who could potentially become audiences
- Their content use and preferences
- How deeply they engage with content
- Areas or regions where they reside

- Their behaviors, interests, and activities
- Their primary languages
- How they navigate to a website or social media platform
- Their likely willingness to pay for content

These data help guide newsroom decision-making and overall marketing approaches. Clearly, news content is expensive to produce and many news organizations have tight resources.

“The problem of news outlets is not that they produce too much content, but perhaps that they produce too much content that only a few people actually read.”

— Grzegorz Piechota, [Nurturing Value for News Consumers](#), INMA

Using analytics tools like Google Analytics, or more sophisticated tools provided by commercial sources, newsrooms can evaluate how their content resonates with audiences and focus their limited resources on content that audiences value.

From a management perspective, these data also serve as a scorecard of how well content resonates with those audiences. Metrics that show how users engage with content are often revealing.

*For an example of a news organization that used audience **analytics** to inform a news content strategy, [click here](#). In this case study, Observatorul de Nor (OdN), a newspaper in Moldova, grew its online presence by investing in audience analytics. OdN's staff committed to ongoing analysis and engagement, which allowed for a better understanding of audience preferences, expanded reach, and more tailored journalism.*

Learning Objectives

Media managers and journalists need access to data from a diversity of sources to help them to understand their audiences, content performance, and potential gaps in reporting or engagement opportunities. Developing a clear plan for collecting data, analyzing it, and filtering this through daily and long-term decision-making at all levels of your media organization can be key to building the power of your brand and creating new business opportunities.

In this chapter, you will:

1. Learn about the **importance of data in media management** and understand how to differentiate between key data and analytics terms.
2. **Explore different forms of media research** and understand the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.
3. Learn how to **get started with data analytics** using the Google Analytics platform.

2.1

Data Analytics, Metrics, and More

Data, Analytics, Metrics, and More

Data and metrics are at the heart of almost every business activity, process, and plan. We measure progress using comparisons to prior years, or to evaluate whether we've reached our goals. We track individual performance based on quality scores. We identify how well audiences are responding to news contents using engagement data.

Today, as news media embrace consumer revenue business models, privacy laws mandate stricter data management, and third-party cookies are making internal data management essential, it is important to distinguish what types of data we're looking at.

We show here the most used types of measurements — they all represent something different, but are used collectively in media strategy, planning, and management. In the next section, [Chapter 2.2](#), you will also find a guide on different forms of media research for data collection.

Data

Data are the “raw material” of decision-making. They are the information that is used as a basis for thinking about issues or situations, for decisions, or for calculations. We capture data every day: how many miles were walked; what time the sun came up; the number of people who viewed our website.

News organizations capture a wide assortment of data that inform their management decisions.

- **Financial data:** This includes revenue and expense information, payment histories, historical costs, payroll information, and much more. It is usually managed in a financial software package.

- **Customer data:** These data identify who current and past customers are, how they are reached, and what their purchasing history has been. Often it is organized in a CRM, or Customer Relationship Management tool.
- **Audience data:** These capture information about who is using our content, how often, and in what formats. They capture the basic measurements of how audiences came to a website or app; how long they stayed; what types of content they engaged with; what types of content they avoided. They are captured by tools such as Google Analytics or Facebook Insights.

Analytics

Analytics takes the raw material of data and transforms it into tools. They are data that is extracted and categorized for analysis, and often include dashboards and reports. Google Analytics, Facebook Business Suite Insights, and YouTube Analytics all provide tools for transforming data into meaning.

Some sample analytics include:

- **Audience acquisition:** How audiences came to a website, where visitors originated from
- **Audience behaviors:** What they do when they visit your site
- **Conversion reports:** How many people in your audience converted to paying customers

Metrics

Metrics put different pieces of data together to create a measurement of performance. They often show something in relation to something else.

People use them all the time. For example, when driving a car, we think of how many miles per liter of gas we can drive. When monitoring our own health, we count how many steps per day we walk.

Some common metrics that media use include:

- **Profit margin:** The amount of money a business retains from its gross earnings
- **Sales growth:** The variance, positive or negative, of sales in one period versus an earlier time period
- **Cost-per-thousand (CPM):** The price of reaching a thousand customers with one ad impression

Metadata

Metadata is the data ... about the data. In digital photography, the basic data about an image is when the photo was taken. But the metadata shows the precise time, what aperture was used, what the equivalent film speed was, its geolocation, and how large the file was.

For news organizations, metadata can include more descriptive information about their reporting.

In fact, journalists need to understand metadata to avoid leaving a trail that points towards their anonymous sources. Every document, every email, includes metadata about who created the file, when, how long it took to create, how many people were involved in its preparation, and who they are.

Statistics

Statistics allow us to look at a small number of people and project their behavior to a larger group of people. It is a type of mathematics that collects, classifies, analyzes, and interprets numerical facts. It can draw inferences using tools such as probability and projection. It uses a variety of reliable “tools” — such as standard deviations and regression analysis.

What are its most common uses for news media?

- Audience ratings: Nielson, GeoPoll, and other audience measurement services survey a representative sample of a population and measure its use of different media. Because it is drawn from a sample that is carefully selected to represent the larger population, the data can be projected to represent that larger group.

- Polling: An opinion poll, often used to project people's views on politics or issues, is a survey of public opinion. It, too, is based on a statistically valid sample that can be accurately projected to a larger group and its subgroups. For example, a poll of all voters can be broken down by gender, age, or political party.

KPI: Key Performance Indicators (Inspect what you Expect)

These are performance measurements that are used to track progress towards an organization's goals. A management mantra is “Inspect what you Expect.” That is, always track the variables that contribute to an organization achieving its goals. They can be a blend of data, metrics, and analytics.

News media use many **Key Performance Indicators** in sales, marketing, finance, and across the organization:

- Sales per hour
- Revenue per customer
- Profit
- Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)
- Employee Turnover Rate (ETR)
- Employee Satisfaction

Tips for Success

- Organizations that successfully integrate audience insights into their operations have a scientific and creative curiosity about their meaning. They believe the data and seek to understand it.
- They test ideas using techniques like **A/B testing** to evaluate and refine their approaches.
- Data are reviewed on a daily (minimum) basis, and in real time, as possible.
- They use data to shape content and product approaches, and to refine specific aspects of reporting, such as testing better approaches to headlines or story length.

Key Terms

These are some frequently used shorthand notations.

■ **YOY:** Year-over-year variance — comparing one set of data to the same data set from the same time a year previously

■ **X = Y:** The values of X and Y are the same

■ **X ≤ Y:** The value X is less than or equal to the amount Y

■ **X ≥ Y:** The value X is greater than or equal to the amount Y

■ **Δ%:** Percent variance. This shows how much relative growth or decline there has been in two numbers. For example, if the average selling price of something last year was \$112, and this year it is \$131, the Δ% is 17%. It is calculated by subtracting the benchmark number (112) from the new number (131), and then dividing that result by the original benchmark number. So $(131-112)/112 = 17\%$.

Please note that this is a statistic that shows the relative variance between two numbers. It is different from comparing two percentages. For example, if a metric grew from 50% to 60%, a ten-point increase, it would be a 20% variance.

Resources

[The Google Analytics Academy](#) offers introductory and advanced courses in using its GA tools. Graduates earn certificates from these free and well-organized courses. It is an essential learning source for any organization with GA installed on its digital offerings. Understanding how GA works and what data it captures can inform newsroom editorial decision-making and marketing operations. It offers options for beginning, advanced, and power users.

YouTube offers analytics, as well, within its [Creator Studio](#). Here's a short video on getting started: [How to Use Analytics](#).

[Facebook Audience Insights](#) offers users an opportunity to look at aggregate data about people connected to their Facebook pages, and people on Facebook. It offers demographic, lifestyle, usage, and interest data. These data are useful in refining page strategies and identifying target audiences.

Knight International Journalism Fellow Mariano Blejman wrote this article about the use of metadata in journalism on IJNet: [Why Journalists Need to Know About Metadata](#). It references the Edward Snowden case and the role metadata played. These two videos give practical instructions on identifying and cleaning metadata out of documents: [How to Analyze Metadata](#) and [How to Clean Metadata](#).

2.2

Guide to Research used by News Media

As your staff begins to incorporate more research into day-to-day decision-making, media managers will need to develop a plan for data collection. There is a diversity of research methods available to collect and analyze data that can guide content decisions, resource allocation, and broader organizational strategy.

“Qualitative data” are descriptive — they are derived from focus groups, interviews, and other sources. They are often used to understand contexts and to generate insights that are otherwise difficult to capture. Qualitative data often help tell the story about a situation or environment; it is investigative in nature and helps develop insights into why things are a certain way. News media often use qualitative data derived from focus groups to better understand target audience segments.

“Quantitative data” are measurable — they are data that can be counted, measured, and compared using numbers. They can be used to generate charts, graphs, time-series, and comparisons to other data sets. News media use a wide range of quantitative data to measure financial performance, track audience engagement, and develop **Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs).

Additional definitions on data, metrics, and analytics can be found in [Chapter 2.1](#).

The following tables show three forms of media research that can be useful to seek out for an analysis of your content, platforms, and the media market at large. For each, you will find information about the purpose of the research, the methodology used, who can conduct and manage the research, and the frequency with which a media outlet could conduct the research. You will also find examples of platforms that provide analysis support as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. This guide can provide a starting point for brainstorming what forms of data you need to achieve your goals and what is possible for your news organization.

Audience Research

Audience research collects data about your audience and their use of your digital platforms. Understanding your audience size, demographics, and their preferences through surveys or analytical tools can lead to improvements in user experience and content. In [Chapter 2.3](#) on Using Analytics, you will also find a more in-depth look at how to incorporate Google Analytics for regular audience research.

Consumer Research

Consumer research is used to collect data about consumers, including those who pay to be subscribers or members of your media outlet. These research methods are used to gain broader insights on the performance of your brand, the impact of **subscriptions** and **memberships**, and how audiences are engaging with your social media presence.

For more on collecting data on social media engagement, go to [Chapter 3.3](#) on Using Social Media to Build Your Brand.

	Audience		
	Audience Survey	Audience Insights	Content Analysis
Type of Research	Quantitative	Metrics	Metrics
Purpose	Understand the use of media across populations, or among a geographic, demographic, ethnic, or lifestyle segment. Allows audience size and compositions to be compared across disparate platforms (TV, print, radio, online) that otherwise lack common measurement systems	Understand audiences and their use of digital platforms. Understand audience demographics, locations, frequency of use, and lifestyle attributes	Allow publishers to understand the types of content consumers respond to; assess the user experience; refine their approaches; and track KPIs over time
Methodology	Surveys conducted with a representative sample that can be statistically projected to paint an accurate portrait of the entire population, and each of its important subgroups	Embed tracking code on websites	Embed tracking code on websites. Use a data tool to understand key elements through dashboards, optimization, and reporting
Who Collects or Accesses the Data	Independent research firms collect survey research	Data is accessible to account managers and others granted access	Data is accessible to account managers and others granted access
Frequency	Usually bi-annual or longer frequency	Real-time, daily use, and trendline data	Real-time, daily use, and trendline data
Examples	Scarborough data, BBC Media Action	Google Analytics, Facebook Business Suite Insights, YouTube Analytics	Google Analytics and others that can be assessed internally. Commercial vendors (Chartbeat, Parse.ly, and others) allow data to be accessible in real time in dashboard format
Strengths	Includes users and non-users. Can analyze total cross-platform use of print, broadcast, and digital sources. Can compare use of different media sources among differing demographics, regions, or ethnographic groups. Can assess consumer interest in potential areas of content and understand what gaps exist. In some surveys, can be combined with measures of purchase intent to demonstrate the commercial value of audiences to advertisers	Includes all users in the data set. Data visible in real time. Crosses geographic boundaries. Examines users by platform, method of access (mobile, laptop, etc.), or brand of device	Data can be viewed in real time in newsrooms, allowing editors to track spiking stories and immediately gauge user interest in different stories. Tracks KPIs over the long term. Facilitates A/B content/headline testing. Facilitates understanding the user experience. Publishers can test page elements and adapt the user experience. If used with a business intelligence system (BI), can view multiple data sets simultaneously. If subscribed to a service, can be compared to peer-group results
Weaknesses	Expensive to produce. It looks backward in time and the data ages quickly. Can miss minorities because of language and access issues. Time limits on length of questionnaire. Can be too expensive to measure audiences outside core geography	Only measures users; does not track non-users or potential audiences. Demographics are imputed rather than known. Cannot project to unmeasured audiences	Does not directly measure content gaps that might attract new audiences. Cost to subscribe to a dashboard intelligence system can be expensive for smaller organizations

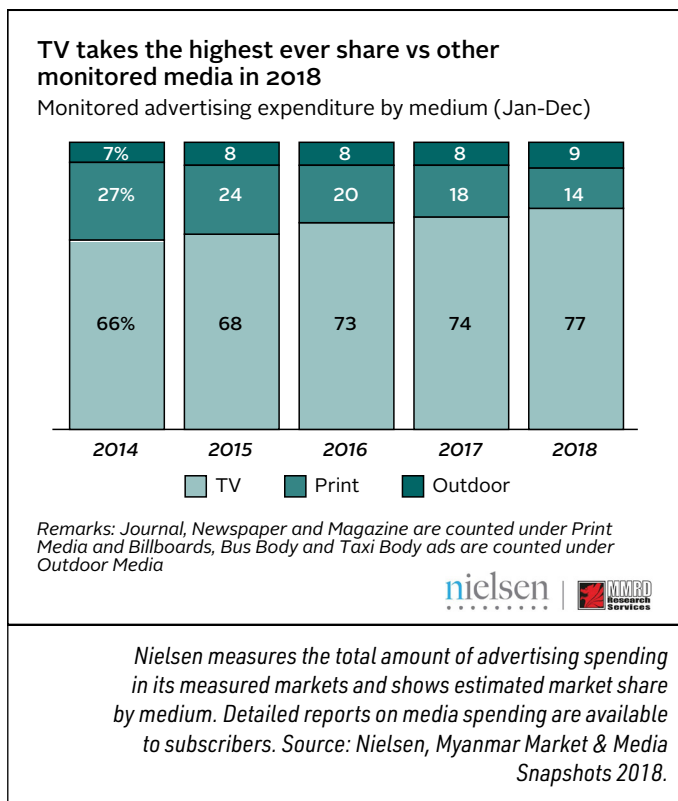
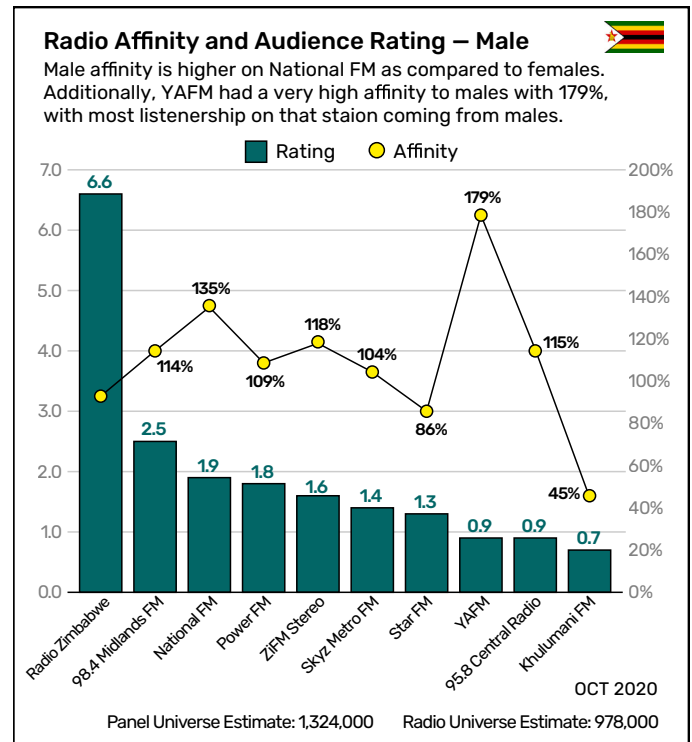
	Audience		
	Audience Survey	Audience Insights	Content Analysis
Type of Research	Qualitative, quantitative	Metrics and financial performance	Analytics
Purpose	Assess brand affinity, likeability, resonance and relevance to various consumer groups. Test positioning approaches.	Measure the impact of subscriber and membership campaigns. Improve the KPIs and ROIs of those campaigns by isolating different aspects of — and response rates to — the subscription funnel. Calculate the lifetime value of differing consumer groups. Segment audiences by financial value.	Understand audiences' use of social media platforms and content and use that to guide decision-making. Allows people given access to the data to examine audience demographics, lifestyles, content behaviors, and site engagement.
Methodology	Surveys. Focus groups and workshops. Consumer intercepts. Social intelligence. Conduct a brand audit to assess brand coherence and continuity.	Software tools interface with underlying digital user data sets	Social media platforms have their own analytics tools to interact with their data.
Who Collects or Accesses the Data	Professional researchers, universities; brand audits can be conducted internally or by local resources.	Piano, Mather	Facebook Business Suite, Facebook Events Manager, Twitter Analytics, Instagram Insights. There are also a wide range of social listening tools that allow marketers to know what people are saying about them on social media. Paid tools like Sprout Social aggregate and analyze social media data into dashboards.
Frequency	Brand audits should be continually monitored. Brand research as needed.	Real-time, daily use, and trendline data	Real-time, daily use, and trendline data
Examples		These programs provide data that help decision-making at every step in an example subscriber funnel: awareness, engagement, conversion, payment, and renewal.	Social listening tools identify what users are saying about a brand so that the company can respond. User analytics help page owners understand what audiences are engaging with their content and dig deeper into those that go viral.
Strengths	Can help strengthen or redirect brand management. Can be used to evaluate the organization's brand equity and its contributions to financial performance and company valuation.	Allows insight into what works, what doesn't, as the company seeks to attract and retain paying customers. Facilitates testing. Fast data can lead to quickly responding to opportunities, or abandoning approaches that do not work.	These data help managers optimize the use of their social media presence. Social media audiences tend to be different from those using news websites.
Weaknesses	Branding is both science and art. The data should be a springboard to creativity, but are sometimes taken literally and out of context, with the result that the marketing efforts become lackluster and literal.	Requires strong in-house technical skills. Can be expensive relative to the size of an organization. Subscription programs are a valuable long-term source of revenue, but often take years to gain critical mass.	Social media users are difficult to monetize, so a focus on these data must also be taken within the broader context of a media organization's overall strategy: what role do the social audiences play in cross-promoting content? In creating brand awareness?

Advertising Research

Advertising research is used to collect data about the advertising market. It is typically conducted by specialized research organizations such as [Nielsen](#) or [eMarketer](#) and paid for by advertisers, ad agencies, or media houses. There are two major types of research: those that estimate the size and value of the advertising market, and those that measure the reach of various media across channels and audiences, which are often expressed as audience ratings.

If available, seeking out the advertising research conducted in your media market by external researchers can allow your managers to recognize the value of the ad market, determine who are your competitors in ratings and audience, and strategize about how to market to advertisers in different industries. For example, eMarketer provides insights on advertising research topics including [digital ad spending](#) around the world and in specific regional markets, [TV advertising](#), and [social media](#). [Nielsen](#) provides audience measurement and ratings across different forms of media. [Geopoll](#) also provides audience measurement and other consumer research through varying methodologies in African, Asian, and Latin American

markets. While these services can provide important insights, these data are usually proprietary, expensive, and can be more difficult to obtain for smaller organizations that are unable to pay for access on some of these platforms or commission research themselves.



Nielsen and other research organizations, such as GeoPoll, track audience ratings to show:

- How many people viewed, listened to, or accessed media during a period of time
- Their demographics
- Which channels they watched
- Which shows they watched
- Those data are available to subscribers and form the basis of advertising rating systems.

Source: GeoPoll, Zimbabwe Media Ratings, October 2020.

	Advertising	
	Ad Market Spend; Market Share by Segment	Ratings
Type of Research	Measurement and estimates	Quantitative and projected
Purpose	Evaluate the overall size of the advertising market. Measure and estimate how much money is spent in each major segment (grocery, health, auto, real estate, etc.); in each type of media (print, broadcast, digital); and with each media house.	Measure the audience size and demographics of programming to establish a way to value and set rates for advertising. Allows advertisers to compare the relative cost of reaching 1000 customers (cost-per-thousand, or CPM) in different contexts.
Methodology	Measurement and estimates	Diaries of sample populations with projections, often in "sweeps weeks." Ratings systems are changing to allow audience comparability across digital and legacy platforms. New rating systems are using mobile technologies to reach broader samples in real time.
Who Collects or Accesses the Data	eMarketer, MMRD	GeoPoll, Comscore
Frequency	Professional services; in-house tracking	Monthly, seasonal, daily - depending on the service provider
Examples	eMarketer, local providers such as MMRD	GeoPoll Audience
Strengths	Allows media organizations to understand the shape of the advertising market, determine competitors, and devise strategies. Helpful in setting sales targets and identifying opportunities.	Allows advertisers to target specific consumer groups and compare how much it costs to reach them in different programs, and using various channels.
Weaknesses	Usually misses "below the line" spending on events, or in-person marketing activities. Revenue projections are directional, not specific, and must be taken as relative measures of advertising weight rather than being absolutely accurate.	Ratings data are a look back in time. Nielsen data has been criticized in various countries for being under-sampled or for having manipulated ratings. And rating systems often only measure those outlets that participate in the system; they tend to reinforce the dominance of the largest players, while emerging or smaller organizations remain invisible within the ratings systems and, thus, to advertisers.

Resource:

The [Advertising Research Foundation](#) website has a wide range of information on audience research and how to use it credibly.

2.3 *Using Analytics to Understand Audiences*

Analytics takes the raw material of data and provides tools to make meaning of the data. They are data that is extracted and categorized for analysis, and often include dashboards and reports. One of the most commonly used free platforms — Google Analytics — provides tools for assessing the performance of a website; social media analytics tools offer insights into how an organization's social presence is used by audiences. All analytics provide tools for transforming data into meaning.

Audience analytics sit at the heart of initiatives designed to engage audiences, generate reader revenue, and support increased opportunities for advertising revenue. They inform decisions about content, marketing, and overall strategy. They are useful both in real time and when viewed over longer periods. In real time, analytics can guide up-to-the-minute content decisions: which stories to elevate? Which are trending? Which stories are underperforming?

When viewed over time, trends in audience reach and use guide overall strategy and inform decisions about allocating resources.

Getting Started with Analytics

Getting started with any analytics tool is easy but requires set-up. When [installing the Google Analytics](#) tracking code on your website, for example, it is important to carefully follow instructions. An imperfect installation can result in inaccurate results, which then influence and corrupt decisions made in response to the data. Once installed, users should activate behavior tracking.

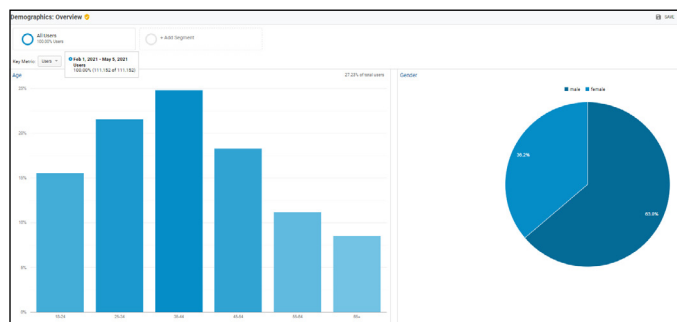
It is important to do this set-up as soon as a website is up and running. Data start collecting from the moment the analytics tool is activated; it is impossible to go back in time and search for earlier information. Since trend data are essential to overall performance and targeting measurement, the deeper your organization's data go, the better.

Within most analytics tools, media managers can set up specific marketing goals and target audiences. The analytics tools will also automatically generate reports to designated recipients. Some news organizations share the data widely; others limit what data are shown to everyone, and what are viewed by editors and managers.

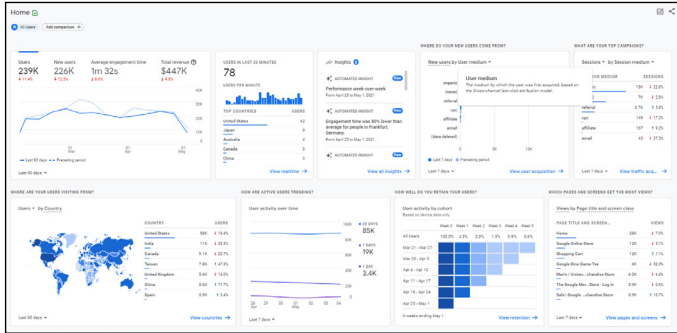
For a complete list of the data and metrics used in Google Analytics, click [here](#).

What questions should data answer for your organization? Here are the most important ones:

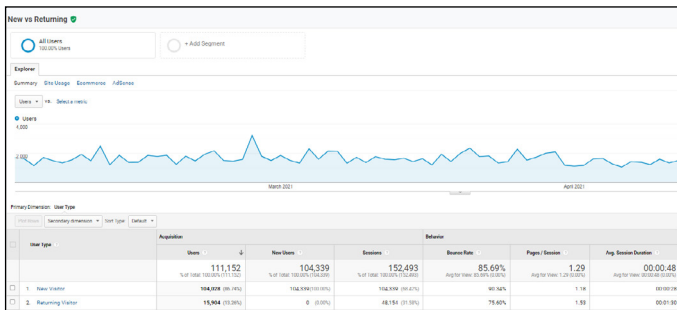
- **What is the profile of our users and how do they use the site?** Using Google Analytics as the key example (and its demonstration data set), its home page delivers “cards” that show key analytics for a date range that you specify. These cards show how many users have used the site, how they have engaged, traffic during the last 30 minutes, how many have come from organic versus other sources, and where they live.
- **Who are our users?** These data are found in the Audience section and can show gender and other demographic data. It can also show user volume and engagement by device type (e.g., desktop or mobile device), browser, and operating system.



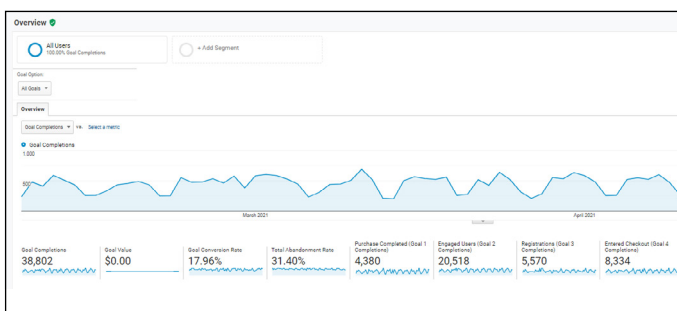
- **How did they get here?** The Acquisition section shows if users arrived at your website directly, via social media, search engines, or referring websites.



- **What are they doing here?** Which content is best at attracting new users and engaging users when on the website? Which content causes users to leave the website? With answers to these questions, editors can better understand how to connect with their audiences. Note that the chart below has a spike pattern: that is a good sign. It shows that people come to the site in response to the news, that content attracts them to the website.



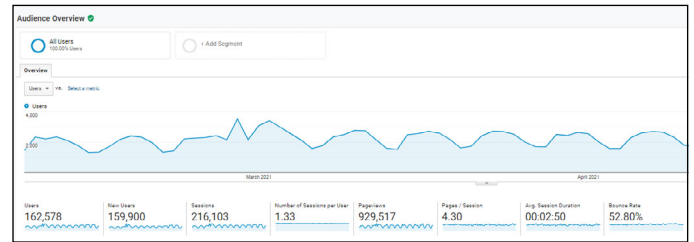
- **What are our goals for them?** Google Analytics and other tools help media organizations set up target audience groups and establish marketing and conversion goals for them. These tools inform marketing processes and help organizations test and model different approaches.



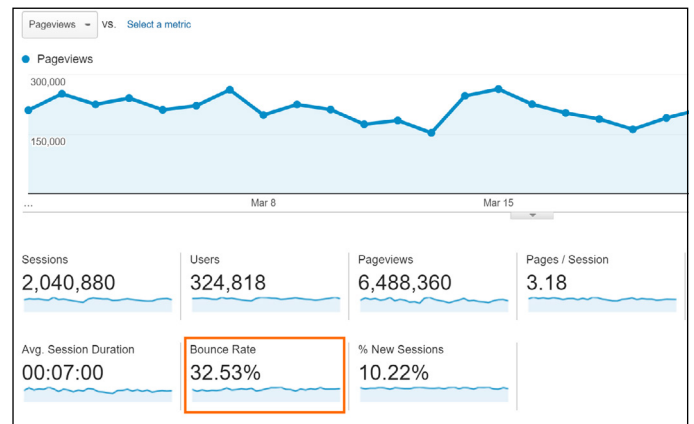
Essential Measures

What are some signs of a healthy website?

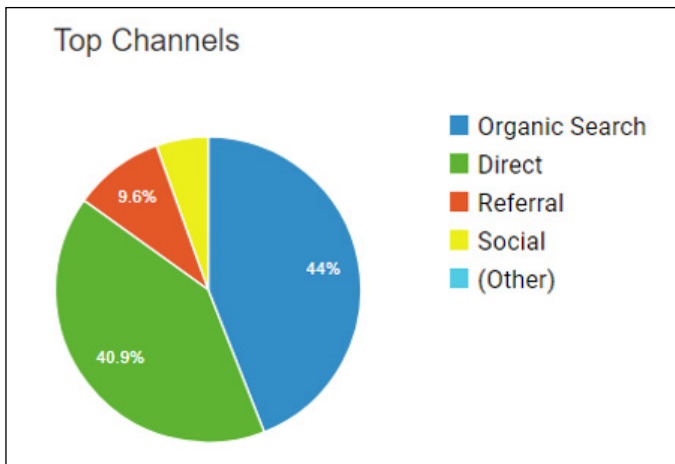
- **Stickiness and engagement:** Users visit 3 or more pages per session, on average, and they remain on the site for a duration that indicates genuine engagement with the content.



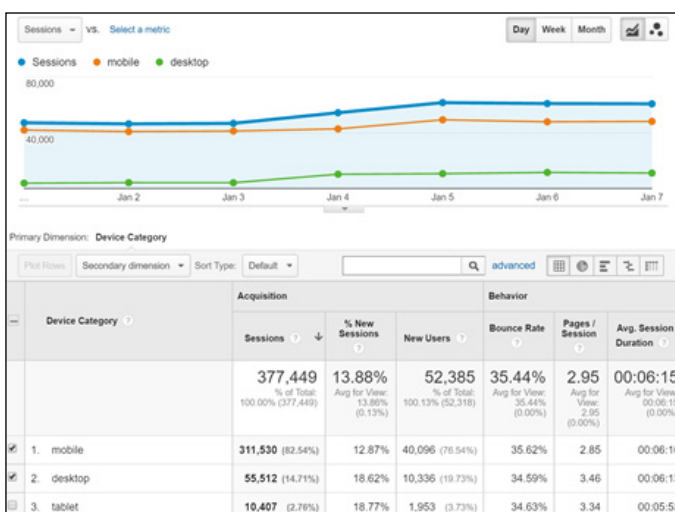
- **People come to your site and stay:** The bounce rate (i.e., the percentage of single-page visits) is between 30-40%: people come to the site and stay on it because it meets their needs. Very high bounce rates can indicate poor content, poor user experience, non-human or spam traffic, low content volume, or excessive dependence on traffic from social media.



- **There are diverse referral sources:** Less than 50% of traffic comes from a single source. Over-reliance on traffic from social media and search engines can be risky due to the external decisions and algorithms that drive these platforms. It is always best to target a high volume of direct traffic, with new audiences reached via organic search, social media, and referrals.



- **Mobile users comprise most of the audience.** Worldwide, [53% of the world's daily time online is on mobile devices](#) as people access sites using mobile devices. As a media business, if most of your users visit from desktop devices, you are missing a large portion of potential users.



Tips for Success

- Managers and top executives should use analytics data in decision-making and review it daily.
- Data should be actively shared and discussed during meetings among staffers.
- The organization sets cross-departmental goals and departments work together to achieve them.
- Key people in newsroom and marketing roles should “own” the data and advocate for actions that address what they observe.

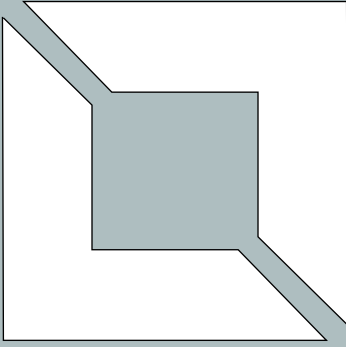
Resources

There are numerous types of analytics available to publishers, such as:

- [Google Analytics](#)
- [Facebook Audience Insights](#)
- [Twitter Analytics](#)
- [Instagram Insights](#)
- [Tik Tok Analytics](#)
- [YouTube Studio Analytics](#)
- [Chartbeat](#)
- [IO Technologies](#)
- [Smartocto](#)
- [Metrics for News](#)

The [Google Analytics Academy](#) is where every user should get started. It offers a strong online learning experience with short modules of text, examples, quizzes, and videos. It offers certificates and has different levels for beginner, advanced, and power users.

The free courses take about 4-6 hours to complete and are available in Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Czech, Dutch, English, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and Vietnamese.



3

Media Brand Marketing

3

Introduction to Media Brand Marketing

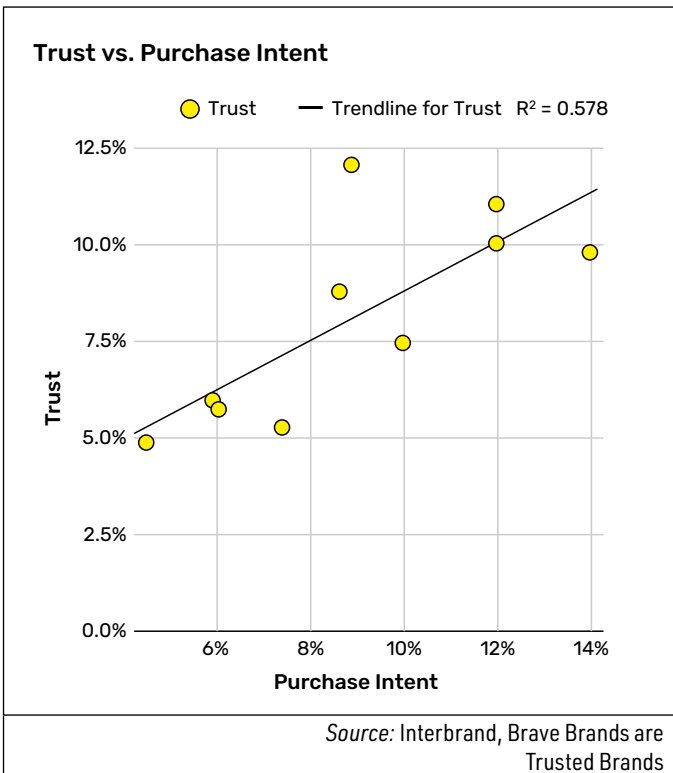
A strong brand helps build financial strength, increases audience loyalty, and creates **brand equity**, improving its value over time. For media organizations, creating a brand that audiences trust and turn to for their information needs is critical, especially in contexts of increased disinformation or where there is a lack of social trust in media institutions. Here are seven reasons why committing to building your brand's strength is central to business success.

- 1. The more people trust a brand, the more likely they are to buy and use it.** **Interbrand** research shows that: "There is a direct correlation between audience expressing trust and purchase intent."

key components: an analysis of the financial performance of the branded products or services, the role the brand plays in purchase decisions, and the brand's competitive strength.

During the turbulent year of 2020, the aggregate value of the top 100 global brands grew by 9%. Not all showed growth during the pandemic, but it can be argued that the strength of their brands helped carry them through. The conclusion? "It's clear that in 2020, strong brands have become stronger as a result of the COVID effect, which has accelerated digital transformation trends..."

The dollar values in this chart reflect the portion of the purchase decision attributable to the brand itself, as opposed to other factors (for example, purchase drivers such as price, convenience, or product features).



- 2. A strong brand adds premium value to the overall financial strength of an organization.** **Interbrand's Global Brand Ranking** assesses the impact that brand contributes to the overall valuation of a company. It considers three

01 +38% 322,999 \$m	02 +60% 200,667 \$m	03 +53% 166,001 \$m	04 -1% 165,444 \$m	05 +2% 62,289 \$m
06 -10% 56,894 \$m	07 -8% 51,595 \$m	08 -3% 49,268 \$m	09 -6% 42,816 \$m	10 -8% 40,773 \$m
11 -4% 39,756 \$m	12 -8% 36,971 \$m	13 -12% 35,178 \$m	14 -14% 34,885 \$m	15 +6% 34,388 \$m
16 -4% 34,119 \$m	17 -2% 31,720 \$m	18 +12% 28,011 \$m	19 New 26,060 \$m	20 -11% 21,694 \$m
21 -4% 21,203 \$m	22 +6% 20,220 \$m	23 -10% 19,458 \$m	24 +6% 19,161 \$m	25 +3% 18,870 \$m

Source: Interbrand, [Best Global Brands 2020](#), [A New Decade of Possibility](#)

3. **Strong brands empower companies to charge premium pricing.** Customers have a higher perception of their value and a lower sense of risk. In addition, customers use those brands as a means of self-expression, for example, if you wear Nike shoes or drive a Mercedes or a Range Rover.
4. Strong brands make promotion more cost-effective. Satisfied customers will both tell others and share on social media.

“If you do build a great experience, customers tell each other about that. Word of mouth is very powerful.”

— Jeff Bezos, Amazon

5. **A strong brand lowers the cost of sales.** It leads to lower acquisition costs because the organization has repeat and frequent purchasers. Loyal customers are profitable customers.
6. **Strong brands contribute to larger market share.** **Brand preference** and top-of-mind awareness combine to keep loyal customers coming back. They also offer protection against competitors who find it difficult to differentiate from brand leaders.
7. **Strong brands contribute to higher employee retention and satisfaction.** Employees who understand and embrace their organization’s mission, often exemplified in their brand, can be more committed and take pride in their work.

Learning Objectives

For media brands, building and maintaining a reputable brand across all platforms is critical to long-term success and audience growth. In the media industry, a brand might encompass a news organization’s visual identity, the journalistic values it is committed to, and the broader mission it seeks to fulfill with reporting, marketing services, or other lines of business.

In this chapter, you will:

1. Learn about the value of building a trustworthy, consistent, and differentiated media brand in attracting both loyal audiences and potential advertisers.
2. Find examples of how to build your media brand with well-designed and responsive social media engagement.

3.1 *Trust, News Brands, and Marketing*

A brand is more than a logo or a slogan, it also encompasses your news organization's **brand personality**, brand values, and presentation to its audience. Brands and brand-building combine science with art.

They start with science: Understanding your current and potential audiences. Knowing what they care about and how they use news media. Understanding the appeal of your competitors and what makes them attractive. For new outlets, the 'science' is understanding audience demographics, interests, and behaviors.

The science then combines with art: How is your organization's personality communicated through words, images, colors, language, sound, and events? What will communicate not just with the minds of your audiences, but their hearts? Their emotions?

How is it unique?

The brand expert Seth Godin [defines a brand](#) as "a set of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another." For consumer products such as shampoo, make-up, watches, or other products, these stories and expectations are largely conceived in the marketing department. The brand becomes bigger than the product.

News media branding is different. The "product" is crafted by life and how it is observed and reported by journalists. The **brand values** and relevance of news media often stem from three key areas: trust, local, and courageous journalism. The intersection of these three is a powerful differentiator from other news sources.

Trust includes trust in the content, its credibility, and in the organization that produces it. Readers trust that it is doing both the right thing and doing it in a trustworthy way. Trust also includes that the news organization understands and values "me": my needs, my community, my hopes, my fears.

Local is the area that a news organization can credibly cover using local sources and understanding its context. For a small community, it could extend a few square miles. For a state or provincial news organization, it could extend to the nation's capital and cover the impact of national decisions on local communities. And for global media organizations, "local" is providing accurate reporting on events around the world.

But "local" is more than geography. Community news can be relevant because it touches people, places, and topics close to the lives of readers. When looked at through the lens of brand values, it also expresses the health of local democracy, the accountability of local powerful people, and community pride.

Courageous journalism reflects the fact-based, independent, and investigative reporting that follows the truth, wherever it leads.

“What we do is journalism, but what we sell is the idea of journalism. People might read mostly about crimes and accidents, but they want to pay for watchdog and investigative journalism.”

— Greg Piechota, INMA Researcher In Residence

Cultivating and maintaining a powerful brand is important for two main reasons:

Strong news brands have power. They have the power to inform citizens, hold officials to account, induce change, and — sometimes — provide comfort. They help create communities. They entertain and enrage; engage and empower. They are personal.

And when they fulfill these roles, they also enhance the ability to make money.

Strong news brands have economic value. They create **brand differentiation** from other offerings which, in turn, supports premium pricing. They offer credibility to new offerings and product introductions. They help attract and retain good employees who are energized by their work. And they are linked to stronger customer acquisition, retention, and lifetime value.

The Importance of Trust

Trust is a critical component in all purchase decisions: the more people trust a brand, the more likely they are to buy it.

That is even more true when it comes to paying for news media. Trust is an essential part of the news media business model: research shows both readers and advertisers are more likely to use and pay for media they trust.

Despite the worldwide infodemic of false news and misinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, [research conducted by The Trust Project and Ipsos](#) at the end of 2020 found that 30% of people in 27 countries were willing to pay for news they could trust. 82% said they only consult news they can trust.

“The economic argument for trust is obvious: The news media model is focused on subscriptions. And readers will not pay for what they do not trust.”

— Dawn McMullan, Senior Editor, INMA, [How News Brands are Rebuilding Trust, 2021](#)

For businesses, placing their ads in trusted mediums drives stronger performance. In 2016, [ComScore concluded](#) that ads appearing on premium content sites outperformed the open web by 67% across numerous brand lift metrics. In 2019, [research from Integral Ad Science \(IAS\) and the World Media Group \(WMG\)](#) confirmed that research, finding that digital ads viewed on quality sites generate a more engaged audience for advertisers which, in turn, is linked to greater advertising effectiveness.

What does this mean to media managers?

First, run a news organization that embraces the brand values of being a credible, trusted, and relevant news source. Pursue courageous stories. Know what is relevant to your audiences.

And then, second, market those brand values in intelligent ways.

Examples

[Ziarul de Gardă \(ZdG\)](#), one of Moldova's first investigative news organizations, developed a creative brand marketing strategy emphasizing how audiences could fight corruption by supporting its investigations, subscribing, and engaging with its content. To read more about this case study, [click here](#).

Fall, 2019 Brand Marketing: “For Halloween, scare a corrupt official. Subscribe him/her to Ziarul de Garda!”
Source: [Ziarul de Gardă](#).



[El Nuevo Día](#) (San Juan, Puerto Rico) highlighted its vital local role in its “[We Live it With You Campaign](#)” and positioned itself as both an observer and a participant in the country’s most memorable — and often difficult — moments.



Key Terms

- **Brand Attributes:** The elements that define a brand — its qualities and personality — in the mind of the customer. They convey the brand’s spirit and tone and guide external communications and internal culture.
- **Brand Awareness:** Customers’ ability to recognize a brand and its value proposition, even in a crowded field, and sometimes with only minimal brand reference. Brand awareness campaigns are often run when launching new brands.

■ **Brand Differentiation:** The perceived distinctiveness of the brand.

■ **Brand Equity:** Refers to the importance of a brand from the customer’s perspective. It is the brand assets or liabilities linked to a brand that either contribute to — or diminish — the value of the brand. It is comprised of brand visibility, customer loyalty, and brand associations. For more on this topic, click [here](#).

■ **Brand Identity:** How users experience the brand via its language, colors, fonts, imagery, sound/video elements, and messaging. These include the brand name and mark, logo, tagline, and specific use of language.

■ **Brand Image:** A user’s perception of the brand based on all its dimensions of product, price, service, and expectations. A non-user’s perception based on reputation, lack of information, or attitude.

■ **Brand Mark:** A symbol, mark, name, slogan, or visual/audio piece that individually, or in combination, identifies the maker or seller of a product, service, or offering.

■ **Brand Personality:** The human personality traits attributed to the brand: serious, austere, friendly, warm, environmentally aware, congenial, intelligent. These differentiate the brand and are reflected in marketing materials, packaging, and in-person moments.

■ **Brand Preference:** Measures customer choice in a category of goods or services. Brand preference, in combination with brand awareness, creates opportunities for brands to charge premium prices.

■ **Brand Standards:** A document that shares the brand’s core values — its mission, vision, principles, and legacy — and highlights its personality and attributes.

.....

- **Brand Value:** The financial worth of the brand.

.....

- **Brand Values:** The brand’s core values and guiding principles. They signal its purpose and reason for being; they guide its decisions and activities.

Resources

[What We Think We Know and What We Want to Know: Perspectives on Trust in News in a Changing World](#), an initial report from the Trust in News Project prepared by the Reuters Institute at University of Oxford and with funding from the Facebook Journalism Project. This research untangles the various aspects of brand, relationship, and familiarity that commingle to create trust in media.

[2021 Edelman Trust Barometer](#) found that after an initial swing upwards in trust of media during the early stages of the 2020 pandemic, a year later overall trust eroded across the world, particularly in the two largest economies (the U.S. and China). Trust in information sources fell to record lows as misinformation and disinformation spread widely and consumers failed to distinguish between credible and false sources.

[Trust Misplaced?](#) This report, conducted by Ipsos in conjunction with The Trust Project in October 2020, explored key factors related to the future of truth and trust in news media. It examined how people find trustworthy content, whether they are willing to pay for it, and how they are often unable to identify sources of misinformation.

[The Trust Project](#) has developed eight Trust Indicators, now used on hundreds of news sites worldwide, that are a global transparency standard for news.

[Journalism Trust Initiative \(JTI\)](#) is a collaborative standard setting process that is being led by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), and Agence France-Presse (AFP).

[Interbrand’s Best Global Brands 2020, A New Decade of Possibility](#) evaluates the top 100 global brands and their challenges. The report includes breakouts on the importance of brands being trusted and relevant, two of the most important differentiators for news media.

It is a forward-looking document, post-pandemic, with guiding thoughts about brand management and business values.

For examples of best-in-class media marketing campaigns, view [INMA’s 2021 Global Media Award Finalists](#) in the public section of its website. The entries detail campaign results and include links to video, print, broadcast, outdoor, and social media materials.

[David Aaker](#) is known as the “father of modern branding.” His work is captured in his numerous books and reflected on the website of the Prophet consulting group, where there are links to articles on brands, branding, and brand management.

For a longer and more comprehensive list of branding terms, click [here](#).



Where literacy rates are low, businesses use images of featured products (Somaliland)

3.2 *Choosing a Business Model*

Brand consistency underpins brand strength. It is the delivery of the brand experience aligned to the organization's **brand values, identity**, and long-term strategy. It prevents customer confusion. When an organization consistently presents itself to its audiences and customers, it creates cost-efficiencies because your target audience is exposed to your messages repeatedly and they build over time. That builds brand recognition and increases trust.

A strong brand can create greater loyalty among audiences, advertisers, partners, and employees. It can make the organisation more compelling to engage with, raising the value of its products and services above commodity level and, by its strength, discouraging counterfeit brands from arising.

News Media Brands

Established news media tend to have strong brand awareness in their markets. Newer media organizations, less so. But all media are subject to brand counterfeiting and logo theft which can then be used to spread false news.

News brand counterfeiters are just like those who knock off luxury brands. They seek to benefit unfairly from the brands that someone else built with hard work, high standards, and by taking risks. They hope the halo of legitimacy of an established news brand will help their content land with greater impact.

And counterfeiters can use it for ill purposes. Examples in the past have included counterfeiters using websites and social media that look like a legitimate site to spread hate speech and disinformation.

Thus, strictly maintaining brand consistency across all platforms helps audiences recognize what is, and is not, legitimate content.

Brand Standards

A basic version of **brand standards** includes:

- An overview of your organization: its history, vision, purpose, personality, and brand values
- Its mission statement
- Standards for logo use — how the logo should be used in different settings; what sizes are allowed; which color treatments are accepted
- Standards for different versions of the logo, including its traditional treatment, simplified versions, and uses with sub-brands
- Type styles, fonts, and sizes - showing specific examples of usage
- The official color palette, with specifications for both digital and print media
- Image styles, with examples of how images (graphics and/or photographs) are incorporated into marketing materials and product design
- Examples of marketing materials, such as business cards, letterheads, and email signatures
- Guidelines on the use of brand images and language on social media

The brand standards will include different authorized logos. You will need various formats to accommodate everything from digital media icons to signage on the side of a building. Here are examples of various treatments of the logo for [The Indian Express](#). The first is the flagship logo, the second is a flame icon used across different materials and social media, and the final is a variation of the logo for Loksatta, a newspaper published in Marathi by the Indian Express Group.



You can explore the full [brand guidelines document](#) of The Indian Express created by brand and digital product agency Area 17 to see how the document lays out all aspects of the news organization's graphic identity and connects this to the brand's values and style. The [Area 17 Archive](#) includes examples of branding and design from other news organizations as well.

Key Terms

- **Brand Standards or Guidelines:** A document that shares the brand's core values; its mission, vision, principles, and legacy; and highlights its personality and attributes.

Resources

[Branding Style Guides](#) has news media examples, available free to registered users.

For examples of brand guidelines for small businesses, click [here](#).

Sample pages of the *New York Times* Brand Guidelines are [here](#).

Amazon provides comprehensive information about its own brand identity, and how Amazon sellers can use its branded elements. Here are examples of its [brand use guidelines for partner businesses](#) and information about its [logo, color, and use guidelines](#).

A discussion of the role of color in brand recognition is [here](#).

[The History of and Story Behind the New York Times Logo](#), Lily Wordsmith.

3.3 Using Social Media to Build Your Brand

Guest Essay: Filip Ivanovic, Digital Director, Vijesti, Montenegro



As head of digital operations for Vijesti, the largest newspaper in Montenegro, Filip has successfully transitioned key areas of the business into digital channels. Data-driven decision making has fueled audience expansion and deepened engagement, and he has led efforts to imple-

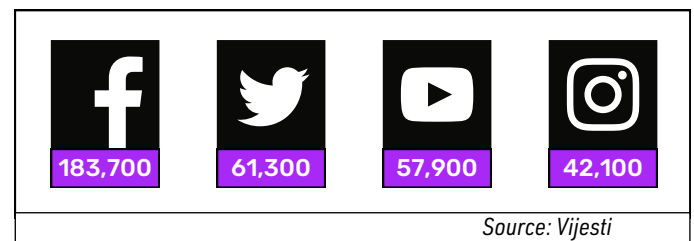
ment a subscription platform. Under his leadership, digital revenues initially grew more than 200%. As a consulting partner for News Consulting Group, Filip also brings first-hand experience with growing digital audiences and revenue to NewsCG partners. He has an MSc in Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Practice and a BA, and speaks Serbian, English, and Italian. He resides in Podgorica.

To reach the widest audience and provide them with useful content, an organization must stand out in the overcrowded online media landscape. News media must position themselves as credible, trusted sources of information. To do so, one must reach all segments of the audience, through as many channels as possible.

Social media plays an important role in this. The cumulative audience base of Facebook and Instagram is almost 4 billion users. YouTube has around 2.3 billion, Twitter around 350 million and LinkedIn 740 million. About two thirds of the human population use social networks, which provide the largest potential user base for any business, including media. Vijesti, a news outlet in Montenegro, has prioritized social media marketing to build its brand across multiple platforms.

Daily Press – Vijesti

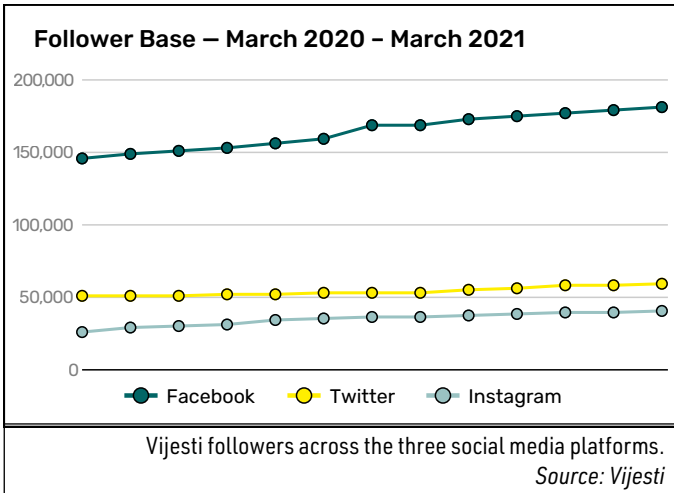
Daily Press is an independent news company in Montenegro that operates under the brand name Vijesti and has three channels — web, print and television. It was established in 1997 and since then has developed a strong brand image in the media market as a trusted source of information. Operating in the country of only 650,000 people, the outlet has faced challenges given a corrupt government, financial and physical attacks, and a deteriorating advertising market. Despite this, Vijesti has developed a large audience on its website (more than 2 million users per month) and a large follower base on social media, as shown below:



Approach

Vijesti uses three major channels to reach audiences: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Social channels serve as a way to communicate with audiences, bring traffic to the website, assess the market, and engage those audiences and deepen their brand loyalty.

In 2021, Vijesti appointed a dedicated Social Media Manager — a role that did not exist previously. It was vital that the manager be both creative and innovative since social media is a place where experimentation is rewarded. The importance and impact of that role can be seen in the growth reflected below:



While each case is different, there are five key aspects of establishing the social media presence of any brand:

1. Create a unified profile picture that represents the brand ([FB](#), [IG](#), [TW](#))
2. Develop a unified description
3. Create clearly branded material
4. Develop a schedule and strategy for posts
5. Verify accounts

Facebook

Facebook is the most important medium for Vijesti — in total, it has more than 183,000 followers across all of its groups.

Strategy

Based on the editorial policy and how frequently content is produced, Facebook should be regularly updated with new content. On a daily basis, Vijesti publishes between 35–40 posts on the main page. This number proved to be ideal when it came to increasing **reach** and **engagement** levels.

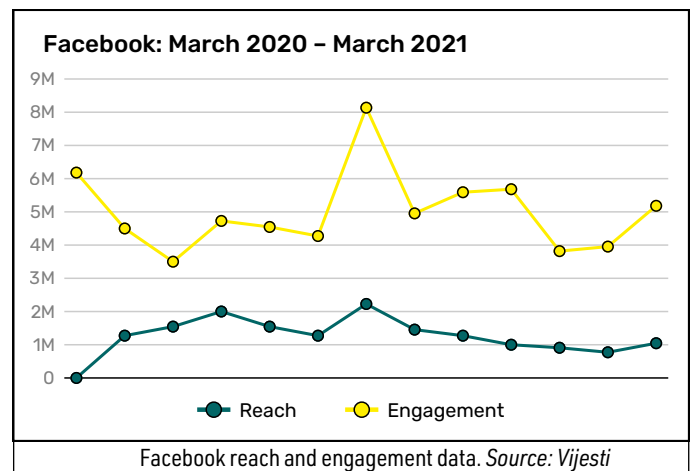
Vijesti also uses Facebook to encourage interaction in a few ways:

- **Call to action on the post** — Inviting users to comment, share opinions, and discuss certain posts. Lifestyle topics have generated the greatest discussion.
- **Post video material** — Raw video files and event livestreams have proven to have high

viral potential. Vijesti is collaborating with partners to also post livestreams with content that Vijesti does not typically produce, such as concerts and festivals.

- **Post galleries** — Pictures and graphics regularly attract audiences. Vijesti frequently posts galleries, either their own or from some of the photo stocks they partner up with, which increases engagement and provides brand benefits.

The posting strategy is also broken down by content segments that each have a unique approach. Political topics require a serious tone of communication; posts on social topics are more casual with some relevant emojis added; lifestyle and sport posts are casual with an engaging call to action and many emojis. In this way, engagement with the audience is more content-specific.



Audience

The audience on Facebook is determined by the news outlet's brand and content. Therefore, the demographic breakdown of Vijesti's audience is similar to its website's traffic. Facebook audiences are looking for news and information and, depending on the article/topic, can also engage by commenting on posts.

There is also potential for specific targeting through Facebook Pixel which Vijesti uses for achieving specific goals. An example of its usage can be when a great piece of content is aimed at a particular gender and age group. If that group is not large enough in the existing customer base, Vijesti invests a small budget into content promotion and targets those audiences. We track their metrics of use, including clicks and new followers gained in that segment.

If executed well, this combination of paid promotion can have a further impact on organic reach and engagement. Here is the performance of one Facebook campaign Vijesti developed regarding the pandemic’s impact on the Montenegro economy. It was a cost-effective way to boost the story to desired audiences and increase its impact.



Instagram

Instagram’s platform allows for different forms of audience interaction than Facebook. It is relaxed and highlights photo and video content. Users are not always looking for news, but rather for rich content. Therefore, Vijesti’s presence is differently tailored on this platform.

Strategy

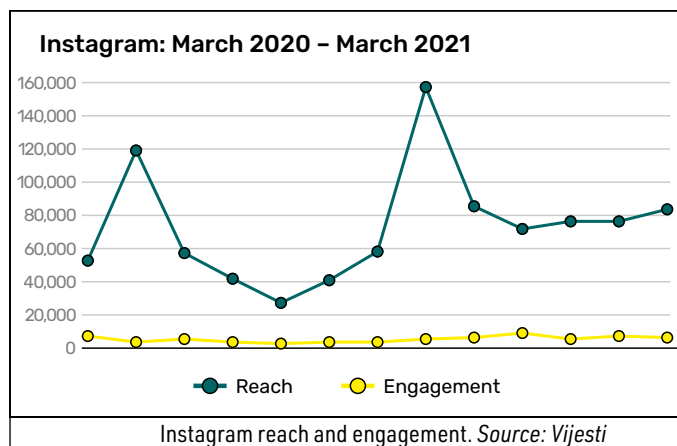
Instagram has two main channels for communication — posts and stories. Recently, Instagram developed a third option called Reels, which is similar to TikTok.

Vijesti uses Instagram to engage readers with a strong brand presence by offering rich content formats: mainly galleries/photos and videos.

Vijesti also created strict rules on the number of posts and stories published daily, weekly, and monthly, which are based on analysis of performance in each segment. Therefore, Vijesti has on average **15–20**

posts per month and around **200 stories** per month. These numbers keep engagement and **impression** rates high.

In contrast to other platforms, these types of stories achieve higher reach and more impressions due to their visual nature and Instagram user behaviors.



Vijesti’s best performing content segments on Instagram are:

- Quizzes
- Polls
- User-generated content — followers respond to a certain call to action (e.g., send pictures of nature that we post later on)
- Questionnaires
- Link in bios attached to stories

Twitter

Twitter serves as an information-only platform: the audience is looking for quick news delivered straight to them. At Vijesti, little emphasis is given to developing an overarching Twitter strategy; rather, it happens organically. All the content that is shared on Facebook is also shared on Twitter. Topics such as politics, society, and sports are the most attractive to the audience on this platform.

Vijesti’s Twitter performance is related to how well the platform does in our different markets. In some markets (e.g., Serbia and the U.S.), Twitter is widely used and serves as means of expression of opinion and commenting. However, in Montenegro, it is used solely as a news feed which reflects our lower engagement.

Key Terms

- **Engagement:** The number of interactions made with your social media content (this can include shares, likes, or comments on a post or story)

- **Impressions:** The number of times your social media content is shown to users across the platform

- **Reach:** The number of unique individuals who are shown the content

Case Study Tools

In support of its overarching strategy, Vijesti has developed these tools for tracking its social media efforts and engagement, which you can reference for guidance and ideas.

- A social media KPI (Key Performance Indicators) tracking sheet, [here](#).
- A checklist of what to include with social media posts, [here](#).
- A social media performance tracking report, [here](#).

3.4 Marketing Your Media Brand to Other Business

The way you sell and market your media brand is important for achieving commercial success. It is vital that your news organization be clearly differentiated from other media organizations, not just for its news content, but also for its business offerings. With many media options to choose from, your outlet's brand must differentiate itself from commercial competitors and position your content and services in consumers' minds.

For many news outlets, journalism is the key pillar for upholding **brand image**. However, media outlets also need to consider whether their sales and marketing activities are also aligned with the brand. Maintaining **brand differentiation** is a vital element of staying competitive.

Cultivating Your Media Brand

Local media outlets with smaller audience reach are rarely surfaced as viable commercial partners for multinational advertisers. Those that do, attribute that success to their media brand's reputation, unique content, commercial service offerings, and how effective they are at marketing and selling those attributes to advertisers.

Media managers need to know how advertisers perceive their media outlet. Successful **advertiser marketing** involves:

- Surfacing the brand traits that have allowed your media to capture significant audiences
- Offering unique and exclusive ways to engage with them

Advertiser marketing efforts should point to your brand's mission, content, audience marketing, and commercial service offerings. Together, those create a unique set of values for the advertiser.

How Advertisers Perceive Your Media Brand and Content

Your media brand and content can be a powerful force in persuading advertisers to work with you, especially when they perceive your media as being aligned with their brand values. When audience reach and engagement are equal to competitors', your brand and content help differentiate your media.

Example: A multinational makeup brand enters the market with products targeting young women. The company is a known supporter of equal rights for women. It has a considerable advertising budget; its media buyers are looking for ways to quickly scale its campaigns with mainstream media partners and have a rapid product launch.

Small publishers would not typically be considered for this type of ad placement. However, if a media brand were well-known for covering women's rights issues and advocating for their rights and empowerment, the company might value placing some of its campaign in this context. If your missions and values are aligned, it opens opportunities.

These partnerships are rarely initiated by the brand. That means the in-house sales team must identify the opportunity and put together a compelling proposal. The proposal's creative approach is critical: if the multinational makeup brand were to simply place ads, a small media outlet's limited reach/traffic would achieve limited results regardless how much the client spent.

Instead, it is important to offer an advertiser a package of ideas. In this example, it could include exclusive **sponsorship** of a program that the target audience cares about deeply. In addition to reaching the target group in an environment they trust, there would be a

halo association of sponsoring such content. Advertisers pay premium prices for these opportunities.

How Advertisers Perceive Your Audience Marketing

Your most wide-reaching and visible marketing efforts are those that promote your brand and content to your audience. These campaigns also may be seen by advertisers in the market. Regardless of whether a media buyer for a potential advertiser is a patron of your media, they may come to recognize you through your audience marketing initiatives.

The amount and quality of marketing you do for a particular program, for example, may also lead media buyers to believe a program is a good one and more likely to attract a sizable audience. At the very least, they will recognize the program when you pitch it to them, citing they saw a Facebook ad for it or an outdoor sign at a local market. Ultimately, the brand and content marketing initiatives that target your audience can have a positive impact on capturing commercial business.

How Advertisers Perceive Your Commercial Service Offering

Being perceived as just a media outlet to place display ads is not an advantageous position for most small or mid-sized publishers. Instead, media outlets must emphasize their other commercial capabilities and offerings to differentiate themselves. Depending on the market and the interests of active advertisers, emphasis should be placed on a selection of attractive offerings your organization can deliver on. More on successful Business-to-Business marketing will be discussed in [Chapter 4](#).

For some markets and outlets, that emphasis may be on reaching ethnic consumer segments with advertisements in their language. For others, it may be highlighting a media outlet's online content marketing expertise. Some commercial creative capabilities are also attractive services to highlight in messaging in most cases. Overall, positioning your outlet as an expert media advisor — one that can help the advertiser navigate the market and achieve the specific results they desire, can be a powerful message.

For an example of how one news organization, Gurjaani TV in eastern Georgia, marketed its brand to local advertisers, [click here](#). After investing in audience analytics, the team at Gurjaani TV assembled a professional media kit and attracted local advertisers with their competitive advantage.

Key Terms

- **Advertiser Marketing:** Encompasses the activities and efforts made to attract commercial clients to your media outlet.
- **Brand Marketing:** The deliberate process of developing and marketing a company or product distinctively to its target consumers.
- **Competitive Differentiation:** A strategic positioning tactic a firm undertakes to set its products, services, and brands apart from its competitors.

Resources

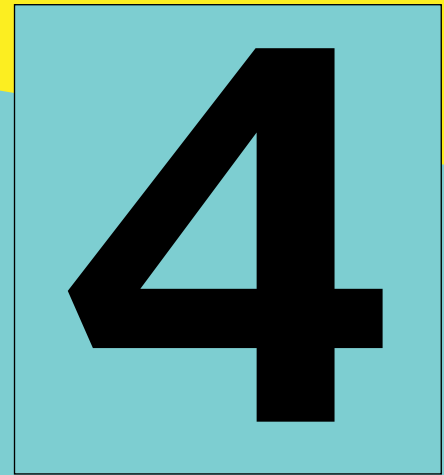
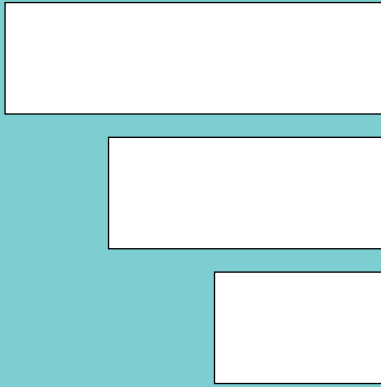
David Aaker is regarded as the leading thinker on branding and brand management. Learn about the [Aaker Model](#); for deeper insights, read his classic books: [Building Strong Brands](#) and [Aaker on Branding](#).

Further reading on [understanding your brand and how it is differentiated](#).

[The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing](#), by Al Ries and Jack Trout, offers insights into brands, marketing, and why brand perception is essential.

Brand, [defined](#).

Competitive differentiation, [defined](#).



Business- to-Business Marketing

4

Business-to-Business Marketing

Business-to-Business marketing, or “B2B”, is selling products and services from one business to another. In media, this can include selling advertising and sponsorships, creating events, providing marketing services, or offering distribution services. It can also involve selling consulting, training, technology services, or website design and support.

Many news media are reliant on B2B marketing for large portions of their revenue. The most common model has been to create an audience and then sell exposure to that audience to advertisers.

Previously, this process was based on using audience data to demonstrate the audience’s size and characteristics: age, gender, interests, and lifestyles. Yet, advertising has evolved. As distribution channels have proliferated and the opportunities for ad placements have become infinite, just selling space on a page or a 30-second commercial is no longer enough.

Media organizations now offer strong brand environments for marketers’ messaging, including native, branded, and sponsored content. To make the most of the potential in B2B marketing, news organizations require a careful approach to media sales management; one that is tightly integrated into the organization’s overall operations and strategies.

The chart on the next page provides an overview of the approaches to B2B explored in this chapter.

Learning Objectives

Developing a strong media brand opens opportunities to build and profit from relationships with advertisers who seek to reach a specific audience with a specific message. Advertising has evolved, and media organizations are uniquely positioned to provide advertisers with media solutions and creative marketing tools that will allow them to strengthen their brand. For this reason, Business-to-Business marketing can be key to maintaining a news organization’s sustainability and diversifying its revenue sources.

In this chapter, you will:

- 1.** Learn about the different B2B sales offerings available to news organizations.
- 2.** Explore the opportunities for B2B marketing offered by programmatic and native advertising, and see examples of how developing branded content and sponsorships can be key to drawing in advertisers with creative marketing solutions.
- 3.** Find best practices for media sales management and supporting your sales team to build relationships with advertisers and create revenue opportunities for your outlet.

	Forms of Advertising Execution		Advertising Formats	
	Programmatic Advertising	Native Advertising	Branded Content	Sponsorships
Description	<p>The automated placement of advertising into digital platforms using software, targeting, and settings instead of manual placements</p>	<p>A form of ad execution on third-party sites like a media outlet's websites</p> <p>Ads are designed to match the other content on a publisher's site and are denoted as being paid or 'sponsored content'</p> <p>Can be displayed programmatically or deployed manually</p>	<p>A paid content format that encourages audiences to engage with content based on its entertainment, informational, or educational value. Engage and provide value to the reader or viewer to establish a stronger brand connection</p> <p>Can be displayed as native advertising on a publisher's site</p>	<p>When an advertiser supports a particular piece or series of content. What content the advertiser matches with depends on the contextual nature, the audience served, and most importantly, the values the content delivers that the advertiser wants to support publicly</p>
Benefits	<p>Can be a long-term source of revenue for media outlets</p> <p>Can be used as a source to identify relevant direct advertisers</p>	<p>If native ad operations are well-planned with a sales management team, they can generate substantial revenue for a media outlet</p>	<p>Can generate revenue by relying on staff's creative talent to develop branded content</p> <p>Can build ongoing direct relationships with advertisers who benefit from a publisher's creative services</p>	<p>Allows for journalistic content and programs to be supported commercially without influencing the content</p> <p>Sponsorship offerings can be priced higher than simply placing ads around the same content, either programmatically or through direct deals</p>

4.1 *Moving Beyond Selling Ads*

What your digital media outlet can directly sell and profit from are not ads. Not ad banners. Not special insertions. Not complex rotations or video placements. These ad products are all commoditized and available far and wide. Having a direct sales team only attempt to sell ads is no longer viable. The market price is too low, and the team's operating expense is too high. The formula does not add up to profits or sustainability for independent media outlets.

With the help of Google Ads, Facebook Ads, Viber Business, and countless others, audiences have also become commoditized. Any advertiser with a credit card has the tools to target nearly any audience segment, anywhere. Of course, your media outlet's audience is a vital piece of your value proposition—but only a piece. Without the other elements, it is now much less attractive to brand advertisers and is not a compelling reason for buyers to consider dealing directly with your outlet.

So, if not display ads and not audiences, what can your media outlets sell?

You can sell your brand position, market knowledge, authority on subject matter, your storytelling ability, your commercial creative capabilities, and your ability to market custom-paid content across owned and third-party platforms.

Sales Offerings Beyond Ads

Leading media outlets have already realized that brand advertisers will not pay them directly for placing display ads. They have also likely experienced a decline in **programmatic advertising** revenues, even as their web traffic remains stable or increases. These declines send media outlets searching for new business models to sustain their operations, the most publicized of which is the consumer revenue model (this will be discussed more in [Chapter 5: Business-to-Consumer-Marketing](#)). But should the commercial or B2B model be abandoned entirely?

Most industry experts say a diversified approach is the most lucrative, and that advertising revenue can still be a sizable income source for media outlets — if they can develop the service offerings that are indeed valued by brands today. Formulating, selling, and producing these offerings requires new talent and skills, new operations, and new processes. It also requires a shift in mindset away from editorial content and advertisements — to editorial content and paid content.

Today, brand advertisers are willing to pay publishers for custom content solutions that create unique engagement opportunities with the publisher's audience. These opportunities are not available through automated marketing channels — it is only through the media outlet's operations that they can be created.

Successful media outlets have also realized that brand advertisers will not be the ones to identify these unique opportunities. Instead, it is up to in-house sales teams or an outlet's agency to actively create and pitch these ideas to advertisers.

Media outlets can leverage **four groups of assets and capabilities** to create value and capture value from advertisers. Diagram A illustrates these four groups. Firstly, your outlet's brand, content, programming, audience, and marketing are all assets that can create value for advertisers who are thinking of working with your team, especially as you build and differentiate your media brand. Secondly, how your organization plans and sells media solutions to advertisers creates value by providing ways for them to reach consumer audiences and develop their marketing strategy. Thirdly, providing **paid content creative**, or the concept and design of content that your organization can produce and disseminate, creates value for advertisers with creative multimedia services. Finally, your organization can create value for advertisers in the ways that you deploy media solutions, through your capabilities and experience using unique engagement channels and platforms.

Not all may be necessarily central to every engagement with a brand advertising client. Sometimes the strength of your outlet's media brand and association with content through a **sponsorship** (discussed in [Chapter 4.4](#)) is what creates value for a client. Other times it may be your ability to sell creative content to advertisers, like **branded content** articles.



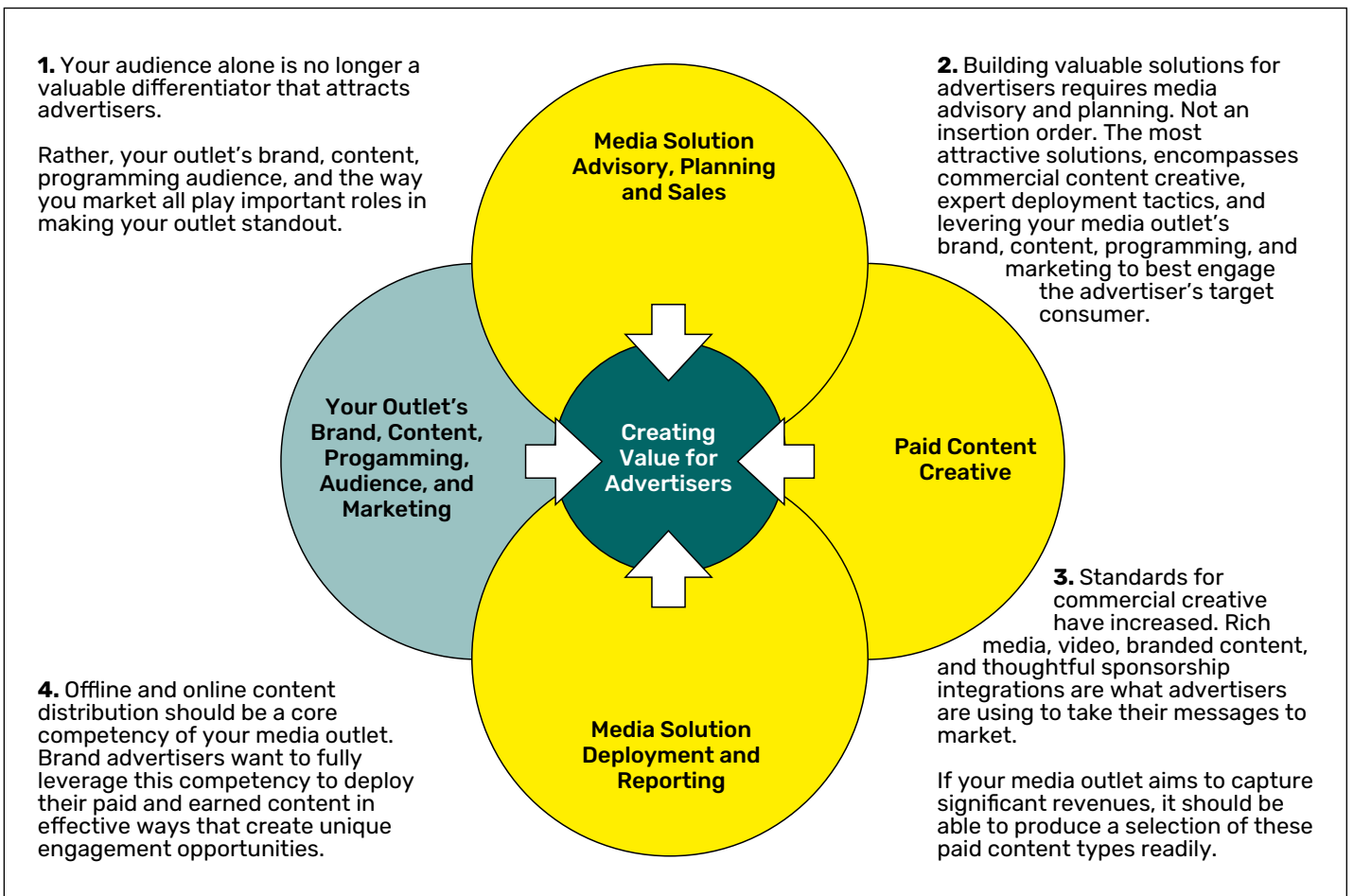
Media business models based on advertising revenues are unreliable in subsistence and unbanked markets (East Timor).

What sales offerings stem from each of the four groups?

Besides your assets, including your brand, content, programming, and audience, media managers can choose what commercial capabilities are possible for their organization. Smaller outlets, for example, may only have the resources to develop branded content articles for advertisers, and provide some **content marketing** services. A larger media outlet with senior creative talent, a studio, and video production capability might be able to provide content in more diverse formats alongside extensive content marketing services.

The chart on the next page provides an overview list of what media outlets can consider for marketing and selling to brand advertisers and the staff roles needed to deliver on the offering.

Diagram A – Creating Value for Advertisers



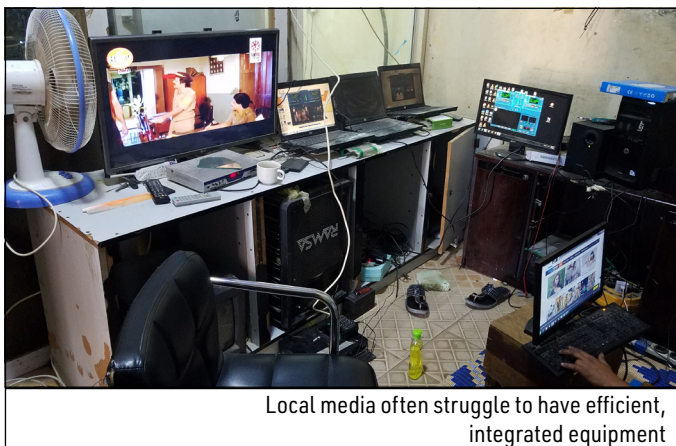
Assets and In-House Capabilities	Roles: Depending on the media organization's size, these roles will vary, and some talented individuals may take on multiple roles.	Potential Sales Offerings
1. Your Outlet's Brand, Content, Programming, Audience, and Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ *Editors ■ *Journalists ■ *Program Director(s) ■ *Audience Engagement Manager ■ *Marketing Director 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Association with your brand 2. Association with your content 3. Association with your programming 4. Access to Audience 5. Joint Marketing Initiatives
2. Media Solution Advice, Planning, and Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ *Media Sales Manager ■ *Media Sales Representatives ■ *Project Manager ■ *Digital Marketing Strategist ■ Media Sales Director ■ Market Analysis/Business Researcher ■ Social Media Strategist 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Marketing Messaging Strategy 7. Paid Content Strategy and Plan 8. Platform Strategy and Plan 9. Public Relations Strategy and Plan
3. Paid Content Creative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Creative Director ■ *Graphic Designers ■ *Animator/Motion Graphic Designer ■ *Ad Copywriter ■ *Video Producer ■ *Photographers ■ *Camera People ■ *Lighting People ■ *Content Copy/Script Writer ■ Marketing Producer ■ Ad Producer ■ Talent/Shoot Manager ■ Business Copy Writers/Journalists 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Campaign Concepting (multi-piece) 11. Paid Content Concepting (single piece) 12. Production Planning and Management 13. Graphic Design (Advertisement) 14. Rich Media Design (Advertisement) 15. Video Production (Advertisement) 16. Audio Production (Advertisement) 17. Public Relations Content Creation 18. Branded Content Creation 19. Sponsored Content Creation 20. Sponsorship Integration: Designing the plans, tiers, and creative for sponsors to have their brands integrated into content programming 21. In-Production Product Placements 22. Brand Guidelines Creation 23. Website/Microsite Creation 24. Social Media Page Creation 25. Offline Event Planning/Hosting
4. Solution Deployment and Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ *Digital Content Marketer ■ *Social Media Specialist *Community/Engagement Manager ■ *Offline Traffic Coordinator ■ Search Engine Optimization/Paid Optimization Specialist ■ Content Analytics Analyst (Quantitative) ■ Campaign Feedback Analyst (Qualitative) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. Content Marketing on the business's owned websites 27. Content Marketing on the business's owned social media platforms 28. Content Marketing on third party websites 29. Content Marketing on third party social media platforms 30. Sponsorship Integration Deployment 31. Various Ad Deployments: In-Stream/Outstream Video Ads, In-Article, Standard Display, Take-over, Page Sponsorship, etc. 32. Microsite Deployment 33. Public Relations/Earned Media Marketing 34. Campaign Performance Reporting 35. Consumer Data Reporting

* Indicates important roles needed to implement these efforts

A digital news outlet's core ability to market content online is the centerpiece for much of what they can sell to brand advertisers today. Having a designated sales team or full-time sales representative is also crucial. While the list of potential sales offerings is extensive, what each outlet offers will depend mainly on current production capabilities and additional capabilities that may reasonably be built into operations.

The roles noted in the table are important for successfully formulating and selling the listed media services. However, not all need to be taken on by a full-time individual. Instead, as we see with many smaller advertising agencies, a few talented professionals wearing multiple hats can also achieve great success.

There is also multimedia production equipment needed to deliver many of the services noted above. What equipment is needed depends on what paid creative content services your outlet aims to offer. For smaller outlets, equipment may be shared between the editorial and commercial departments. However, when larger-scale commercial operations are merited, investments in production equipment for commercial projects could be reasonable to ensure smoother operations.



Local media often struggle to have efficient, integrated equipment

How should a media organization begin to consider what is possible in the realm of sales offerings? The first step is to assess your current assets in terms of your brand, content, programming, and marketing. When brainstorming the options you have for sales offerings, consider the following questions developed from Diagram A:

- What unique audiences does your organization serve? How are you currently leveraging your content, brand, and programming to create value for advertisers?
- What media solutions do you currently provide to other businesses? Could you provide advisory services to support advertisers in creating their own messaging or public relations strategies?
- Does your outlet have the capacity and staff needed to develop and sell creative content to advertisers? In which formats? Can any of these efforts be scaled to provide more options for advertisers to request branded content in multimedia formats, social media services, graphic design support, or ad campaign design?
- What capabilities does your outlet currently have in deploying content and engaging with audiences? How can your team support advertisers with social media engagement, ad deployment, and website design?

Assessing where your outlet currently stands with respect to staff and resource capacity will allow you to plan for short-term and long-term strategies to deepen your engagement with advertisers through different sales offerings. Determine your strengths and weaknesses in this area, and then begin considering where your team could grow its B2B revenues.

The following sections in this chapter will provide examples of several areas in which your media outlet could potentially develop its sales offerings and diversify revenue from advertisers.

Key Terms

■ **Content Marketing:** A form of marketing focused on creating, publishing, and distributing various content types for a targeted audience online. It may be through unpaid/owned channels and platforms and/or paid channels. Content marketing as a discipline requires specific online marketing and advertising expertise and skills to optimize efforts' performance.

■ **Rich Media:** Content that combines text, graphics, sound, and sometimes video. It is a term that can describe ads or other media content, including a piece of journalism or branded content that utilizes several multimedia elements.

■ **Microsite:** A brand-specific website or single page used to promote a product, event, or other initiatives. It is typically hosted on a brand-owned platform or domain. Today, microsites are also commonly created through collaborations with publishers and live on a publisher's platform for efforts like new product launches that the publisher may be helping to market.

■ **Paid Content Creative:** The concept and design of content that your organization can produce for advertisers.

Resources

INMA's [The "New Abnormal" of Media Advertising](#) report that offers sections with insights on revitalizing and mounting advertising sales effort during the era of COVID.

A great overview article on [digital media sales and pricing strategies](#) today.

4.2 Introduction to Programmatic Advertising

Programmatic advertising is the automated placement of advertising into digital platforms using software, targeting, and settings instead of manual placements. The most common formats are images, text, and video.

Connecting publishers to advertisers, programmatic advertising is a cluster of technologies and intermediaries designed to put the most relevant ad on screen for the right user, at the right time. For advertisers, the aim is to reach and market to their target audiences as efficiently as possible in platforms that do not reflect negatively on their brand. For publishers, the aim is to deliver great content and user experience, which brings users to their platforms frequently and for a long time. The longer users stay, the more advertising they are exposed to, and the more likely they will see something interesting to click on, generating income for the publisher.

The best-known provider of programmatic advertising for websites and mobile apps is Google. Its [AdSense](#) program for small businesses allows publishers to deliver programmatic advertising on their websites and mobile apps to generate ad revenue. There are numerous other providers, such as OpenX, PubMatic, and The Rubicon Project.

The best deployments of programmatic advertising strike the right balance between monetizing effectively without the advertising dominating pages. When there are too many ads on a page, or the formats used are too intrusive (e.g., **pop-ups**, **interstitials**, video ads that start playing automatically), audiences are more likely to leave the platform or install ad blockers, which attempt to block all advertising from being displayed.

The Benefits of Programmatic Advertising

Benefits to publishers of programmatic advertising:

- Revenue
- Shows direct advertisers (i.e., ones that negotiate directly with a publisher for placement of ads) that ad positions are available
- Can be used as a source to identify relevant direct advertisers

Benefits to advertisers of programmatic advertising:

- Automated delivery of ads
- Single point of billing to reach audiences across many websites and apps
- Extended audience **segmentation** and targeting options
- Highly efficient, as algorithms control the delivery of ads based on price and performance

Globally in 2020, 69% of all **display advertising** was sold programmatically and the growth trend continues. As the world started collaborating more remotely during the pandemic, and people spent more time online, rising levels of e-commerce drove demand for more programmatic advertising. Google parent company Alphabet reported a record \$17.9Bn in profit in Q1 2021 while Facebook reported net income 94% higher than Q1 2020, attributing the performance to a [30% increase in the average price per ad](#).

News media use programmatic advertising as a stable revenue source, although it is rarely enough to sustain a news media business entirely. Programmatic advertising is here to stay, even though [widespread changes](#) to the use of data from cookies will change

some of the targeting and retargeting options available to advertisers. The main reasons for online advertisers not to run display advertising programmatically are:

- Running a multi-channel campaign that covers online advertising with print, broadcast or other forms of promotion offered by a media company.
- Using special ad formats that are not available programmatically, such as the homepage takeover which prevents any other advertisements being shown on a page, giving the advertiser 100% **share of voice**.
- Not having access to programmatic advertising or knowing how to use it. This can be more common among small businesses.

Implementing Programmatic Advertising

- You will need a website or mobile app that meets the advertising platform's content requirements, such as the content language. For [Google AdSense](#), for example, content must be published only in approved languages.
- Programmatic advertising is implemented into websites and apps using small pieces of code called ad tags, which can sometimes be implemented directly into the page's code (e.g. Google AdSense) or in other cases require delivery via an ad server. Using an **ad server** is preferable, as it allows multiple sources of programmatic and direct advertising to fill any given **ad unit** so that the most relevant and best-paying ads can be delivered.
- Use of [IAB industry-standard-sized ad units](#) is highly recommended, so that the advertising spaces created on websites or apps (Ad Units) will be fillable by the greatest number of advertisers. This opens a larger 'bid landscape' creating a deeper pool of available ads, which pushes up potential revenues. Some of the most popular ad sizes globally are: 970x250, 728x90, 336x280 and 300x250 (width x height measurements, in pixels).

- Programmatic advertising platforms have advanced with internal quality detection. Websites and apps that attract invalid traffic (IVT) or deliver content that is not original or considered brand-safe will often be blocked by the platform or by individual advertisers, resulting in fewer, lower bids for their ad **inventory**, and considerable reductions in their revenues.

Indicators for Publishers

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for programmatic advertising performance are:

- **Revenue:** How much revenue is generated?
- **Revenue per 1,000 pages (Page RPM):** How much revenue is generated from all the programmatic ads on a page? This is an important measure of how effective the website or app is at monetizing its traffic. Page RPM is calculated by dividing revenue by number of pageviews, multiplied by 1,000. Page RPM can be applied to programmatic advertising specifically to evaluate this revenue source alone but is also an essential metric to evaluate across all revenue sources for a platform. Instead of just programmatic advertising revenues, managers can include direct advertising, donation, subscription, and other revenues directly attributable to the platform.
- **Average Revenue Per User (ARPU):** How effective is the media outlet at monetizing each user of its website or app? Simply divide the total revenue by the total number of users in the same period. Like Page RPM, this essential management metric can be applied to programmatic advertising revenues or all revenues directly attributable to the platform.
- **Equivalent Cost Per Mille, or the cost per thousand times ads are displayed (ECPM):** How much revenue is generated by each ad unit on the website? This is usually a function of its size and position on the page, and what else the page contains. If ad units have a very low ECPM, they should be adjusted, moved or removed. Ads units that generate negligible ECPMs slow down page loads

for no benefit, which detracts from a positive user experience. They also reduce the quality score of the inventory for advertisers, resulting in lower demand and revenues.

Advertising prices vary considerably by country. In a sample of almost 8,000 news websites from 30 countries, the ECPM (i.e., Equivalent Cost Per Mille, or the cost per thousand times ads are displayed) ranged from \$0.08 to \$1.70, with an average of \$0.22. Less developed economies achieved the lower rates, whereas markets such as the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom achieved the higher rates. For many online news outlets focused on freedom-restricted countries, having visitors from more affluent diaspora countries can make a significant contribution to their total programmatic advertising revenues.

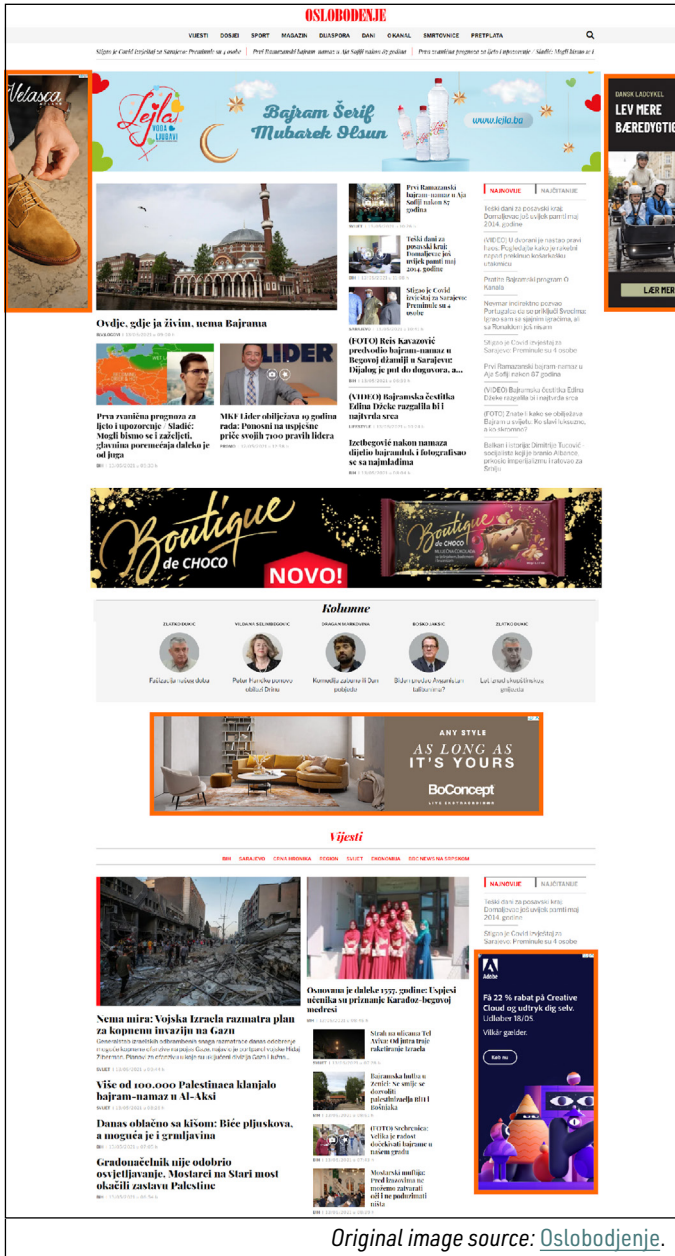
- **Coverage:** What percentage of the available ad impressions are filled with ads? Sometimes ad units placed on pages are not filled all the time. This can be due to sub-optimal sizing, positioning, or technical problems such as responsive website layouts (i.e., layouts that adjust automatically based on screen size and/or device type). It can also be due to insufficient demand.
- **Ad density:** What is the balance between content and advertising, and how does this affect the user experience and the **click-through rate (CTR)**? Ad density is measured by dividing the total content area covered in ads, versus total content area of the page. The [Coalition for Better Ads](#) suggests an industry-wide standard of no more than 30% ad density on mobile pages. Maintaining a healthy ad density is important in balancing revenue generation and ad experience, and not giving users a reason to use ad blockers.

Indicators for Advertisers

- **Performance:** How many clicks and conversions are generated by each ad unit? A global benchmark for display advertising, CTR, is 0.1% (i.e., one click per 1,000 ad impressions) but programmatic advertising — with its algorithmically-driven targeting — should achieve much higher rates. Ad unit placement is essential; placing ads where they can be seen, embedded within content rather than above the content, in sidebars or footers, generally improves click-through rates.
- **Viewability:** An ad only has value to advertisers if it is visible to users. Loading ads far down on a page, before users scroll down, potentially wastes internet data. Ads that cannot be seen cannot be clicked, and a low CTR negatively impacts the attractiveness of your ad unit to advertisers, resulting in lower revenues. The **lazy loading** technique can help with this, as it loads ads further down on pages only when users can see them. Websites and apps with high viewability attract more brands to advertise.
- **Brand safety:** Is the website or app safe for an advertiser to be seen in? If the content or user experience do not meet recognized international standards, advertisers may choose not to place their ads with you. Platforms and content that comply with standards of the [Global Alliance for Responsible Media](#) (GARM) are more attractive to advertisers than those which do not.
- **Reach:** How many visitors does the website or app attract each month? Many of the major brands focus their ad spend towards websites and apps that generate substantial traffic.

Example

All programmatic advertisements on the website of Oslobodjenje, a news outlet in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are outlined in orange below:



Original image source: Oslobodjenje.

Key Terms

- **Ad Server:** An online platform used to manage advertising delivery settings, including ad positions, start date, end date, geographical locations, and device types.
- **Ad Impression:** A view of an advertisement
- **Ad unit:** An area of a page in which an ad tag is placed, reserving that space for ads.
- **Brand Safety:** The practice of organisations protecting the environments their brands are promoted within.
- **Brand Suitability:** A subjective measure by brands regarding the types of ad environments they consider acceptable for their ads.
- **CPM:** Cost Per Mille, or the cost per thousand ad impressions purchased. Although cost is an advertiser metric, CPM is used interchangeably by both publishers and advertisers. See also *RPM*, below.
- **Display advertising:** Advertising placed on digital platforms in the form of text, images, and video. Display advertising containing images is sometimes referred to as *banner advertising*.
- **DSP:** A platform used by advertisers and media buyers to access programmatic advertising marketplaces.
- **ECPM:** Equivalent Cost Per Mille, or the cost per thousand ad impressions when the advertising is sold on a per-click or other basis, instead of being based on volume.
- **Interstitial:** An intrusive advertising format that acts as a roadblock to accessing content. See examples on the Coalition for Better Ads website.

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- **Inventory:** The advertising space a publisher can sell. It is the product of all ad units and all page loads.

.....

- **Lazy loading:** A technique for only loading elements of a web page, such as images and ads, when a user scrolls down a page so that the image or ad is just about to come into view. This prevents content being loaded into a page until it is necessary.

.....

- **Page RPM:** Revenue per 1,000 page loads.

.....

- **Pop-up:** An intrusive advertising format that acts as a roadblock to accessing content. See examples on the [Coalition for Better Ads](#) website.

.....

- **RPM:** Revenue Per Mille, or the revenue per thousand ad impressions delivered. It is usually used by publishers at the ad unit level.

.....

- **Share of voice:** The percentage of a media platform's audience reached by a particular ad or campaign. It can be calculated as platform, page, or ad unit level. For example, if an advertiser wants 50% share of voice in the top ad position on a homepage that generates 500,000 page views per month, it would need to buy 250,000 ad impressions.

.....

- **SSP:** A platform used by publishers to access programmatic advertising marketplaces.

.....

- **Tech Tax:** This term refers to the many intermediaries in the programmatic advertising ecosystem that may or may not add value but retain some of the gross ad spend. An illustration of programmatic advertising intermediaries is available from [Luma](#).

.....

- **Unique Users:** The number of distinct individuals requesting pages from a digital platform during a period of time. It is often expressed as a monthly metric to indicate the reach of a digital platform within its addressable market.

Resources

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[GARM: Brand Safety Floor + Suitability Framework](#) represents widely adopted standards for brand safety and suitability when placing advertising online.

[Google Ad Exchange \(AdX\)](#) is an online advertising marketplace used by publishers to monetize their content. Using AdX, publishers can sell their advertising inventory to agencies and directly to advertisers using real-time bidding technology. It creates an open marketplace where ads can be allocated efficiently, and publishers can control who can advertise on their sites. It is an SSP, a supply-side platform, and typically yields higher CPMs than other Google ad networks. There are monthly page-view thresholds that must be met to qualify for participation.

[Google Ad Manager](#) is a free ad server that can be used to deliver programmatic and direct-sold advertisements.

[Google AdMob](#) is a mobile ad network and monetization platform. It enables mobile developers to monetize their content from ads, gain insights, and serve ads globally. It offers automated tools and ad formats.

[Google AdSense](#) is an ad network that offers publishers access to demand from advertisers. It is suited to smaller publishers with a limited team allocated to managing digital advertising.

Here is a [comparison of Ad Manager, AdSense and AdMob](#) and here is a comparison of [AdX and AdSense](#).

4.3 Introduction to Native Advertising

Native advertising: is a form of paid media where the ad experience matches the natural form and function of the platform's user experience.

A native ad is designed to mimic the form, layout, tone, and quality of the publisher's other content. On a media outlet's website, a native ad can be made to look like a news story. Native ads are found on websites, or other third-party platforms, including social media. This form of ad execution is becoming ubiquitous on most news sites. Publishers can generate revenue from native ads through programmatic channels (discussed in [Chapter 4.2 Introduction to Programmatic Advertising](#)) or by working directly with brand advertisers to craft and integrate the content in innovative ways.

Because native ads can be intentionally made to look like news stories, having a policy to determine how native ads are displayed is necessary to differentiate them from other articles or content. You will also need to determine which advertisers you are open to working with on native advertisements. To execute native ads with transparency to your audience, it is critical to include a label to denote that the native ad is paid for by an advertiser. This will ensure that your brand as a trustworthy source is not damaged if you are seen to disguise advertising as news content, especially if your outlet defines itself as independent.

Getting Started with Native Advertising

If deployed correctly, native ads are served to an audience that could probably be interested in the product or service for sale, which creates value for audiences. Targeting native ads can be managed programmatically or by manually placing native ads alongside particular news coverage or specific pages.

With the declining performance of some types of display ads, deploying native ad inventory can give publishers a boost in ad revenues and create a better user experience for their audiences.

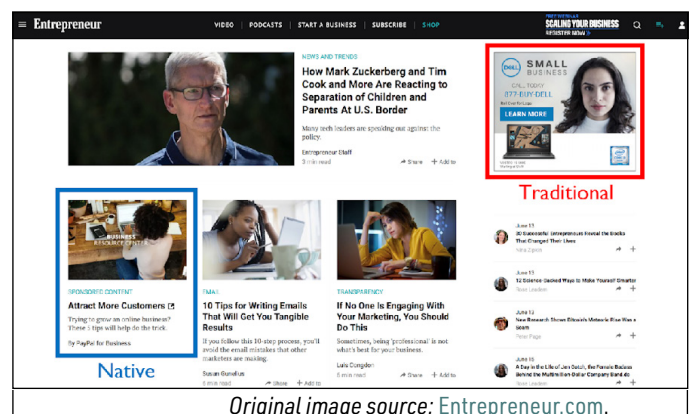
Read about how one news outlet succeeded in attracting local advertisers by selling native ads over the holidays [here](#). In this case study, Uralsk Week, an independent news outlet in Kazakhstan, developed an online magazine with native advertising for local New Year celebrations that promoted local businesses with articles and videos about the best places to make holiday purchases.

Examples

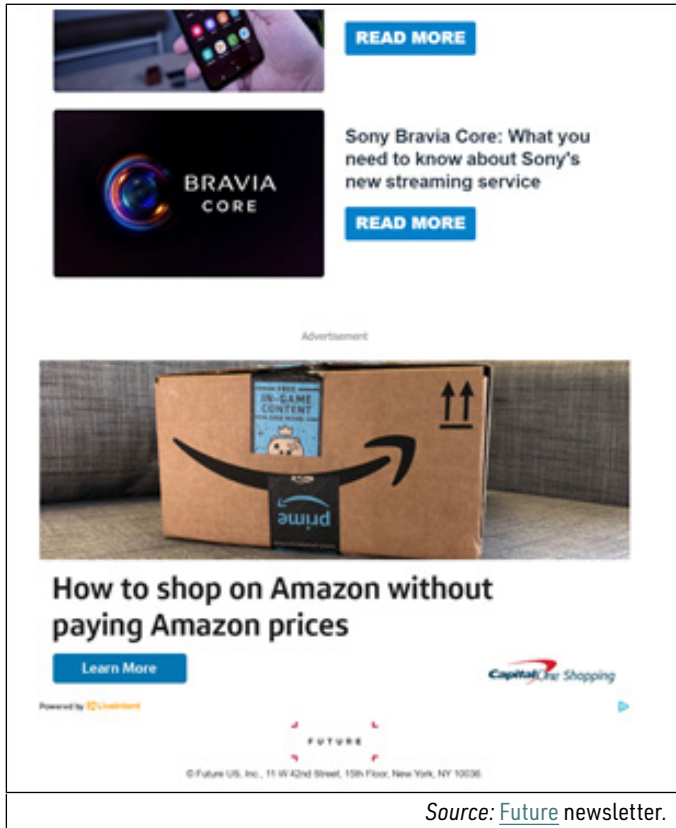
Native Ad vs. Traditional Display Ads

The example below highlights the execution of native ads versus display ads on a website. Online, native ads typically look like links to other articles or media. However, the subsequent content aims to compel the user to buy an item or take the next step in a sales journey. Here the example outlined in blue is labeled as 'sponsored content' to identify it as paid; however, the overarching term used to define the execution of this type of paid content placement is native advertising.

Native Ads in Your Newsletters



Here is an example of a native ad placement in a newsletter. Native ads are a great benefit to offer to brands that may want to appear in a weekly newsletter from your media outlet. In this example, the native ad marketing how to shop on Amazon is included at the end of an organizational newsletter.



Native Ad Contextual Example

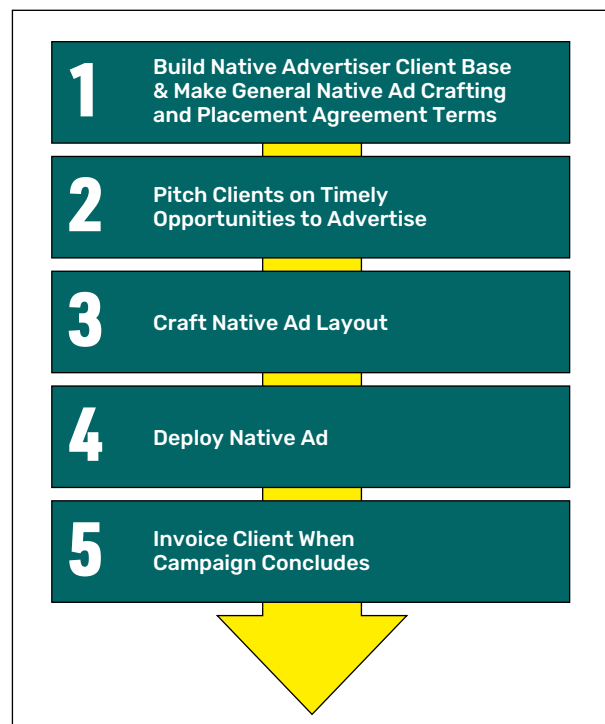
If flood season is approaching and news about upcoming flood potential is regularly published, a relevant native ad may be one for flood insurance which describes an advertiser's services. Another example is, if there has been a recent flood, a native ad may be placed for a microfinance company that is ready to help farmers with small loans for planting new crops. A lighter example may come from coverage of a local movie industry award event, matched with a native ad from a local fashion advertiser known for being a favorite of celebrities. These are well-integrated examples that media outlets with sales forces can facilitate directly with local advertising clients in their market.

Direct-Selling Native Ads

If these direct deals are pursued, your sales team will build up a base of direct clients and general agreement terms. Terms might include a fee of \$50 for crafting a native ad, and a rate for **impressions** (the quantity of digital views from your audience), or other metrics, such as a rate based on the **click-through rate (CTR)** of the ad (the ratio of viewers who click on the ad to follow the link). You could also agree on a flat fee for serving the ad. A streamlined sales process for pitching, crafting, deploying, and collecting fees for native ads is also necessary. Having a process makes contacting fitting clients when timely opportunities arise more manageable. As suggested in the examples above, these opportunities may depend on upcoming article series, news cycles, seasonal coverage, or various event coverage.

Although individual direct native ad placements might come at a low fee and rate to the client, achieving high volumes through this process can amount to a substantial revenue stream for the media outlet. Once general agreement terms are negotiated, and the process is set up by sales management, with good planning, the operational demands on the sales team can be minimal.

The Process for Direct-Selling Native Ads



Implementing Native Advertising

For success with native advertising, you will need:

- **Programmatic inventory** near various audiences or news coverage types designated to matching native ads.
- A direct client base of local advertisers and possible multi-national corporations selling into the local market.
- A sales process to help streamline and facilitate direct placements of native ads when timely opportunities arise.
- A commercial editor/designer to craft/layout some aspects of native ads in-house for a fee.
- A publicized editorial policy that discloses the use of native ads. Ideally, mentioning a policy of only displaying safe and proven products and services and how this content aims to offer valuable information to users.
- Proper labeling that indicates the content is paid for by an advertiser.

For smaller media outlets with no sales operations to pursue and serve direct clients, setting up programmatic native inventory is likely to be appropriate, and discussions of the technical requirements are addressed in the earlier section [Introduction to Programmatic Advertising](#).

Key Terms

- **Native Advertising:** A form of paid media where the ad experience matches the natural form and function of the platform's user experience.
- **Programmatic Inventory:** The amount of ad space a publisher makes available programmatically on the open ad market. The inventory may be allocated to various types of programmatic media — including native ad channels.
- **Sponsored Content:** A piece of brand journalism that lives on a publisher's website. It is commonly written or produced by the publisher's staff, so the content matches the surrounding journalistic

context's tone and voice. It is common for the terms branded content and sponsored content to be used interchangeably to denote paid content.

Resources

The [Native Advertising Institute](#) is a source of research, articles, and insights on native advertising and how to leverage it.

WAN-IFRA Webinar: [Native Advertising Trends](#).

Additional information on native advertising with examples can be found [here](#).

[Performance metrics](#) used to measure native ads.

4.4 Introduction to Branded Content

Branded Content: is a paid content format that encourages audiences to engage with it based on its entertainment, informational, or educational value. Its foremost objective is to engage and provide value to the reader or viewer to establish a stronger brand connection. The content can be written and produced through brand-publisher partnerships, in-house by the brand, or by creative agencies.

Branded content's foremost objective is to engage and provide value to the reader or viewer as an attempt to establish a stronger connection to the brand. It prioritizes storytelling over product promotion — and in some cases, does not promote a product at all. Instead, the article, video, or audio may promote an idea or story central to its customers' interests and brand. Branded content is typically found on brand-owned platforms or served on third-party platforms, like news sites, as **native advertising**. Some native ad executions are linked to branded content pieces. Read more on native advertising in [Chapter 4.3](#).

“Branded content is relational — just like a publisher’s successful interaction with its audience and its advertisers. It isn’t new, but the timing may be perfect for it to be a successful and lucrative bridge to connect all three.”

—Michelle Vielma and Julia Campbell, [INMA: Why Branded Content Fits This Advertising Moment](#)

Today, online marketers are looking for more effective ways to engage with consumers. Simultaneously, consumers are becoming less captivated by display ads and, in some settings, bothered by their intrusion. Branded content is an advertising format and solution that fits both parties' interests. Branded content has gained marketers' attention and budgets, and consumers have also shown their acceptance by engaging with it more frequently than display ads.

Branded content is also an offering in which publishers can flex their content creation muscle — and get paid for it. Most advertisers will benefit from the service to best tailor branded content to engage a publisher's audience in unique and meaningful ways.

“We need to stop interrupting what people are interested in and be what people are interested in.”

— Craig Davis, Former Chief Creative Officer of advertising company J Walter Thompson

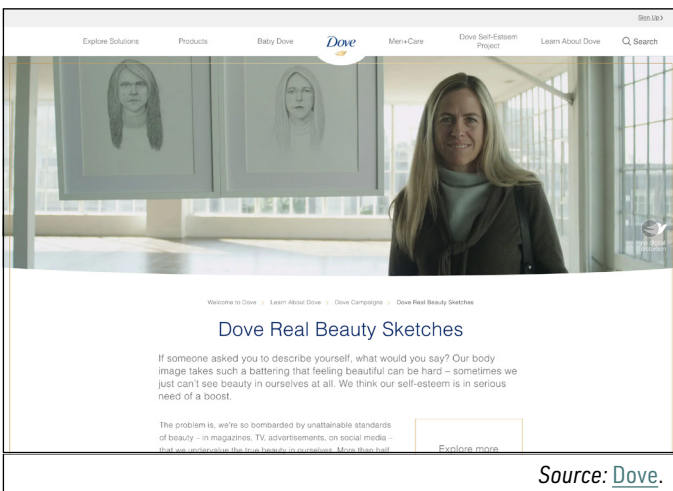
Examples

Here are two examples of large-scale branded content campaigns from recent years. These campaigns incorporate multimedia elements and each has a robust **content marketing** approach. For larger media outlets with creative teams, creating branded content in video or **rich media** formats can help capture attractive fees for production. Both campaigns were promoted through owned and paid channels. As a bonus, these campaigns also earned media coverage, and the Dove campaign went viral.

This Netflix “Separate But Not Equal” campaign for the program, *Orange Is the New Black*, was a collaboration between the publisher, the *New York Times*, and the client, Netflix. The branded content lives on the publisher's platform, which adds credibility.



The Dove “Real Beauty Sketches” campaign was created by the brand and agency and lives on the brand’s website. It was then promoted heavily through social media platforms like YouTube. It was channeled to third-party platforms like news sites, through native ads. Even though the campaign was launched a number of years ago, it continues to resonate online and has been used as a [case study](#).

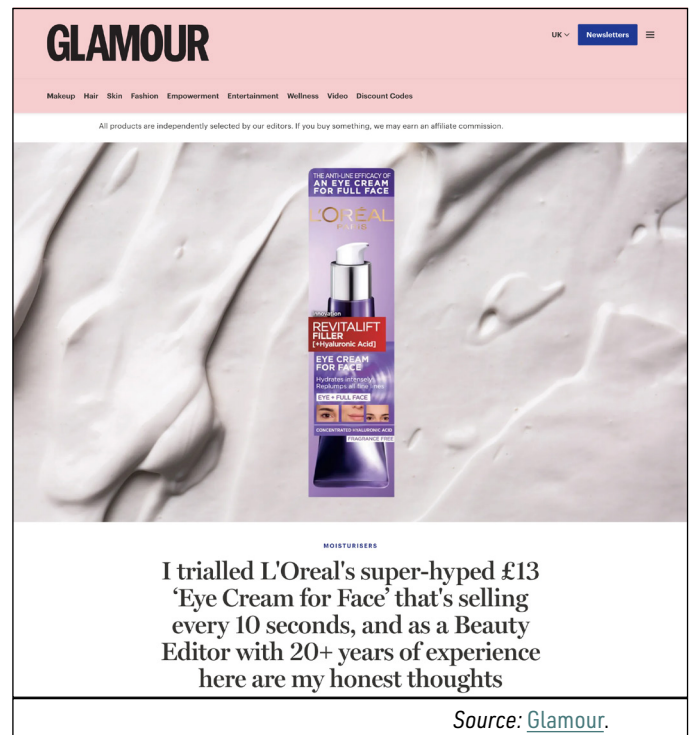


For smaller digital publishers, offering the service of writing branded content articles is a great way to start engaging and serving local clients. These efforts can be made by designating or hiring a commercial journalist to focus on conceptualizing and writing the content. Below is an example of a branded content article.

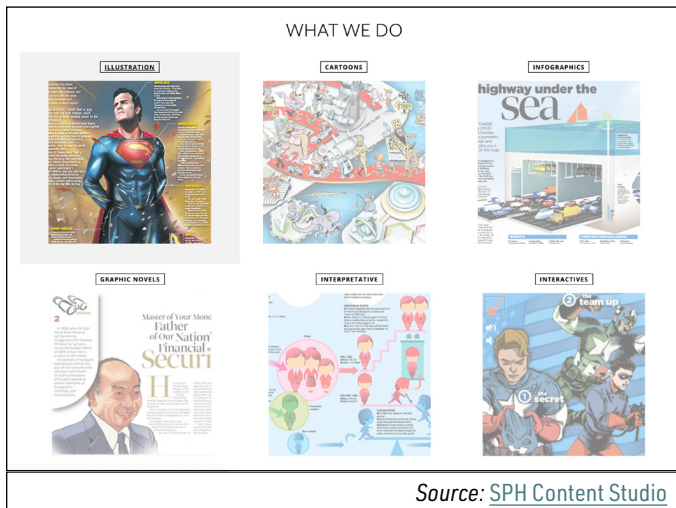
The L’Oreal “Eye Cream for Face” article was a collaboration between the publisher, Glamour, and the Brand, L’Oreal Revitalift Filler. The branded content

gains credibility from living on a respected fashion publisher’s website. It goes a step further and denotes that an experienced beauty editor is reviewing the product. This extra step may not be suitable in all scenarios, but it is common in the beauty industry and considered appropriate. The content was also channeled to other third-party sites and social platforms in the form of native ads. Larger publishers with successful branded content operations may produce several articles like this often, even daily.

In comparison, smaller publishers could aim to produce several articles per week. Determining what types of brands fit fluidly with news content and create value for your audiences is vital.



The [Straits Times](#) in Singapore also provides an example of how a media organization can market its creative services, and then publish branded content on its own website. The [SPH Content Studio](#) provides creative marketing expertise, supports clients in developing effective branded content and clear messaging, and offers a variety of different formats, as shown below.



The *Straits Times* also publishes branded content on its own website. For one example, see [this article](#) on youth and mental health, as part of a series published in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

Getting Started with Branded Content

Branded Content Creative Services

For media outlets to generate the most revenue from branded content, direct sales, creative content production, and content marketing capabilities are needed in-house. When employed together, media outlets can identify ideal clients in the market and then charge fees for producing and deploying their branded content.

In some constrained markets, brands may have little access to creative agencies that specialize in creating branded content. Because of the similar nature of work, media outlets may leverage their writers or video producers to deliver these commercial services. In this context, consider how your media outlet's staff and resources could be used to create branded content. Are you able to identify potential clients who might be interested in this type of service, and do you have the capacity to create branded content in different formats?

Creative Services Fees for Branded Content

Once branded content production capabilities are honed, a publisher can expect to charge by word,

project, or a flat fee for the service which varies depending on the medium. For one piece of content, a publisher may be able to charge different prices for different formats depending on the time and effort it takes to produce. A branded content text and graphic article may earn a lower fee than the production of a branded content video.

If you are creating branded content proposals for clients, your media organization should aim to produce branded content in a series or campaign to achieve better results for the client; achieve project efficiencies; and yield higher revenues per project. To create even a single piece of branded content to a high standard — just as with journalistic content — takes research, preparation, client liaison work, and significant editing. A creative team would not ideally want to go through all this motion and learning to write one article for a small sum. Instead, a campaign of twenty low-cost article variations would be more attractive to both sides and amount to a more lucrative total project fee. This is also advantageous for the client because the campaign timeline is extended, and more content is crafted. This allows for testing, adjusting, and optimizing the creative and content marketing mix until meaningful traction is achieved.

Capturing Revenues Across the Branded Content Value Chain

The branded content **value chain** has six main links: (1) direct brand/client relationships, (2) solution tailoring and sales pitching, (3) creative production, (4) distribution, (5) engagement, and (6) tracking and reporting. Various data sources and providers may also be considered links at different value chain stages. They are not represented here, but data and data tools are likely being used by the publisher and by the brand advertiser to assess the best strategy for development and deployment.

Your organization can capture revenue at each of these stages of the value chain. At a minimum, many publishers have programmatic inventory to allow for branded content to be served as native ads. Along with this comes programmatic revenue attributed to the 'distribution' link in the value chain. This revenue may be substantial for publishers with significant traffic. However, publishers can increase their revenue potential when they are able to plan and produce branded

content campaigns rather than simply distributing them as native ads on their website. To do so, they need to have direct relationships with brands, the ability to tailor and pitch solutions, produce creative, distribute, engage, and the knowledge to track and report back on campaign performance. After examining this diagram, consider where in the value chain your outlet is equipped to capture revenue. Are you already displaying branded content as native ads on your website? Can you begin to approach clients to start building relationships and becoming more directly involved in the creation and dissemination of branded content campaigns?

Implementing Branded Content Placements and Services

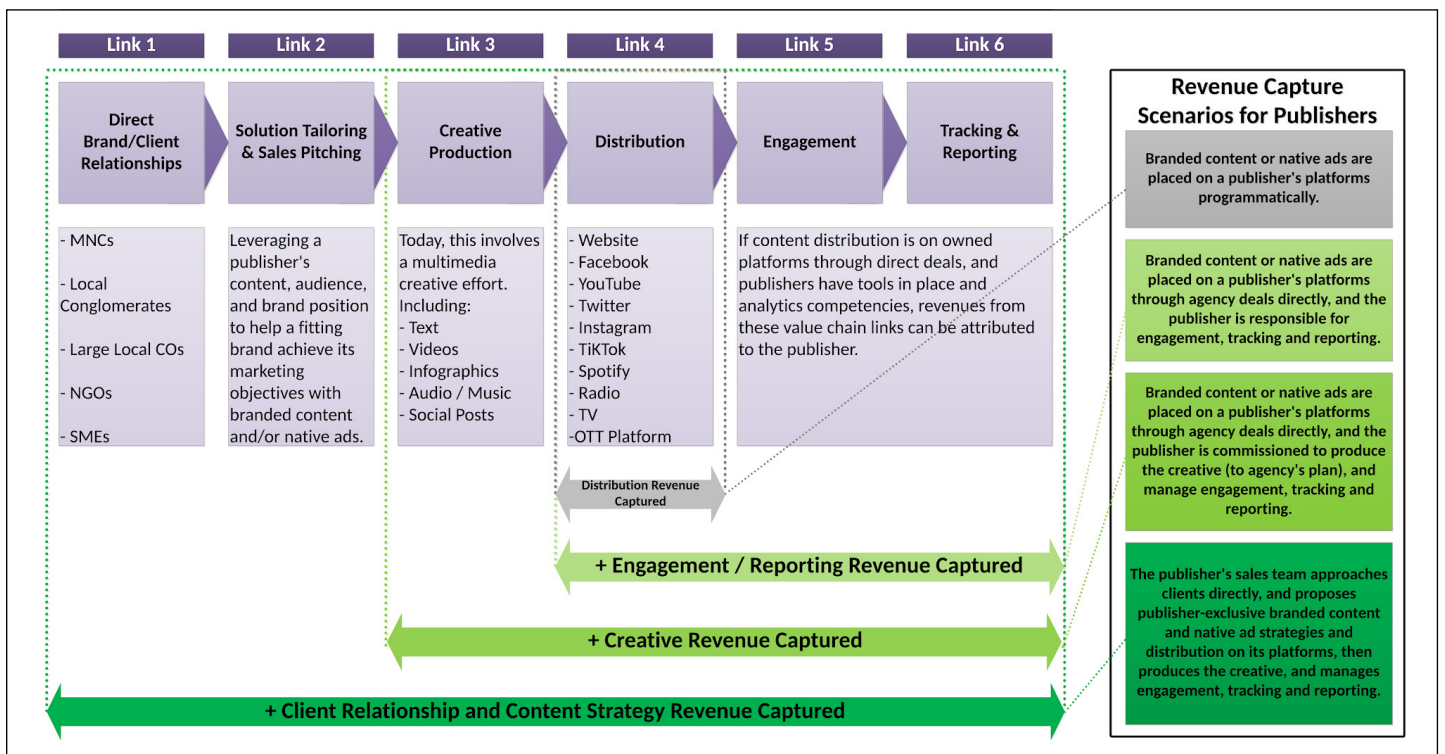
For success with placing branded content and offering branded content services, you will need:

- **Programmatic inventory** targeting audience types or placed near related news coverage designated to matching branded content.
- A direct client base of local advertisers and possible multi-national corporation clients selling into the local market.

- A sales process to help streamline and facilitate direct placements of branded content when timely opportunities arise.
- A commercial writer/designer to concept and write branded content articles in-house for a fee or a multimedia production team to produce forms of branded content like videos in-house for a fee.
- A publicized editorial policy that discloses the use of branded content. Ideally mentioning a policy of only displaying reputable brands, and how this content aims to offer valuable information to audiences.
- Proper labeling that clearly indicates the branded content is paid for by an advertiser.

Key Terms

- **Branded Content:** A paid content format that encourages audiences to engage with it based on its entertainment, informational, or educational value. Its foremost objective is to engage and provide value to the reader or viewer to establish a stronger brand connection. The content can be written and produced through brand-publisher partnerships, in-house by the brand, or by creative agencies.



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■ **Native Advertising:** A form of paid media where the ad experience matches the natural form and function of the platform's user experience.

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■ **Programmatic Inventory:** The amount of ad space a publisher makes available programmatically on the open ad market. Their inventory may be allocated to various types of programmatic media — including native ad channels.

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■ **Rich Media:** A digital advertising term for an ad that includes advanced features like video, audio, or other elements that encourage viewers to interact and engage with the content.

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■ **Sponsored Content:** A piece of brand journalism that lives on a publisher's website. It is commonly written or produced by the publisher's staff, so the content matches the surrounding journalistic context's tone and voice. It is common for the terms branded content and sponsored content to be used interchangeably to denote paid content.

.....

■ **Value Chain:** A set of activities that a firm operating in a specific industry performs in order to deliver a valuable product for the market.

Resources

The [Content Marketing Institute](#) is a source of research, articles, and insights on branded content and how publishers can leverage it.

Here is information on the emotional [impact of branded content](#) on consumers.

[Why Branded Content Fits This Advertising Moment](#) is a COVID-era report from INMA on branded content and its validity.

What's New in Publishing has shared this [article on branded content](#) to help guide publishers.

4.5 Introduction to Sponsorship

Sponsorship is the practice of matching an advertiser with a particular piece or series of content. The matching is on contextual nature, the audience served, and most importantly, the values the content delivers that the advertiser wants to support publicly.

Increasingly, news media outlets are turning to sponsorships as a primary source of revenue— and for a good reason. Sponsorships allow for journalistic content and programs to be supported commercially without influencing the content. On the surface, the approach sounds similar to placing ads before, between, and after content. However, sponsorships create and capture value by matching content to advertisers for reasons beyond audience targeting.

These reasons may include the contextual nature of the content or the value the content delivers to an audience that the sponsoring brand wants to support publicly. For example, a debate program that raises issues central to democratic development could be an excellent opportunity for a telecom company to show its support for such efforts. Simultaneously, the sponsorship allows them to reach consumers with messaging about their products or brand-building messages that promote their socially responsible values.

In addition to charging a brand for association with the content, media outlets create unique sponsorship benefits that give the brand visibility and opportunities to engage with consumers in meaningful ways. These benefits may include incorporating the sponsor into **content marketing** activities, integrating the sponsor's brands into the content itself, for example, through product placements, and announcing to the audience the sponsor's caring support.

As you can see, sponsorships are very different compared to **'sponsored content'** on a website or **'branded content'** because the latter two are directed entirely or in part by the advertiser— not the media outlet.

“You’ve got to figure out a way to bring back the huge impact that advertising had on the bottom line, if you’re going to sustain a newsroom... that’s why you’ve got to figure out ways like sponsorships that you actually are charging rates that are somewhat similar to what you had on advertising.”

— [Penny Abernathy, Medill Professor and Media Researcher](#)

The Value of Sponsorships

Creating unique content and program sponsorship opportunities for brands allows media outlets to produce the journalistic content they are already producing and gain commercial support. If packaged correctly, sponsorship offerings also command a premium price. The amount can be significantly higher than what might be paid for simply placing ads around the same content or program, either programmatically or through direct deals.

Sponsorship offerings also open the advertising market to prospective companies that might not ordinarily promote their products and services through mass media like digital news outlets. For example, a large steel manufacturer is unlikely to buy traditional ads because their target consumers are niche businesses— like real-estate developers and shipbuilders. However, if a news outlet has popular programming for aiding in socioeconomic development, the manufacturer might be persuaded to support and be promoted alongside the content. This move could help the manufacturer achieve its **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** goals and satisfy interests in being recognized as a socially responsible corporate citizen.

Sponsorships are great for news media because they generate commercial income from producing the same journalistic content that is valuable to their audiences and their mission-- instead of selling out space and time to advertorials or other paid content. Sponsorship is also a helpful practice to adopt for media outlets with limited resources and capacity to produce paid content.

Overall, with tech giants and social platforms chipping away at media outlet's advertising revenues, and the profitability and attractiveness of direct traditional ad services, media outlets must evolve their commercial offerings. Creating sponsorship opportunities is a great place to start.

Example: Attracting Advertisers with "People-Oriented Programming"

Chai FM, Tanzania

By identifying and catering to local business needs, a small radio station is attracting big sponsorships in an area believed to have little ad market. In the rural farmlands of Southwest Tanzania, Chai FM's strategy is to produce highly localized content — what it calls "people-oriented programming."

In 2020, Chai FM, run by a tea cooperative, started airing programs catering to local dairy farmers. Shows feature conversations with veterinarians and experts in the livestock and milk-processing industries. Listeners call in or send questions via SMS. By teaching local farmers new methods for caring for their animals and improving milk quality, Chai FM has not only increased its audience but has contributed to a rise in local milk prices.

Previously, advertisers could easily disregard the small radio station. Now, with the number of listeners calling into the programs, they see the potential benefit. "Advertisers saw the opportunity of reaching many customers through us. Many of them flocked to our studio by themselves. We also created a small marketing team to present the opportunity in nearby towns," says Ally Kingo, Chai FM Station Manager.

"We had overlooked the market in our local area while competing for big advertisers in cities. Now we know without good people-oriented content, no business owner will be interested in investing in us."

— Ally Kingo, Chai FM Station Manager



The staff at Chai FM. Source: Chai FM

As a result of its “people-oriented programming,” local businesses are eager to market their agricultural products on Chai FM. The station has also attracted sponsorships from national advertisers such as Tigo Telecommunications and one of Tanzania’s largest milk processors. While Chai FM was previously dependent on association fees and grants, the new income is helping to cover the station’s operations costs and to pay staff salaries on time. In the future, Kingo hopes the new strategy will allow Chai FM to procure new transmitting equipment to increase its broadcast range and reach more people.

Learn more about Chai FM [here](#). Chai FM receives support and training from Internews and Internews’ local partner, Jamii Media, through a 5-year media and civil society strengthening program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Example: DVB’s, Doh Pyay Doh Myay (Our Country, Our Land) TV Program Sponsorship

Even before the 2021 coup in Myanmar, independent news media operated under constraint. It was difficult to break into the advertising markets dominated by the state-owned and crony-held media outlets. Even so, the television broadcaster DVB*, the Democratic Voice of Burma, identified ways to use sponsorships to generate new sources of advertising. It started Doh Pyay Doh Myay, a travel show that visited remote parts of the country and illuminated the different landscapes, people, and customs found there. The program producers also sought to give voice to the people they met and uncover the challenges and issues they faced. A common conclusion to each program was that regardless of ethnicity or region, people in Myanmar face similar problems. Ultimately, the program’s goal was to promote understanding and connectedness between the country’s many peoples to foster peace.

From a Slow Start to Commercial Success

When launched, finding sponsors was challenging. Why? The content was not always positive, and many of the segments and interviews focused on people’s hardships. Furthermore, blame for community issues was commonly placed on



Walk-in storefront newsrooms encourage community engagement (Myanmar)

mismanagement by local governments. This was not a positive angle to pitch to sponsors and better suited to independent news reporting.

The program was repackaged with an adventurous travel show front through collaboration between the program producers, sales, and marketing. The reformulation included more camera time spent on the entertaining rigors of the journey and the positive cultural storylines — creating contextual alignment with more potential sponsors. The program maintained the content segments that gave the local people a voice and surfaced common challenges, making for a more digestible social responsibility element that sponsors could stand behind.

After the repackaging, the program became a strong commercial success. Global motor oil brands like Kixx, large local insurance companies like IKBZ, airlines like AIR KBZ, motorbike brands like Lifan, and a powdered milk company, PEP, all lined up to sponsor seasons. For DVB, it was a strong source of new revenue and was attractive to audiences.

**Note: In the wake of the 2021 coup, DVB — along with other news media organizations — has lost its operating license.*

Implementing Sponsorships

For success with sponsorships, you will need:

- A savvy sales team, which approaches and proposes attractive sponsorship opportunities to fitting companies/brands based on its values, public relations objectives, and the audience the brand aims to reach.
- Content or programming with well-defined and profiled audiences and a significant following.
- A multimedia creative team to produce various custom creative that integrates the content and sponsor.
- An ability to produce and execute a joint content marketing plan that promotes the content and sponsor effectively.
- Operations to ensure sponsorship benefits like product placements and logo visibility within the content are executed properly during content production and post-production.

Key Terms

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** The self-imposed efforts an organization undertakes to be socially accountable, whether to itself, the public, its community, and/or its stakeholders.
-
- **Sponsorship:** The practice of matching an advertiser with a particular piece or series of content. The matching is on contextual nature, the audience served, and most importantly, the values the content delivers that the advertiser wants to support publicly.

Resources

A recent [survey of local news media](#) inquires about media managers' perspectives on various media business models and their validity.



Street sales remain an important distribution channel for print media and generate consumer revenue (Myanmar). Note: Post-coup, these magazines are unavailable at present.

4.6 **Media Sales Management 20 Best Practices**

Managing a successful sales operation is a critical role. It requires a person with diverse skills: one who is analytical, creative, and effective with a wide range of people. The best sales leaders are passionate about selling, goal-oriented, and have the experience to understand how to make your media organization successful.

Selling is a process. It has many discrete steps, each of which must be managed. Understanding that process and implementing it well helps lift an organization's revenue performance. It also helps identify potential new clients, increase the loyalty of existing advertisers, and expand revenue and brand opportunities.

Establishing a Media Sales Process

News media have many important processes built into daily operations. Story assignments, copy-editing, financial reporting: all of these are built on proven processes that deliver good results.

Sales, too, are built on a series of manageable steps. For sales managers, defining a general sales process and how each team member engages with it can significantly improve performance. The following illustrates a general media sales process, and defines each stage:

1. Lead Generation

What does it entail?

Researching, cold calling, emailing, and visiting businesses that may be potential commercial clients.

Why is it important?

Media sales require a steady stream of new leads entering the top of your sales funnel.

2. Prospect Qualification

What does it entail?

Meeting with and questioning company leads to determine if they have the funds and need to advertise and if your outlet can offer a uniquely fitting solution that they will benefit from.

Why is it important?

Not all leads are qualified to advertise or partner with your media outlet. You also may not be best suited to meet their needs. It is important to determine this upfront so time and energy are not wasted by sales reps, forcing an agreement that is not a win-win.

3. Media Plan Creation & Presentation

What does it entail?

Creating a custom advertising solution for a prospect and pitching it compellingly to earn their business.

Why is it important?

Today, emailing a media kit with platform analytics is not enough to gain advertisers' attention. If they are qualified to advertise in the market, they have likely been approached far too often with kits. To get advertisers' attention, outlets must prepare thoughtful custom plans that feature exclusive media solutions.

4. Agreement Negotiation

What does it entail?

After the pitch, if the client is interested, they will likely want to negotiate on price and terms. These negotiations with decision-makers should be conducted as soon as possible after the formal pitch is presented.

Why is it important?

A friendly negotiation can strengthen the bond between the media outlet and the client. Taking time to craft a reasonable offer and then discuss with the client until they are comfortable is usually time well spent.

5. Fulfillment Guidance

What does it entail?

Once the agreement is made, the sales rep or manager responsible must communicate the terms and nuances of the agreement to internal teams. This includes a defined process of creating an internal work order, and a creative brief if production is part of the deal.

Why is it important?

Though much of an agreement's terms can be spelled out, it is vital for those managers or reps who consummated the deal to share their sentiments with internal teams. This ensures there is no misunderstanding on how to proceed. It is particularly imperative when commercial content will be produced.

6. Creative Presentation

What does it entail?

Presenting the client with various versions of commercial content creative before production.

Why is it important?

Commercial production is an exciting part of the media plan that many clients want to participate in and actively give their input on. These active clients and others need to be kept in the loop on production, and their input should be gathered and applied at each stage.

7. Media Plan Deployment

What does it entail?

Deploying commercial content on platforms in the manner outlined in the agreement and media plan.

Why is it important?

It is important to ensure clients receive everything they have paid for — and sometimes a bit more. The platform strategy and content marketing approach taken here can significantly impact the performance of a campaign or special project. Both the media outlet and the client want to see good results begin to roll in after launch.

8. Reporting & Collection

What does it entail?

At certain stages in a media plan/campaign, the sales team must report the progress and collect the agreed-upon amount of payment due at that stage. In most

direct deals, payment is made towards the end of the campaign period. The exception is for content production, which is typically paid for upfront when it is produced.

Why is it important?

It is always important to thoroughly validate the work done for clients and keep them updated well in advance of any invoices hitting their inbox.

9. Follow-up, Cross-sell, Testimonial, Referral

What does it entail?

Sales reps reach out to clients for their feedback, share new special offering ideas, request testimonials, and in some cases, inquire about a specific referral.

Why is it important?

Keeping in friendly close contact with clients after a respective project is finished is a good policy. With new client acquisition being a challenge, existing clients are always your best source for future work.

20 Best Practices in Media Sales Management

This collection of 20 best practices are divided into those applicable to managing any sales force, and those specific to managing a larger sales force operation with multiple sales reps and supporting teams.

General Media Sales Management Practices

1. Document your current and past customers in a single spreadsheet. Who are they, what did they buy, how much did they spend, and when?

2. Understand who your best customers are. Who has spent the most with your media outlet in the past five years? How much did they spend and on what products? Who has spent the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th most? Are these top spenders actively advertising with you now? If not, why not?

3. Build a combined customer and prospect spreadsheet. Because your past customers are also prospects, combine them in a spreadsheet that includes your latest leads. This is your potential client base.

4. Start documenting your sales activity. Who did you call yesterday? Who did you visit? What proposals did you send? How about that pitch last week, was there a follow-up call made? When was it and what was the outcome? All this information is necessary to optimize the effectiveness of your daily sales efforts. Keeping this information only in sales team members' minds is not the most effective.

5. Seek out prospects that have timely reasons to buy. Just because an advertiser is sponsoring a program with another media outlet does not mean they are qualified to work with your outlet. Prospecting this way also limits the sales team's lead generation approach. Instead, search the market for timely reasons why specific advertisers or types of businesses may benefit from media services and working with your outlet. Here are a few examples illustrating the timely reasons to buy your sales team should be looking for.

- It is planting season and cheap fertilizers are entering your market. Local fertilizer companies need to take action to retain their **market share**. An advertising campaign with your outlet would be ideal, because of the trust you have built with rural audiences.
- Small e-commerce fashion companies are popping up and chipping away at the business of your country's most prominent local clothing store chain. You have heard they are launching an online platform, but they may not be aware of how much marketing will be necessary to gain traction. The time is right to pitch them on your media outlet's reach and your ability to create online video ads and **branded content** articles that funnel consumers to their new site.
- A popular imported soft drink brand just invested in a large bottling facility in-country, creating hundreds of local jobs. This is the time for their brand to show how thankful they are that people love their beverages and are excited to make a new home in your country. Though the factory opening may indeed be a newsworthy event and earn some media coverage, bolstering that coverage with branded content can help them make a bigger splash. This may also be the moment when the brand is thinking of producing localized advertising creative content

to support its aim to increase its product's penetration in your market. Sell them on creative ad production too.

6. Pitch the owner. When dealing with local companies in developing markets, it is common for the owner to make marketing decisions. Also, advertising benefits may not be apparent to their managers, or the managers may not be as interested in ideas that will help grow the business. Therefore, it is most effective to pitch the owner who has a stake in the company.

7. Give value first. Today, unique marketing ideas are what direct clients buy into — not ad placements. To win business, you must put the time in upfront to craft a thoughtful solution for the advertiser that compels them to buy. It should incorporate the timely reason to buy that you have identified and their business goals. This solution should be unveiled before an agreement is made.

If your team does not come to an initial meeting with a thoughtful idea for the owner, why is she sitting across from you? To hear your standard sales pitch or see your rate card? These objectives do not make a good first impression. And it also makes you look like just another salesperson on a prospecting visit.

8. Custom tailor your pitch. As a media outlet, you want to be seen by prospects as experts in marketing. Showing up to a pitch with an outdated brochure or standard PowerPoint does not make that impression. For most media outlets in constrained markets, successful commercial operations may have less than 100 clients — not 1000's. This suggests that every pitch is important and that your team should have time to customize each.

9. Know your outlet's audience. Brand advertisers today want to target specific consumers. Your sales manager or representative should know who your audiences are and have defined segments and detailed profiles of each. Also, your audience researcher should be able to analyze and provide data points that make your audience particularly attractive for a specific advertiser. Of course, in some cases, the data will show you are not the right match for an advertiser. But in the cases that it does suggest a match, the more relevant audience insights you can pitch to the prospect, the better.

10. Work with other departments to create sales offerings. If you are the sole member of your media outlet's sales team, you will need to engage other departments to help you win business — your production department to produce **paid content creative**, your digital team to help with deployment and **content marketing**, and your content producers to coordinate **sponsorship** integrations. Leveraging these interrelationships is how the most successful media outlets create value for their advertisers.

Team Sales Management Practices

11. Close the deals. For sales managers with a team of junior reps, talking the talk is rarely enough. Sales managers should have the skills and make the time to join reps on client pitches to help close the deal. For media sales in smaller constrained markets, there is a good chance the business owner will be facing off with your junior sales rep. Is this an ideal match-up for negotiation? Most likely, it's not. Rather, business owners are more inclined to take a meeting and make an agreement with a more senior manager representing your media outlet.

12. Set appropriate policies for sales expenses. In business-to-business sales, there will be costs associated with attempting to close a client. Proper transportation to the meeting. Costs for small gifts, a lunch, or coffees. Costs of other departments' time to help produce pitch materials. This is normal. Also, media outlets launching outside sales efforts will need to provide phones, professional uniforms, and business cards for reps. Remember, ramping up revenues is the first primary hurdle. It's counterproductive to get ahead of yourself and be concerned with profit margins in advance of winning significant numbers of clients and revenues.

13. Ensure agreements are fulfilled. The deliverables you agree to in your contract with an advertiser may require multiple parties within your media organization to fulfill. It would be naive to think that other departments are vested in a deal as much as your sales department is. That's why sales management must closely oversee the fulfillment of commercial obligations or delegate a coordinator to help.

- *For example, a client sponsors a round table interview program, which includes the benefit of their beverage cans being placed on the studio desk in front of the host and guests.*

Have they been placed visibly before recording? During the edit, have enough wide-angle shots been included that show the desk and beverage, or have mostly close-up shots of each speaker made the final cut? Managing these scenarios requires communicating the agreement's specifics to the program producers (i.e., the product must be captured on camera for fifteen seconds of each four-minute segment). And ideally, it also requires some oversight from your sales management to ensure instructions are understood and followed.

14. Coach your sales reps. Coaching is the practice of helping your reps perform at a high level and achieve their sales goals. This is the responsibility of the sales manager.

- **Proactive coaching** should be engaged in during a monthly goal-setting meeting to gain buy-in from reps on the performance goals being set for them. It also helps sales management see eye-to-eye with reps to understand upcoming opportunities and forecast sales revenue for senior management.
- **Real-time coaching** takes place in the moments leading up to closing a deal and aims to help sales reps overcome plan creation challenges.
- **Performance review coaching** is the bi-annual practice of meeting with sales reps and discussing how they are doing in relation to management's performance expectations.

15. Institute a customer relationship management (CRM) system.

Research suggests that CRM systems can positively impact sales results. Whether the team is working with a CRM app or Excel, disciplined data input and follow-up practices are where the positive impact stems from. For reps that have never worked within this discipline, sales management's responsibility is to ensure everyone understands the system and adheres to inputting and updating data regularly. Here are a few CRM applications to consider:

- [Odoo](#), open-source, highly customizable, plenty of technicians globally to help implement
- [Acumatica](#), robust and intuitive
- [Nutshell](#), light, easy to use with low monthly licensing cost

16. Focus on manageable sales metrics. Sales managers only control certain sales metrics, with many others being unmanageable. This diagram illustrates

the manageable sales activities that should be the focus of daily sales management, along with the lagging unmanageable sales objective and business result metrics.

17. Establish a sales routine. A weekly sales routine improves efficiency and management's ability to control performance. It includes blocked-out time for each regular sales team activity. It also allows managers to set times to check on performance and engage with reps in coaching sessions. The chart on the next page is an example of a media sales force's weekly sales routine.

18. Set up a managerial accounting practice. The purpose of managerial accounting is to account for business results, like contracts signed, revenues, and cash collections in real-time so managers can make better decisions on what to do next. For sales management, this is important for making decisions that keep the sales force on track to achieving its goals.

Manageable 'Lead Measures'	Unmanageable 'Lag Measures'	
<p>Sales Activities are the everyday sales tasks that can be managed. Effective management of the right sales activities today, will drive the sale force towards achieving sales objectives and business results tomorrow.</p>	<p>Sales Objectives are guide markers that sales management sets for the sales force. Sales objectives are not directly controllable since they require agreement from prospects. However, they are influencable through conducting the right amount of effective sales activities.</p>	<p>Business Results are lagging indicators such as revenue, that reveal the impact of what the sales force has done in the past. Not what sales management can manage or control in the present.</p>
<p><i>Media Sales Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prospects entered into CRM ■ Phone calls made ■ Emails sent ■ Online inquire chats had ■ Conversations had ■ Prospects qualified ■ Presentations made ■ Proposals sent 	<p><i>Media Sales Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Monthly revenue goals ■ Customer acquisition goals ■ Customers retention goals ■ Agreement size goals ■ Revenue diversification goals 	<p><i>Media Sales Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Market share ■ Revenues ■ Cashflow ■ Operating profit

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All hands internal sales force meeting Creative production meeting Traffic and plan deployment meeting 	AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private and team real-time coaching sessions Prospecting calls and appointment setting 	AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private and team real-time coaching sessions Prospecting calls and appointment setting Sales appointments and presentations 	AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales appointments and presentations Sales appointments and presentations Sales appointments and presentations 	AM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private and team real-time coaching sessions CRM and progress review by management Sales appointments and presentations
PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prospecting calls and appointment setting Sales activity report submission 	PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales appointments and presentations Sales activity report submission 	PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales appointments and presentations Sales activity report submission 	PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales appointments and presentations Sales activity report submission 	PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales appointments and presentations Sales activity report submission
Example of a media sales force's weekly sales routine.				



Video commercial concept to shoot.
Source: DVB Creative, Creative Lead Thet Paing Kha.

19. Build a creative services team. The aim here is to build a team that can increase your outlet's creative capabilities. The main two focuses are to (1) enhance your outlet's ability to market its brand and content and (2) enable your outlet to offer a wider selection of services to commercial clients. These may include branded content articles, video commercial production, graphic designs, and other services depending on the type of media and creative talent on staff.

20. Ensure human resource policies for sales operations are appropriate.

Newsgathering and sales operations are different. It is important to consider how some internal policies should be adjusted to serve new sales forces best. For example, commission payments, bonuses, and sales-related expense reimbursements may be unfamiliar to a media outlet's existing payroll staff. Therefore, sales management may need to take responsibility for overseeing this. Another example may be working hours. The newsroom may be opened on Sundays, but the sales office may not need to be.

Key Terms

■ **Continuous Improvement:** Sometimes called Kaizen, is the idea that small and ongoing positive changes can add up to significantly improved business results over time.

■ **Customer Relationship Management (CRM):** The practice of managing a prospect or client relationship before, during, and after the sale or project term. The goal of which is to drive revenue generation for the media outlet.

■ **Solution Selling:** A sales approach in which sales reps help prospective clients and clients understand their needs and provide services and

products to solve their problems or pain points. The practice is best applied to B2B sales scenarios where the selling company's offering is customizable, like media services.

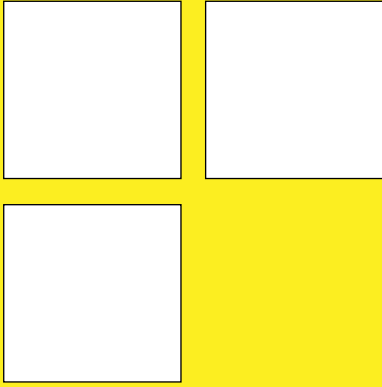
■ **Creative Brief:** The document used by creative professionals to outline a client's business and campaign goals and other specifics about the brand. In writing it up, a media outlet's creative lead and the client agree on what messaging, and concepts will be explored during the creative process and what should be included in the final deliverables.

■ **Sales Funnel:** The buying process that a seller leads prospective customers through to purchase a product or service. This process runs parallel with a media outlet's general overarching sales process. Your media outlets' sales funnel stages may be labeled and defined as you see fit. Typical stages may include awareness, interest, decision, purchase, and retention. Ideally, once a client makes a purchase and its campaign is concluded, it enters the retention stage. Here, a sales team may engage in activities and communications that strengthen the relationship, like reporting good results or offering free bonus benefits. Then, that client reenters the top of the funnel when your sales team makes them aware of new opportunities to advertise with you.

Resources

The book [Cracking the Sales Management Code: The Secrets to Measuring and Managing Sales Performance](#), by Jason Jordan and Michelle Vazzana, is a good reference for more information on sales metrics and sales performance management.

Here is a link to a good resource produced by [Salesforce](#), a company that has broken down selling into discrete, measurable, and manageable steps: [What is a Sales Funnel?](#)



5

Business-to- Consumer Marketing

5

Business-to-Consumer Marketing

Business-to-Consumer marketing, or B2C, is the process of a business selling products or services directly to consumers. For media, examples can include subscriptions, direct sales, personal advertising, merchandising, event tickets, and access to unique content.

For print and digital media specifically, “reader revenue models” are those in which some or all revenue comes directly from readers. Print media have traditionally generated a significant portion of their revenue from consumers. Robust newspapers developed large paid circulation bases through offering term-limited subscriptions, single copy sales, and bulk distribution copies. They also had thick “want ad” sections where people could place ads to sell their cars, furniture, and other items. And they sold branded items, like t-shirts and hats, to their loyal audiences.

Public service media raised money from members to fund their organizations. Other media relied on private contributions raised during fundraising campaigns.

Those models all exist and flourish in digital media. News organizations around the world are combining digital paywalls with **subscription models** to offer paying audiences access to premier content. They are hosting events, selling merchandise, and offering access to unique content (such as crossword puzzles, local sports news, or cooking sites). Online classified ad sites dominate in the personal selling space.

But reader revenue models have also expanded what is possible in the B2C space. Readers can now purchase content in smaller units using micropayments. An example would be a media outlet that sells short Premier League sport alerts to fans via SMS texts. Publishers can also bundle their offerings with other, aligned products and services. For example, [the New Yorker](#) magazine bundles its publication with [Wired](#), very different publications but with appeal to a common target audience.

The chart on the next page describes common approaches to building consumer revenue that will be explored in the chapter:

Learning Objectives

Implementing B2C initiatives including subscription and contribution programs requires a significant shift in organizational resources. Successful publishers marry excellent content with a strong user experience. They execute strong marketing and messaging campaigns, experiment to refine their efforts, and closely monitor a wide range of data to evaluate performance. They invest in technology and analysis. Most importantly, they are willing to put readers’ needs at the heart of their efforts and build products and programming that meet those needs.

In this chapter, you will:

1. Learn about the value of establishing reader revenue models, particularly in constrained markets, and the differences between common models employed by news organizations.
2. Find essential resources to help your organization plan to implement a subscriptions or contribution model.

	Subscriptions	Contributions: Publishers encourage audience to financially support the organization		
		Donations	Crowdfunding	Membership
Description	<p>A method of repeatedly selling products or services to customers over a fixed period and for a set amount of money</p> <p>Readers subscribe to news organizations for content, whether delivered digitally or physically. Typically involve paywalls</p>	<p>A charitable gift paid to a news organization</p> <p>Can be requested on a website with a donation banner or button</p>	<p>Typically used to raise one-time funds to support a specific initiative or goal</p> <p>Can be requested on a website with a donation banner or button</p>	<p>Offering a set of benefits to contributors and encouraging their active involvement with the brand</p> <p>Can involve member benefits, access to content and newsroom engagement, or events</p>
Benefits	<p>Can build a base of consistent funding, especially in contexts where advertising revenue can be constrained</p> <p>Relies on a strong brand and can strengthen brand loyalty with subscribed readers</p>	<p>A simple way to begin generating reader revenue</p> <p>Relies on a strong brand and can strengthen brand loyalty with donors</p>	<p>Can be used to support specific initiatives or reporting projects in need of resources</p>	<p>Can build a base of consistent funding, especially in contexts where advertising revenue can be constrained</p> <p>Allows members to be actively involved with the organization and its impact, strengthening the relationship with readers/listeners and a better understanding of their preferences</p> <p>Member events or engagements provide additional media brand marketing opportunities</p>

5.1 Elements of Subscription Models

A **subscription model** is a method of repeatedly selling products or services to customers over a fixed period and for a set amount of money. Worldwide, the subscriber economy is taking off in many different segments based on streamed content: examples include Spotify, Netflix, Nigeria's Iroko TV, Televisa-Univision, India's Hotstar, and Malaysia's iFlix. There is also growth in subscription services in categories like software (Office, Adobe) and gaming.

In the media world, readers subscribe to news organizations for content, whether delivered digitally, physically, or both. Content can be sold as a single product, such as a subscription to a home-delivered newspaper or a digital-only subscription. Or digital and print offerings can be bundled to subscribers in various combinations and at diverse price points. For example, many publishers offer digital access with other offerings, such as 7-day print subscriptions or the Sunday print edition. As one example shown here, [Tempo](#), a news magazine in Indonesia, offers different subscriptions packages based on access to the digital newspaper and magazine at different levels: Silver, Gold, and Platinum. Tempo also offers

readers a print and digital bundling option, in which they can have access to the magazine's publications in different formats.

Digital-only subscriptions are usually linked to a **paywall** on a news website. Unlike the clunky early versions of paywalls, today they take diverse forms and can be adjusted based on the organization's marketing goals and audience behaviors.

The Value of Reader Revenue

Resilient news media rely on diverse revenue sources. For news media operating in emerging and constrained spaces, advertising revenues are often inconsistent — if available at all. Thus, readers are an important source of ongoing revenue, and offering subscriptions helps build a base of consistent funding.

While the combined average growth rate (CAGR) of many segments of media revenue (advertising, street sales) are flat or declining, subscription revenues in many places are showing a healthy growth rate. For example, the *New York Times* now generates more revenue from online readers than from its print subscribers. And it has earned more money from consumers than advertisers for years.

Print circulation managers have historically known that subscriptions are built in “units of one”: selling one more subscription to one more person. The Time's focus on getting readers to visit the site one more time a day, read one more article, and access content in one more section has helped fuel its digital subscriptions growth to more than 7.5 million paying customers.

Subscription and reader-first revenue business models are starkly different from advertising models. For advertising models, a clear organizational mandate is to increase the breadth of reach among audiences desirable to advertisers.

The screenshot displays Tempo's subscription offerings. At the top, it lists three 'Paket Digital' options: SILVER (Rp 32 RIBU PERBULAN), GOLD (Rp 50 RIBU PERBULAN), and PLATINUM (Rp 54 RIBU PERBULAN). Each package includes 'Akses 1 Bulan' and various digital access options. Below these, there is a 'Paket Bundling Cetak & Digital' section with a 'view bundling package' button. The page also features a testimonial from Tempo about their bundling offer.

Tempo's subscriptions page provides readers with different offerings at varying price points.
Source: Tempo, [Subscriptions](#).

However, building a sustainable digital business subscription model is not just about building audience volumes, but rather about generating **subscriber** profits. The key is having a strong brand that readers prefer. The quality of the news — the “**value proposition**” discussed in [Chapter 1.3](#) — is at the heart of all subscription models. For reader-revenue programs, the goal is to create **brand preference**, develop a sense of community among readers, identify segments of users that are likely to convert to paying customers, and then acquire and retain them.

Retention marketing — how your organization continues to nurture and cultivate its subscribers — ultimately has substantial influence on profitability since it is much more cost-effective to retain a customer than to acquire one.

The Subscription Funnel

Creating a strong process for subscriptions usually involves visualizing it as a **funnel**. The widest end is the readers or users who are aware of the opportunity to subscribe, who then are exposed to a series of marketing efforts that encourage them to move to deeper engagement with your brand and content.

To do so requires aligning your organization around the funnel and its processes. Consumer insights derived from data inform every decision point in the subscriber journey. This is an example of a typical

subscription funnel and the key metrics used to inform decisions at each step.

Typically, an organization would use an integrated set of **CRM or customer relationship management** tools to automate these processes. There are various free and paid services that help manage subscription funnels.

Three Essential Resources

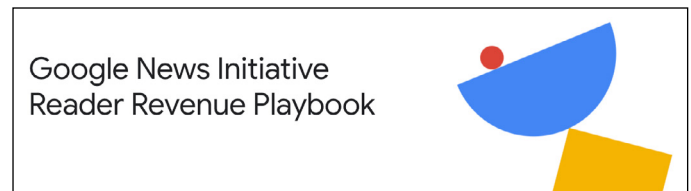
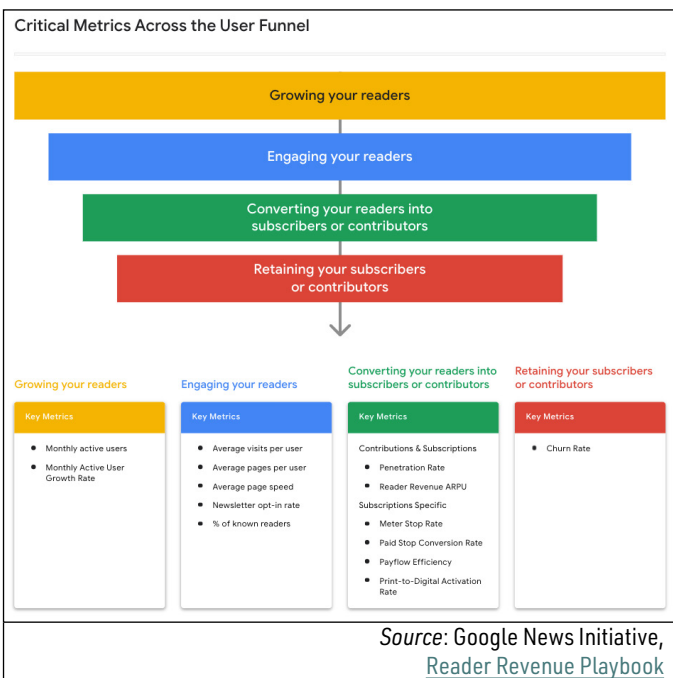
1. Reader Revenue Playbook

If you are considering a subscription model, turn to the [Reader Revenue Playbook](#) produced by the Google News Initiative in conjunction with FTI Consulting and the Local Media Association. It is the first stop for a news organization seeking to develop reader revenues in the form of subscriptions or contributions.

The Playbook is a comprehensive free resource with guides, examples, and interactive exercises, and provides a framework for accelerating publishers’ digital subscription development.

It has tools to identify your reader revenue opportunity and, once underway, compare your funnel’s performance against industry benchmarks. Its goal-setting exercise helps you develop a well-integrated plan for your reader revenue business.

The Google News Initiative also has a [suite of subscription products and policies](#) designed to help publishers increase their reader revenue businesses. It [shares proven approaches](#) to content sampling and recommends best practices. It offers tools to facilitate conversions using an integrated purchase/payment flow. Its newsletter sign-up is [here](#).



2. News Consumer Insights 2.0

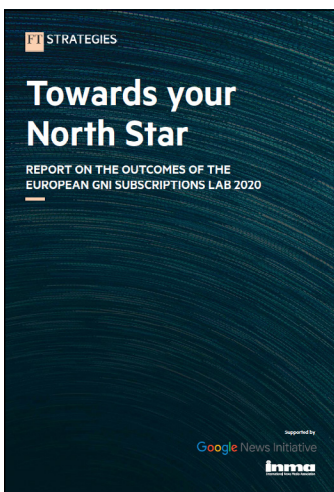
Google also provides the [News Consumer Insights 2.0](#) Playbook to help publishers make data-driven business decisions. Filled with best-of-class examples and proven approaches, this guide includes recommendations on:



- Improving reader engagement and revenue
- Benchmarking reader performance
- Optimizing **conversion rates**

3. Towards Your North Star: Report on the Outcomes of the European GNI Subscriptions Lab 2020

FT Strategies, the consulting arm of the *Financial Times* that provides expert guidance on reader revenue models, partnered with the International News Media Association (INMA) and the Google News Initiative (GNI) to share learnings from eight European publishers that participated in the European GNI Subscriptions Lab. The program was designed to help publishers develop a “North Star” strategy of creating a reader-first culture. [Towards Your North Star](#) has two sections:



- **Building a Subscription-First Company:** identifying the challenges to becoming a subscription-led business
- **Optimizing the Subscription Lifecycle:** Examples of best practices and ways to optimize performance at stages of the subscription lifecycle.

Note: On page 42 there is a Key Metrics Glossary that not only defines important metrics, but also shows a benchmark range achieved by the participants.

Insights

Getting Started: Building a Consumer Revenue Business Model for News Media

Interview with Grzegorz Piechota, Researcher-in-Residence, INMA

Once an editor heading the dynamic *Gazeta Wyborcza* newsroom in Poland, Grzegorz “Greg” Piechota is a leading expert on consumer revenue models for news media. Currently serving the global membership of [INMA](#) as Researcher-in-Residence and a trusted source of leading-edge thinking, Piechota has studied technology-enabled disruption across many industries, with a special focus on news media.



Source:
Reuters Institute

With 20+ years of news industry experience and a law degree, Piechota is an ex-fellow at both Harvard and Oxford universities. At Harvard Business School (HBS) he focused on digital business model innovations; at Oxford's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, he examined the intersection of paid content models for news organizations and digital platforms.

A prolific writer and public speaker, he has published research reports on the evolving relationships between news and social media, and co-authored the book [Unlocking the Customer Value Chain: How Decoupling Drives Consumer Disruption](#) with Thales Teixeira, an HBS professor. His enormous energy and passion for news and news media benefit various organizations and he serves on a number of media, software, and e-commerce company boards of directors. Greg lives in England.

Q: In your experience, is developing consumer revenues possible for media outlets in constrained markets?

A: It is certainly possible, as news publishers, such as [Gazeta Wyborcza](#) in Poland, [Telex](#) in Hungary or [Malaysiakini](#) in Malaysia clearly demonstrate. These publishers have found that reader revenue

might be the key in securing financial and editorial independence.

The reason is because advertising markets in Poland, Hungary and Malaysia are politicized, and controlled by governments or oligarchs allied with governments. By supporting the news outlet financially, readers demonstrate they see the value in their work.

Consumer revenues not only provide sustainable revenue, but they also confer legitimacy on journalists' work and give them confidence. As the FC Liverpool Fans sing: journalists know [they will never walk alone](#).

Q: What gaps do you see between media outlets in developed markets in Europe, India, and North America, and those in the constrained markets we often work in?

A: Publishers in constrained markets often have less access to resources: money for investment; people with skills useful in monetization; or even the necessary technology. And there is an additional factor: journalists often fear that, in comparison to Western media, the quality of their products is lower, or breadth of their content is smaller.

On the other hand, they often have a clarity of purpose that other media may lack. They have a committed staff: their journalism is fearless.

Their products are differentiated from the competitors in their countries not by the breadth of content or quality of layout but simply because of the basic function of journalism they produce — they investigate, they witness, they verify, they make sense.

As a result, they often have a dedicated audience ready to support their work, and that deeply loyal audience is often most likely to be the first to pay for their journalism.

Q: Do media have to be at the scale of the New York Times or Financial Times to generate consumer revenues?

A: No, they don't. The New York Times and the Financial Times spent the last decade trying to prove that their journalism is worth paying for, and now they are working on scaling that idea. While smaller, other

publishers can learn from the subscription leaders about the fundamentals of reader revenue:

- Aligning around the company's mission (internal goals and the **brand values** communicated externally)
- Courage in journalism (the value proposition) and in business (operating model and profit formula)
- Focusing on understanding readers and tailoring content, product, and marketing to those readers
- Using a hypothesis-based approach and evidence-based decision making (the use of data to confirm/reject the hypotheses).

By 2020, based on my study for INMA, 39% of nationwide media outlets in the world's 33 richest media markets charged for online news.

Q: For those outlets that are not doing so now, how do they get started? What barriers do they typically have to overcome first? Or what first steps do they need to take?

A: Starting a digital subscription program is often mistaken to be just a marketing or a technology project. It is not. It changes everything about how a news media organization is managed and operates.

Indeed, subscription models require redefining the marketing mix. That includes adjusting the subscription offers, pricing, and promotion. It also often requires changes in the publisher's **tech stack**, such as implementing identity software to authenticate users, adding a CRM database to manage users, creating a paywall or targeting software to expose readers to offers, and having a strong payment system.

Yet launching a subscription model goes well beyond those individual pieces. It is really a change in the business model of the publishing company.

Paying subscribers might have different interests than the free visitors a publisher has attracted. This is an important distinction, especially for news media that have been focused on building their free audiences to attract digital advertising.

So, publishers often face a need to understand their readers better, and in greater detail, and adjust to meet their needs. This often includes refining their editorial content, products (such as websites or apps), and introducing new features worth paying for.

This all constitutes changes to all aspects of the business — the value proposition, the operating model, and the ways the business generates profit.

Successful publishers, such as The New York Times, emphasize the role of a culture change within the publishing company so that it becomes more customer-centric.

Sometimes, it leads to redefinition of the company's mission and purpose. An example is The Guardian in the U.K.: it introduced a **membership model** in which there is no paywall on its websites, but readers are encouraged to contribute financially to support their journalism. They can give a one-off contribution, commit to regular donations, or subscribe to mobile apps.

Q: If a media outlet had a timeframe of six months to ramp up consumer revenues from zero to 10–20% of total income, what main operations or activities would you prioritize? What investments should they make?

A: The first step should be to hire a data analyst or researcher to help understand your online readership, survey readers, and size the opportunity. Sometimes publishers find they need to work first on reader engagement before they can successfully launch a subscription/membership program.

The second step would be to have your editor in chief define what the purpose of the publication is — this is going to be the source for your brand positioning messaging and the launch campaign.

The third step would be to appoint a program/project manager who will figure out what are the necessary changes in the editorial, marketing, and technology to start charging for content. That person will manage the project until the launch and then optimize it afterwards.

Before going to market with the actual subscription or the membership product, you can test the market with, for example, a **crowdfunding** campaign. People who contribute first will be your fans and heavy users

who might provide invaluable feedback to inform your paid product development.

Whether or not you achieve 10–20% of the total income depends on the size of your base income, the size of your loyal audience, and the commitment level of your supporters.

Obviously, the larger the publisher, the longer it has been in the market, and the better its brand is known makes it easier to get started. Established publishers have some advantage over newly launched projects.

However, the latter can leverage the credibility and relationships of their founders or first employees to get started. Many publishers also focus first on identifying loyal readers and working on their engagement, with registration and newsletter projects that precede the launch of the paid subscription program.

Q: How does moving to a consumer revenue business model affect a media organization operationally, and the relationships between key areas?

A: Reader revenue success is a transformative project for the company and it requires alignment of all parts of the organisation: the newsroom, marketing, advertising, technology, finance, and data. This can be achieved by creating a shared vision of success, along with clearly defined goals, and **Key Performance Indicators**, or KPIs.

Developing a subscription/membership product requires collaboration among all departments, and publishers often set up cross-functional teams to manage the development and further growth.

Q: Does the commercial revenue model still have potential for news outlets? And if so, what types of media services might outlets aim to develop and offer to direct brand advertising clients?

A: If the goal is sustainability, publishers may wish to strategically diversify their sources of revenue, and therefore advertising or e-commerce still have an important role in their business. Many publishers find that the technology, skills, or talent they have attracted or built to succeed in subscriptions can be used to develop new products in advertising and e-commerce.

That is an important point. With the death of third-party cookies, advertising markets are shifting towards first-party data-based advertising and that basically requires registering and logging in readers. One of the outcomes of a successful subscription or a membership program is the higher share of logged in users, and the information about their behaviors is going to have a higher value than just the money they pay for a subscription or membership.

In that sense, the shift towards reader revenue raises a tide that will help elevate all a publisher's business lines.

Key Terms

Subscription management is not new to print publishers. Whether in print or online, there is a specific vocabulary to describe actions, activities, and processes. However, in the digital environment, many of these are fully automated and can occur in real time. Many of these terms also typically serve as key indicators.

■ **Acquisition:** The process of gaining a user, reader, or customer. Google Analytics offers data on the source and medium of users, along with other acquisition dimensions. It offers reports on users that come to a site from organic, social, or paid search.

■ **Active Users:** The number of people currently viewing content on a website.

■ **Audiences:** A group of readers who share common characteristics. As a metric, you can use Google Analytics to create custom audience groups to assess how marketing campaigns perform.

■ **Average Pages per Visit:** The average number of pages a user visits during a single visit. It is a key measure of user engagement. Users who visit multiple pages during a visit are more committed to the content and the brand.

■ **Average Page Speed:** A metric of how quickly a website page loads. How fast a page loads is an essential element of overall engagement and user experience. Slow load times are detrimental to the process of converting users into subscribers.

■ **ARPU:** Average Revenue per User

■ **ARPS:** Average Revenue per Subscriber

■ **Average Time Spent/Average Session Duration:** The average amount of time users spend on a website during one visit.

■ **Average Visits per User:** Of all users on a website, the average number of visits per month.

■ **Brand Preference:** The brand that users prefer in a specific situation, such as when searching for local or breaking news.

■ **Conversion:** When a user completes a goal or makes a purchase. Converting an unpaid reader to a paying subscriber.

■ **Conversion Rate:** The percentage of potential customers converting from unpaid to paid.

■ **Churn Rate:** The number of non-renewing customers as a percentage of total subscribers.

■ **CRM/Customer Relationship Management:** This refers to both a set of processes and the tool used to manage them. CRM is the processes, techniques, and strategies that acquire, retain, and upsell customers. A CRM Management tool is software that manages those functions, automates key parts of the sales effort, generates productivity reports, and provides management with key performance metrics.

■ **Engagement:** Engagement metrics are used in combination to learn how deeply users are using a website and its content. For Facebook, engagement metrics include the number of comments, shares, likes, and clicks. For a news website, engagement metrics can include the bounce rate, time spent on site, page/scroll depth, and pages per session. *Financial Times* uses RFV: Reader engagement as measured by recency, frequency, and volume of use.

■ **Freemium Model:** When a business cultivates a relationship with a customer by offering free services, but then charges to access upgrades or premium offerings. It has been commonly used in the online gaming environment and is used by news media to widen their base of potential paying customers by offering a certain type of content at no charge.

■ **Frequency:** How often a reader accesses content.

■ **Funnel (Subscription Funnel or Subscription Conversion Funnel):** A model of the journey a prospective customer goes through en route to becoming a paying customer and, once having paid, how that customer is remarketed to and retained.

■ **Lifetime Value:** LTV, the financial value of a customer over time.

■ **Meter:** A paywall that allows users to access a specific amount or type of content or before requiring a paid subscription. Some metering schemes only allow access to non-premium content in front of the paywall; others define a set number of articles that can be accessed before the paywall activates.

■ **Meter Stop Rate:** A metric of the percentage of unique users who hit the website's subscription paywall (unique users who hit the paywall divided by monthly active users per month)

■ **Monthly Active Users:** The number of users during a defined period

■ **Pages per Session:** An engagement metric that shows the average number of pageviews in a session.

■ **Paywall:** A method of limiting access to content to paid subscribers. It can take many forms: a hard paywall that stops all non-subscribers. A freemium or metered model. Or a hybrid model that allows content sharing and other methods that make the paywall more porous.

■ **Recency:** How recently a reader accessed content.

■ **Registration Wall:** A page on your website that asks users to register their email addresses and perhaps captures a minimum amount of other information about them. This allows the media organization to market to them with subscription offers and content promotion.

■ **Retention/Retention Rate:** Among subscribers, the percentage that renew. It can be evaluated by campaign, audience segment, or offering.

■ **Returning Visitors:** A visitor that returns to your website within a specific period.

■ **Revenue per User:** An average amount of revenue generated by each user measured by the total revenue divided by the number of users.

■ **Segmentation:** Audiences are segmented in many ways to distinguish how to market to one group in a different way than when marketing to other groups. Segmentation can be based on demographics (gender, age, income), psychographic or lifestyle behaviors, purchase behavior, or loyalty metrics.

■ **Subscribers:** Users who pay for access to content for a defined period.

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- **Technology Stack:** The technology solutions that implement each step of the subscription funnel. A comprehensive list of the types of tools used and why they are important can be accessed here.

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- **User:** An individual browsing a website as tracked by a unique browser cookie. When someone visits a website using a mobile phone, tablet, desktop, or other device, those are each treated as separate users. There is a user ID feature within Google Analytics that allows you to track individuals rather than devices.

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- **User Experience (UX):** The complete experience that a person has when using a website. UX includes page speed, the ease of access to content, and other less concrete aspects such as imagery, beauty, and the use of language. It also represents the integration across the site of common design elements, clear branding, usability, and strong functionality.

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- **Unique Visitors, Total:** Total visitors to a website during a set period of time.

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- **Unique Visitors, Known:** Known visitors are those who already have a relationship with the brand, such as registered users or email and newsletter subscribers. They are more likely to convert.

Resources

[FTI Consulting](#): A global business advisory and consulting firm, and a co-author of the Reader Revenue Playbook.

[FT Strategies](#): The digital growth consulting group of the Financial Times. Its website includes reports, articles, and podcasts on topics related to subscriptions and reader engagement.

[INMA](#): International News Media Association. This membership-based organization offers expert insight into many areas of news media management and

offers rich opportunities (virtual and in-person) for peer-to-peer learning. Its website offers some free resources; members have access to in-depth reports, case studies, online discussions, and thought-leadership.

[Local Media Association](#): A U.S. organization that brings together media for sharing, networking, and collaborating. It has resources on social media solutions, audience development, and methods to heighten user engagement.

[Mather Economics](#): Mather is a leader in customer data analytics and subscription management. It provides thought leadership to the subscription community, turn-key analytics services, and custom consulting services.

[Piano](#): Piano offers media companies an integrated suite of paid subscription management tools that automate the subscription journey from acquisition through retention. It helps deliver the right experience to audiences, supports real-time audience segmentation, and provides digital analytics. Its website also shares case studies of best examples.

[Substack](#): Substack is a platform where individual writers, reporters, and creatives can post their own content and develop an audience that pays them directly without the intermediary of a larger media house.

[How the New York Times A/B Tests their Headlines](#) shows good examples of how the publication tests approaches with audiences. A/B testing is an important part of managing engagement with users and testing subscriptions.

[How Netflix's Customer Obsession Created a Customer Obsession](#), a Medium blog post by Gibson Biddle.

[Bloomberg Media expects nine-figure consumer subscription business](#), an article by Axios.

5.2 *Elements of Contribution & Membership Models*

News media need diverse revenue sources to be resilient. Globally, business models for news media have collapsed: Google and Facebook continue to erode market share from local news producers and other advertising sources have become irregular. Thus, many news media find it vital to turn to audience sources of revenue.

A **contribution model** for news media is one where publishers encourage readers to financially support their organization. Many models encourage funders to contribute on a regular basis, often monthly. In return, contributors gain access to content, member benefits, or a combination of both.

Contributions can take the form of direct financial **donations**, various forms of **crowdfunding**, or memberships.

The Value of Contributions

Contribution models are based on a personal relationship between a news brand, its content, and its supporters. A news organization aligns itself to produce the quality and quantity of content that a broader audience requires and that contributors are willing to support.

The goals and operating principles of contribution models are distinctly different from those of news media largely reliant on advertising models. Those require broad reach of audiences that advertisers find desirable, which can lead to producing content with broad appeal.

They also differ from subscription models in a substantial way. In a **subscription model**, publishers request payment in exchange for content. Digital subscriptions typically require a form of **paywall**. Because they are commercial and transactional, subscriptions are — in some ways — easier to manage and scale.

In a contribution model, readers pay for access to high-quality content for themselves and, through their support, for others. Contribution models typically do not involve paywalls, so the contributions made by readers allow others to continue accessing content for free. They align readers' values with the values of the news organization. **Membership models**, in which an organization offers members a set of benefits, are even more involved because they create direct engagement with the brand. This requires more intense messaging, creating in-person events, and managing one-to-one relationships.

A contribution model can also impart a brand halo on the content producer. If this model effectively supplants the need for advertising or **sponsored content**, audiences gain a greater perception of the content as editorially independent and free of commercial bias.

Contributions can be used to fund an organization's overall expenses, or to fund specific reporting projects, particularly long-form journalism requiring long lead times and intensive resources. For nonprofit news organizations in some countries, contributions can be considered tax-deductible expenses.

News media that have large exile or diaspora populations often use contribution models to raise funds from outside their borders. And those operating in environments with substantial income disparities can use contribution models targeting upscale funders to ensure unpaid access to independent reporting to all readers. In constrained environments or contexts in which the press is targeted, asking contributors to directly support independent reporting, improve information ecosystems, and elevate critical journalism can be key to marketing your organization's mission to your audience, raising needed revenue, and building both trust and brand loyalty.

Types of Contribution Models

Contribution models share common elements: they all seek to create deep and engaged relationships with brand loyalists. Fundamental to that is a commitment to high quality, relevant content that successfully engages and rewards audiences. At their most effective levels, contribution models are as intensively managed as subscription models.

For a thoughtful outline of the differences between contributions, memberships, and crowdfunding, [click here](#).

Donations

The most basic contribution model is a donation, a charitable gift. The simplest way to implement a donation program is to have a “donate” button on a website linked to a payment gateway. That simple step can serve as an entryway into gaining consumer-generated revenues.

**“News is a commodity.
Journalism is not.”**

— Grzegorz Piechota, Researcher in Residence,
INMA Media Subscription Summit 2021

[The Guardian](#), perhaps the best-known contribution model example, has raised this model to a fine art. It is the standard for framing a donation appeal. It builds on its trusted relationship with audiences and high-quality reporting to ask for contributions that keep its reporting widely accessible.

In fact, this contribution box (which pops up covering the site’s content) has become genericized: other news organizations seeking contributions often use similar colors, fonts, and language in their appeals.

Celebrate our past, power our future

It's not every day you turn 200. We hope you'll join us in celebrating two centuries of independent, high-impact Guardian journalism, and support us as we gear up for centuries more. You've read 5 articles in the last year. Since 1821, tens of millions have placed their trust in us, turning to our quality reporting in moments of crisis, uncertainty, solidarity and hope. And we're just getting started. With your help, we can remain open for all, fiercely independent and can continue chasing the truth. Every contribution, however big or small, powers our work. **Support the Guardian from as little as \$1. Thank you.**

Support the Guardian →

VISA Mastercard PayPal

Join the party →

Source: [The Guardian](#)

Telex, a media organization in Hungary, was founded to be an independent and trusted source for readers across the country and relies on reader donations to remain free from government influence over the media and journalism. The donation page shown below, demonstrates how the organization calls upon its readers to support independent media with their donations: “Tens of thousands of people have decided to help finance this big idea, and we are doing everything in our power to make it a reality. We aim to build a large, independent, and diverse news portal because we sincerely believe that fair and impartial news is necessary for readers to make free decisions.”

SUPPORT TELEX!

Donate Join us!

Telex is Hungary's largest, community-funded news source. It grew out of the idea that readers should be able to learn about what's going on in Hungary and the world at large from a well-rounded, interesting, entertaining, and impartial news source that is not dependent on any economic or political interests.

#WEWONTSTAYSILENT

Source: Telex, [Donation page \(English\)](#)

Donations are not just limited to online news media. [KQED](#), the PBS television broadcaster in the San Francisco Bay area, is famous for promoting its quality journalism and seeking contributions.

Local, non-profit journalism is critical for healthy communities. Help our community stay strong by supporting independent news and information in Northern California.

Donate

KQED PBS

Always free. Sign In

Source: [KQED](#)

Crowdfunding

A **crowdfunding** model is typically used to raise one-time funds to support a specific initiative or goal. An example is [Krautreporter](#) in Germany, which funded its 2014 launch with a successful crowdfunding appeal. It later converted to a membership model.

Membership

A membership model differs by offering a set of benefits to contributors and encouraging their active involvement with the brand. According to the [Membership Puzzle Project](#), “membership is a social contract between a news organization and its members in which members give their time, money, energy, expertise, and connections to support a cause that they believe in. In exchange, the news organization offers transparency and opportunities to meaningfully contribute to both the sustainability and impact of the organization.”

In the United States, public service broadcasters manage some of the most famous and effective **membership programs**. National Public Radio (NPR) affiliates hold periodic “pledge weeks” when they interrupt programming to ask listeners to call in and commit to supporting the station. Contributors at different levels receive benefits tiered to their contribution.

Here are some examples of benefits offered to members.

[La Silla Vacía](#), (*The Empty Chair*), in Colombia gains support from its “Super Amigos,” members who contribute at a high level. Those members provide foundational support to the organization and help support its independent journalism.

military coup, Frontier’s membership program has continued to be effective at raising support.

Thanks for reading Frontier.

We're building a membership programme. That means we're asking you to invest in our journalism by becoming a member. We're also offering a range of exclusive products, from newsletters to events and behind the scenes content, that will help you to understand what's going on in Myanmar.

In addition to the plans outlined below, we also offer custom group and institutional subscriptions. If you're interested, or if you have a question about our membership options, send us an email at members@frontiermyanmar.net.

Membership **\$80**
per year

Become a member of the Frontier community

Monthly

Annual (Save 17%)

Subscribe

Give this as a gift

- ✓ Support Frontier's independent journalism
- ✓ Access a digital edition of Frontier before the magazine hits the stands
- ✓ Political Insider
An in-depth look at Myanmar's political landscape, sent out to members every two weeks
- ✓ Option to receive a 50 percent discount on your print subscription (Yangon, Nay Pyi Taw and Mandalay only)
- ✓ Free entry to our monthly events in Yangon
- ✓ Receive 'behind the scenes' community emails

Source: Frontier, [Frontier Membership](#)

La Silla Vacía Login

ARE 1,118 Súper Amigos.

The journalism that we do and in which we believe needs SuperAmigos: a community that guarantees that this project is sustainable and that allows us to grow as it grows with us. If you also believe that a well-informed country makes better decisions and wants to experience our journalism and the talks, courses and events that we do in the front row, choose to be our SuperFriend and take your seat in this civic and intellectual community.

AS PART OF THE CIVIC AND INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY OF LA SILLA LOS SÚPERAMIGOS:

Source: La Silla Vacía, [Super Amigos](#)

Super Amigos have a chair at the organization’s Thursday talks, share knowledge with reporters, and attend virtual courses.

[Frontier Myanmar](#) launched its membership campaign in the wake of enormous disruption. Local advertising markets collapsed when tourism faltered in 2019 following the Rohingya genocide and then exacerbated by the pandemic quarantine of 2020. During the 2021

Read about how Agora.md in Moldova researched, developed, and implemented a membership program in this [case study](#). In 2020, Agora launched its membership program, a unique model in Moldova, allowing readers to engage more with its content by paying to become a member at the Supporter, Fan, or Ambassador membership levels.

The Contribution Funnel

Creating a strong process for contributions is similar to that for managing subscriptions. It usually involves visualizing the process as a **funnel**, similar to the subscription funnel described in [Chapter 5.1](#). Like a

subscription model, the widest end of the funnel is the readers or users who are aware of the opportunity to contribute, who then are exposed to a series of marketing efforts that encourage them to move towards deeper engagement.

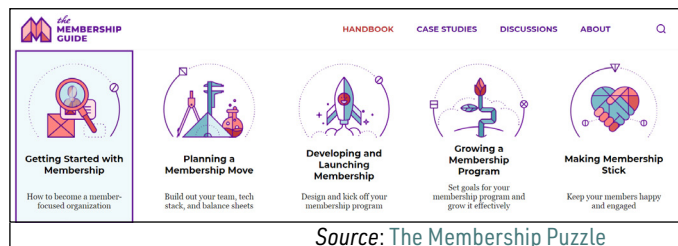
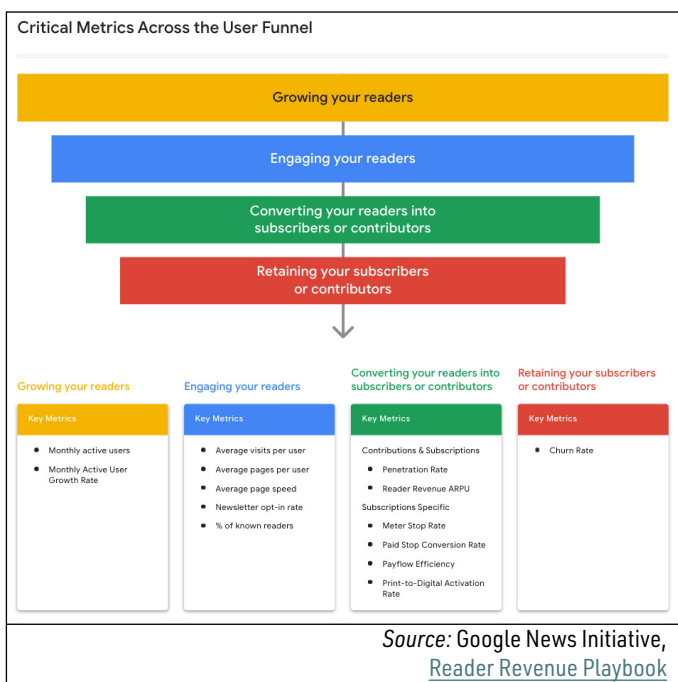
A contribution model, however, has more non-automated processes. Those include holding events, soliciting commentary, creating opportunities for members to share ideas and be involved. Those are vital parts of the process and must be incorporated.

it serves. With membership, members give their time, money, and ideas to support a cause they believe in.”

The Puzzle Project offers media managers rich resources for building their membership models. It offers [research](#) on topics and thought leadership related to membership programs.

It includes a [guide](#) that includes:

- A comprehensive [handbook](#) outlining the steps to start developing a membership program
- [Case studies](#) from publishers with their key learnings
- [Guidance](#) for making decisions about your tech stack
- A [database](#) of organizations with membership programs
- A [library](#) of information about trust and news media
- A [database](#) that compares how 50 public radio stations’ sites in the U.S. and internationally define, attract, and retain members



Two Essential Resources

1. The Membership Puzzle Project

The [Membership Puzzle Project](#) is the first place to look when evaluating whether a membership program is a good fit for your organization. It operates under the Media Development Investment Fund, [MDIF](#), and was originally founded by NYU professor Jay Rosen and his [Studio 20 program](#) in conjunction with the former Dutch online publication De Correspondent. It created an essential toolkit for news media seeking to grow a community of readers who contribute financially — and in other ways — to support independent journalism.

Its founding insight is that “membership is a social contract between a news organization and the community

Importantly, the Project previously developed the [Membership in News Fund](#) to provide financial and venture support to organizations seeking to build strong audience relationships. Although it concludes in 2021, the Project generated a wealth of knowledge about membership programs and their essential elements.

2. Reader Revenue Playbook

If you are considering a contribution model, the [Reader Revenue Playbook](#) described in the last section on subscriptions also has guidance on contributions, successful examples of contribution models, and how to decide whether to include this form of reader revenue in your business model.

Key Terms

- **Membership Strategy:** The overall approach your organization takes to membership and where/how it fits within your overall operation. It covers organizational approaches and alignment with content. More importantly, it is the program's vision, comprised of its mission, values, principles, and aspirations.

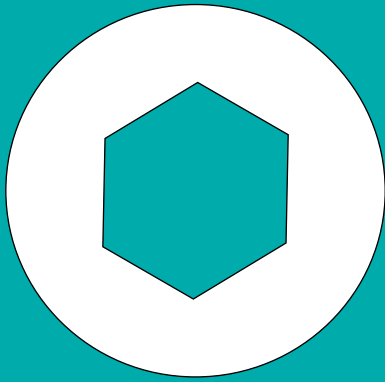
- **Membership Program:** The structure of the membership effort. It includes member benefits, payment mechanisms and levels, the opportunities for member engagement, and avenues for membership participation.

- **Contribution Model:** A revenue model in which publishers encourage readers or listeners to financially support their organization.

- **Sponsorship Program:** Many programs hold events for their members. They are often funded not only by member donations, but also by business sponsorship or underwriting.

Resources

- [Kickstarter](#) is one of the most popular crowdfunding platforms and has been used by various news organizations to support startups and finance special projects.
- [Patreon](#) is a crowdfunding platform used by many news media organizations to manage and collect contributions. It is more broadly used by fans and others to financially support the work of artists they like online.
- [Global Investigative Journalism Network](#) offers thoughts on crowdfunding for journalists.
- [Philanthropic support is a small but growing revenue stream for The Guardian, reaching a record-breaking \\$9M last year](#), Nieman Lab.
- [One year after India cracked down on Kashmir, The Kashmir Walla turns to membership to survive](#), Nieman Lab.
- [INMA](#): International News Media Association. This membership-based organization offers expert insight into many areas of news media management and offers rich opportunities (virtual and in-person) for peer-to-peer learning. Its website offers some free resources; members have access to in-depth reports, case studies, online discussions, and thought leadership.



Event Marketing

6

Event Marketing

Relationships & Revenue

News media have a powerful asset in their ability to cost-effectively promote an event to their own audiences. They are often well-known in their communities and have considerable brand strength.

And media, with their unique role in a community, have the credibility and convening power that can make them outstanding event marketers.

They can use this considerable power to generate publicity for community events managed by others. In a typical [media partnership](#) arrangement, an organization holding an event partners with a media house to provide mutually beneficial promotion.

News media can also create their own events and use their own medium to promote them. It is often more beneficial — and more profitable — for a media organization to create and manage its own events. This approach is more complicated, as it requires strong organizational skills and focus. It also starts with an idea and a passion: is there an event that would bring people together and offer them some unique value, whether it is education, entertainment, or engagement with a topic they care about?

The best events **have a strong sense of purpose**. There needs to be a “why” — what will audiences get out of the event? What do you want them to feel or experience?

The best events also **incorporate the values, mission, and principles** of the media organization.

Events are also often **good sources of revenue**.

News media use events to create deeper relationships in their communities and to build strong brand associations for their organizations. They also create events that attract new and diverse sources of revenue, whether from [sponsorships](#), advertising, tickets, merchandising, or other sources.

The Value of Event Marketing

Event marketing is personal — it is usually conducted face-to-face. That personal component is what makes event marketing so effective: it is a direct way to create a deeper connection between a brand and an individual.

There are many different types of events, from small personal experiences to ones of vast scale, such as marathon races, musical concerts, or trade shows. As will be shown in the following sections, media organizations can host a diversity of events including thought leadership seminars, member club events, gatherings to meet reporters and other staff members, or radio remotes.

There are also events that are created to enhance an organization’s brand and create a community. In those cases, an organization may join with other sponsors to create something unique. For example, a large fundraiser for a prominent newspaper would likely have many sponsors who receive recognition for their support of its journalism, particularly if the media outlet has a strong and trustworthy brand.

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, many events have also shifted to digital platforms that are increasing their impact and reach, as audiences seek to remain connected to others.

Business Models: News media companies generate revenue from events in various ways, including:

- Holding events under their own brand and selling sponsorships, tickets, advertising, and merchandising.
- Designing and operating custom events on behalf of others for a fee.
- Owning the rights to a local version of an event that is managed and implemented by a third party or a partner. Revenue is earned by selling tickets, advertising, and merchandise.

- Partnering with an event organizer as an official “media partner” by offering in-kind media trades and visibility in exchange for sponsorship rights that benefits the news brand.
- Acting as “brokers” by selling advertising and other promotional packages in conjunction with an event, generating commissions on those sales.

Each of these business models has the potential to earn revenue when events are well-managed, well-promoted, and targeted to a specific audience.

Indicators

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for event marketing will vary based on the type of events your organization holds and its specific goals. Here are some useful indicators.

Ticket Registrations and/or Sales: It is important before any event to develop an audience and engage its commitment. This metric shows how many people are interested in your event. This indicator also helps compare different events and their success. A ticket sale usually reflects a higher level of commitment to attending than just a registration. It shows that the buyer understands there is an economic value to the event and that it is worth paying to attend.

Event Attendance: What percentage of people who registered attended the event? It would be rare for this number to be 100%: there is always **attrition**. There are many reasons: some preventable, some not. There are last minute emergencies or conflicts. Weather or travel delays may preclude participation. But if an event is poorly attended, it should be evaluated. Was the event well marketed, and marketed to the right audiences? Were they reminded via email or text that the event was coming up and how to attend? Was registration so cheap that there was no financial loss to the user for not attending?

Revenue by Sales Channel: How much revenue did the event generate, and from which sources? It is typical to measure all forms of business revenue (sales, sponsorships) separately from consumer revenue (tickets, merchandising).

ROI: Expenses and Profitability: Return on Investment. Was the event profitable? Did the revenues cover expenses? This is usually expressed as the ratio between the net profit and the amount of money invested in producing an event. For example, if an event raised \$70,000 and cost \$50,000 to produce, it would have a 40% ROI.

Post-Event Surveys: If you've ever attended an event, you've likely received a short survey afterwards. It is easiest to administer a survey using a digital tool like [Google Forms](#) or [SurveyMonkey](#) to gather insights for evaluating the event.

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{Gain from Event} - \text{Cost to Produce Event}}{\text{Cost of Investment}}$$

$$\frac{\$70,000 - \$50,000}{\$50,000} = 40\%$$

Participants: It is good to measure participants' overall satisfaction with the event and to drill down on specific aspects of it: the venue, speakers or activities, quality, and whether they would attend another similar event.

It is also useful to include a **Net Promoter Score (NPS)** question which is a loyalty metric. It usually consists of only one question which measures how likely an attendee would recommend an event to someone else. The most common question is asked using a ten-point scale: “How likely is it that you would recommend this event to a friend or colleague?”, or a variation, such as “How likely is it that you would recommend an event from this organization to a friend or colleague?”.

[SurveyMonkey](#) classifies the answers this way:

9–10 = Promoters—loyal responders who will keep buying and referring others

7–8 = Passives—satisfied but indifferent responders

0–6 = Detractors—unhappy responders who can hurt your brand through negative word-of-mouth

Net Promoter® Score (NPS) Template

PAGE TITLE

* 1. How likely is it that you would recommend this company to a friend or colleague?

NOT AT ALL LIKELY EXTREMELY LIKELY

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Source: SurveyMonkey

To calculate the NPS score, identify the percentage of responders in all three categories. Calculate the score by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. The final number will show the likelihood that attendees would recommend your event to others.

Example: Promoters = 65%
 Detractors = 15%
 NPS = 50

Sponsors: It is also valuable to survey sponsors and measure how satisfied they were with the event. Did it meet their brand and business objectives? Were they satisfied with the quality of the event?

Real-Time and Social Media Engagement: If the event is digital, it is important to have commenting tools and the ability for participants to add questions to a chat. Those can be monitored to assess users' active engagement. How many times did people comment? What percent of participants commented or engaged?

Event managers are also smart about using social media to increase their reach beyond the immediate audience at an event. By using hashtags, news about the event can be shared socially. Organizers can promote social outreach across multiple channels and track the total number of people engaged with the event.

Tips for Success

- A good event will be unique, fill a need, and have a well-defined target audience.
- Events also require coordination and community collaboration. Internally, there must be someone who “owns” the event, an event manager who has a passion for it and will manage its implementation. This will include identifying an event venue, designing the event, arranging participants, promoting the event, maintaining databases of attendees, managing tickets, creating sponsorship opportunities, and securely receiving payments. It will also include having a plan for the safety of participants.
- Externally, a media organization's events are more likely to be successful when they engage many volunteers, have partners in the community, and tap into a community need or desire.

Examples

Event strategies can work for media organizations of all sizes. For example, in Somalia, a radio station created a much-needed community event that also generated a new source of revenue. Parents, concerned about their children's education, frequently sent them to after-hours enrichment classes. The radio station convened a simple outdoors **trade show** where educators and after-school programs set up table displays and met with parents to promote their services. The radio station charged the educators for table space and then promoted its event on its airwaves. Attendance was strong and many children were enrolled on the spot.

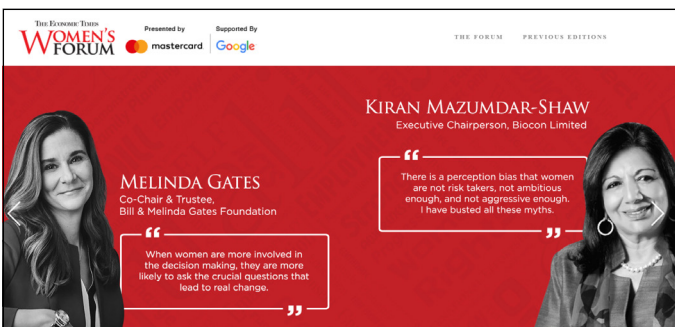
Kakheti Khma, a digital-first Georgian news organization highlighted [in this case study](#), targets its content to the 19,000 residents of Telavi, near the Georgia-Russian border. It also operates a small, professional training center and a wine garden, both of which generate some revenue to support the organization.

Yet the impact of the pandemic has shifted many events online, requiring a new set of event ideas and digital skills to create dynamic, engaging events.



Source: Michelle Foster

Mumbai's *Economic Times* has convened [the Economic Times Women's Forum](#) annually since 2017. In 2020, it went virtual. Supported by an eight-week campaign using print, television, and social media, it attracted more than 3,800 viewers. It was delivered during one-hour sessions over a six-week period and included high-level speakers who helped empower women leaders.

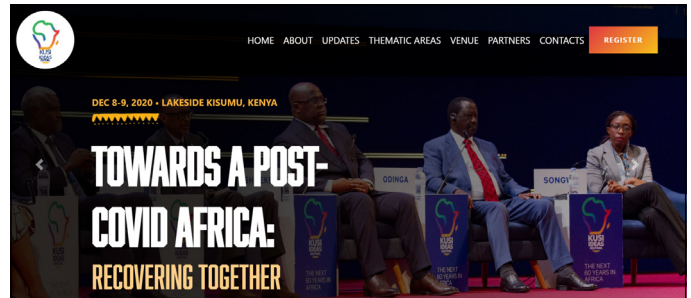


Source: The Economic Times, [Women's Forum](#); INMA Best Practices, [The Economic Times Women's Forum](#)

In Nairobi, Kenya, The Nation Media Group formed the [Kusi Ideas Festival](#) online and in person during 2020 to create a platform for people to share ideas about strengthening Africa. More than 14,000 participants from 44 countries participated online, and the festival generated significant revenue for the company from corporate sponsorships.

Key Terms

- **Attrition Rate:** The difference between the number of people registering to attend an event versus the number who actually attend. For example, if 1000 people register for an event, but only 600 attend, the attrition rate would be 40%.



Source: The Nation Media Group, [Kusi Ideas Festival](#); INMA Best Practices, [Kusi Ideas Festival](#)

- **Event Management:** The process of planning and implementing an event. Key areas include budgeting, scheduling, venue selection, security, food services, logistics, marketing, and arranging for speakers or entertainers. The event manager is responsible for all aspects of the event, including delivering good value to both participants and sponsors.

- **Event Marketing:** An approach to marketing a brand that is based on creating memorable, unique experiences. It creates opportunities for a brand's representative to interact directly with customers, potential customers, or other valuable groups. Events are used to create emotional connections to a brand or organization and can form long-lasting impressions.

- **Event Venue:** The location of the event. Venue selection is an important aspect of creating a strong event. A premium fundraiser benefits from being held in a unique environment, while an outdoor marathon route needs to be selected with security and crowd-control considerations.

- **Honorarium:** A payment to a speaker or other person for what is essentially a voluntary contribution to an event. It is meant to cover incidental costs, such as transportation, but is not considered payment.

- **Hybrid Event:** An event that combines a live, in-person event with a virtual online component. The virtual component can expand the reach of the original event geographically, reaching people who could otherwise not attend.

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- **Keynote Speech:** The opening address to an entire event or to a particular session. The speaker is usually a well-known person, authority on a specific subject, inspirational speaker, or industry leader.

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- **Net Promoter Score (NPS):** A loyalty metric that gauges how likely an attendee would recommend an event to someone else.

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- **Post Event Report:** A report produced by the event manager, with inputs from all stakeholders, on how the event functioned. Its purpose is to evaluate the separate components of the event and provide guidance on improving the next one.

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- **Registration:** Event registration is a cornerstone of any organized event. It is when [a person makes a financial and/or time commitment](#) to attend your event. It is the pre-event process that the event manager uses to estimate actual attendance, generate lists of known users, and communicate with them.

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- **Early-Bird Registration:** Registrations for large events often have a time-limited “early-bird” payment period, when the earliest registrants receive a meaningful discount off the event price for making an early commitment to attending. Those early registrations can often be partially or wholly refunded for a period of time. The closer to the event date, the less likely they are to be refunded. These early, paid registrants are valuable to organizers because they signal the attractiveness of the event and allow the event manager to make reasonable judgments about contracting for services. They provide up-front revenue that can help offset early expenses.

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- **Sponsorship:** An event sponsor supports an event in exchange for brand visibility, data, personal involvement or speaking roles, special benefits, and/or hospitality opportunities. Sponsors sign contracts for the level of benefit they will receive and either pay directly or in trade for their sponsorship. While cash sponsorship usually provides essential funds, trade sponsorship also has value and can help with cash flow. For example, if an

event is held at a restaurant, it could be promoted as a sponsor in exchange for the use of the venue and for covering some or all of the food and beverage costs.

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- **Trade Show:** An event in an industry where goods and services are exhibited and demonstrated. A trade show is good for generating leads and forming initial relationships. Common examples include technology fairs, travel shows, and college expos.

Learning Objectives

Event marketing can be an extremely valuable way to connect with your audience, develop new relationships with other businesses, and strengthen your news organization's brand. To make the most of event marketing, hosting successful events requires strategic thinking, careful planning, and a focus on how events can benefit your media organization as a whole and in the long-term.

In this chapter, you will:

1. Learn about the value of event marketing to media organizations and find tips on planning and hosting a successful event.
2. Explore opportunities to plan different types of events and find impactful examples from news organizations.

6.1 *What Makes a Successful Event?*

Events that make an impact, that are memorable and well-attended, do not just “happen.” They require creativity, planning, and attention to details. Here are some things to consider when planning an event:

- **Clear definition of target groups:** What group — or groups — do you want to reach? Often, a good event has multiple target audiences. For example, a music festival might target young adults to attend, beverage brands as sponsors, and community leaders to gain local support for the event.
- **Unique premise:** It all starts with a good idea. People are busy and have lots of things to do. What kind of event would be so exciting, so engaging, or so relevant, that it would be a “must-do” activity? This has to be considered in light of who the target audience is; for example, a newspaper’s political seminar might not attract readers who are more interested in lifestyle or cultural reporting.
- **Creative implementation and consistent branding:** Stand-out events surprise and delight people at every level. The invitations themselves should be memorable; t-shirts and other giveaways should reflect a high level of creativity and clear messaging; the signage and other materials should stay “on brand” and contribute to the overall message. The whole event should have a uniform feel. Small things, like poor signage or cheap giveaways, can detract from the overall experience.
- **Lasting and measurable impact:** Clients invest in **event marketing** because they want to create a measurable impact among the attendees. It is different from running an ad on radio or in print. Events are personal and memorable.
- **Talk it up!** Getting the message across is vital. It starts with how you sell the event to sponsors, the invitations or call for entries, and carries through to the thank you notes at the end. Social messaging is a vital part of the mix, and you should clearly map out how you will engage before, during, and after the event. Using your media outlet platforms to strategically promote the event will be important in making your audience aware of the event.
- **People strategy:** You are bringing this audience together for a reason. Be sure that your own team is prepared. If key community leaders will be present, who will escort them? If top customers are coming, who needs to greet them and make them feel welcome? Should there be a separate area for special guests?
- **There will be people who need special consideration:** Will there be any people who have unique needs, such as people who have mobility, vision, or hearing issues? If you’ll be serving food at the event, are there alternatives for those with dietary restrictions?
- **Build lists:** Develop lists of targeted attendees and sponsors. Use those lists to promote the event, solicit **registrations**, remind people when it will be held, and survey them afterwards.
- **Know who is coming:** Have a formal registration process. Attendees should register in advance so that the organizers can plan properly. There will always be **attrition**; some people won’t show up, and this needs to be factored into calculations.
- **Excellent planning:** Events occur in real-time and with a live audience. Any mistakes or poor preparation will be visible to attendees and detract from their experience. At their worst, errors can cause serious harm to an organization’s brand and reputation. Every detail should be thoroughly planned in advance and tested. For example, all technical equipment should be tested and have back-ups in place. If there is a

stage, organizers should be sure that it is visible from all seats. If food will be served, there should be adequate refrigeration and storage.

- **Detailed budgeting:** Events can be expensive. Unbudgeted items can add up quickly and, in the end, undermine the event's overall profitability. Everything needs to be budgeted, from name tags and pens to rental and equipment fees.
- **It isn't over when it's over.** After the event, it is important to plan an effective follow-up to keep the impact of the event alive in the minds of your audience and sponsors. A good event will generate many different types of follow-up, such as sending thank you notes, responding to specific inquiries, and recognizing participants.
- **Evaluation.** After an event, while memories are fresh, get people together and debrief. Create a **post-event report**. What worked? What went well, and what didn't? What did people say about the event? If you conducted an evaluation survey, what were the results? Were there areas that needed more focus...or less? This step helps to ensure that the next event will be even better.

Insights

Why News Media Should Consider Event Marketing ... And What it Takes

Interview with Rich Harshbarger



Rich Harshbarger is the former CEO of Running USA and Executive Race Director of the Detroit Marathon owned by the Detroit Free Press. He is a marketing and communications professional with 25 years of experience and consults for events in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

Q: Why should media organizations consider adding event marketing to their mix?

A: From a business standpoint, it would diversify its revenue sources and develop a new revenue stream. The organization would offer businesses unique ways to connect with audiences beyond just paying for ads or clicks.

But there's more to it than that.

Events help a news media organization fulfill its innate mission of serving its community: events get people engaged in community life. An event may be educational in nature, such as a business seminar or thought leadership luncheon, or cultural, like a film or art festival that engages creators like artists, authors, or filmmakers. Or it can be entertaining, like a concert or holiday celebration.

News media also sponsor a wide range of sporting events. If they organize an endurance event, like a marathon or other running event, it serves the overall health of the community beyond just the immediate participants. Those events rely on the support of many volunteers, which opens the door to the entire community to be involved. Anyone, able-bodied or not, can be part of it by handing out food, staffing a water station, or signing in runners. There is tremendous emotional benefit from being part of community effort and celebration.

Q: What sources of revenue are there?

A: Events generate many different types of revenue, that's one reason they are a good part of the marketing mix. Consumers pay for ticket (or "gate") sales, registrations, merchandising (hats, t-shirts, souvenirs), food, and beverages. Sponsors pay for being associated with the event, through naming rights (the event is named after their organization), signage, advertising, hospitality events, and special access.

The Detroit Marathon helped a local bank "punch above its weight" when it became the marathon's named sponsor. The First Bank of Michigan had a lot of branches, but not the name recognition of larger, national banks. When it put its name on this premier event, it raised the bank's overall profile and associated itself more deeply with the state of Michigan. The marathon helped propel it to greater overall business success, and it has renewed and increased its sponsorship for eleven years.

Q: Okay — so there are lots of ways to generate topline revenue. What is the bottom-line impact?

A: Events can be profitable. We grew the revenue of the Detroit Marathon from \$300,000 to more than \$3 million, with an 80% profit. Not all events have that potential, and not all are designed to be big money-makers, but — managed correctly — they can contribute to overall revenue growth and profits.

Q: How should a news organization get started on event marketing?

A: Start small. Pick something that you are passionate about. Find a void in the community and fill it, whether that is a leadership seminar, or an awards program, or something else. You don't have to go out and try to be the biggest in your community or region.

Q: Events can be complex and require a lot of logistics. What kind of person is best to lead this kind of effort?

A: Someone who has collaboration at their core.

You really want a conductor, and then build your “symphony,” your team, around that person. Engage someone who knows how to work with other experts, who has a clear vision to lead the project, and cannot be deterred.

That person should have moxie, which is a type of courage, of spirit, of fearlessness and determination. The leader needs passion for whatever it is, and believe in it, but also must do the hard work. That could be getting up at 2:00 in the morning for an early morning race, or setting up a room, or counting the cash. The leader must be dedicated to the success of the event and have the courage to step outside the lines and see opportunity where others do not.

Another important quality is the ability to remain calm and understand how to talk with media and the public at large.

Q: Why is that last point important?

A: Because things go wrong. Most of the time, they don't. Nine times out of ten, when speaking with the media about an event, it is an easy interview with prepared talking points. But when things go wrong, you

need someone who can think quickly and understand how it might impact the reputation of the event or the credibility of the sponsors.

There was the 2013 bombing at the Boston Marathon, for example. More commonly, it is something less dramatic. A participant or volunteer could suffer an accident. A sponsor could become tangled in a scandal.

Q: With good planning, things normally go right. But what advice would you give for when things do go wrong?

A: You won't know all of the details in the first hour, or sometimes not even in the first 24 hours. Remain calm. Gather as much information as you can. Identify one spokesperson to be the sole point of communication. If things escalate, have someone higher up identified who can speak with authority.

Q: What unique value can event marketing bring to the news media organization's own brand? Why are you passionate about it?

A: I'm passionate for it because it's a natural way to earn and generate revenue that is a core function of a media business. It is not a gimmick or some money grab. Local businesses inherently need ways to market their products and services. Digital and print products are a way to do this ... so are events. Event marketing is a strong part of the marketing mix.

Resources

The *Texas Tribune*, famous for its strong line-up of events, successfully responded to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This case study shows [How the Texas Tribune Pivoted a Flagship Fundraising Event to Virtual](#) and offers pragmatic guidance on creating effective online events.

Recognizing the importance of creating and hosting successful events, The *Texas Tribune's* in-house research and training center (sponsored by the Facebook Journalism Project), selected 14 publishers to participate in an 8-week online program on event management: [T-Square: Welcoming Our First-Ever RevLab Cohort](#).

Splice Media, which supports media start-ups in Asia, has several useful articles and guidance on how to [host an online festival](#) like their own Splice Beta and [experiences with event management](#).

Aventri, an event marketing consulting firm, has shared best practices.

Examples from [four media organizations using events to raise revenues](#).

Bizzabo, an event technology company, has detailed guides to many aspects of event marketing on its blog. It has also published this list of [10 Publishers with Visionary Event Strategies](#).

From Splash, an event marketing platform, a guide for publishers to increase revenue and build partnerships with events.

The Balance Small Business offers management support to small businesses and has created [a primer on event management](#).

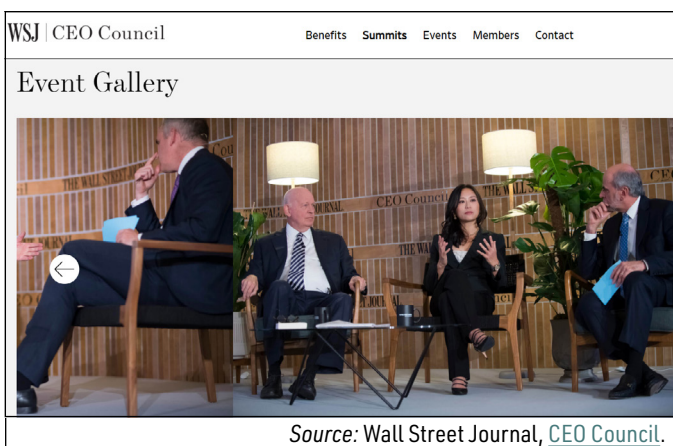
HubSpot has written [a blog](#) with in-depth information about the Net Promoter Score (NPS) as has SurveyMonkey.

Convene, an organization that provides work and convening spaces, has produced a [glossary of terms](#) for the event industry.

6.2 Thought Leadership Events: Conferences and Convening

News media are uniquely able to define and help shape discussions around important issues. They do so as a normal course of business in their reporting platforms, but sometimes issues need a deeper look. For example, the Wall Street Journal caters to a specific audience with a series of [CEO Council summits](#) on the most pressing issues and challenges in business leadership.

Revenue sources for thought leadership events typically include ticket sales, corporate sponsors, dinner sponsors, advertising, merchandising, trade show revenue, and sales of email and address lists of participants. Sponsors do not have to be businesses and can include foundations, donors, NGOs, or government agencies.



Yet these activities are not the exclusive domain of major media houses. Media organizations around the world convene events to help shape local dialogue and improve community life. For example, many media organizations hold conferences centered on specific issues and featuring experts on the topic matter. These can be issues such as security, energy, economic growth, taxation, housing, ageing, financial markets, local policy, health care, and more.

Engaging audiences in discussions about current topics is not just good for reporting, it's good for business.

Media organizations like the [Texas Tribune](#) in the U.S. have built resilient revenues off their event strategies. A non-profit news organization, it has hosted hundreds of public events that attract attendance and corporate sponsorship. Most of the revenue comes from corporate event sponsors or member donations. These sessions yield good profits and deepen reader and community engagement with key topics.

Example: The Gathering 2020: Rebuild South Africa

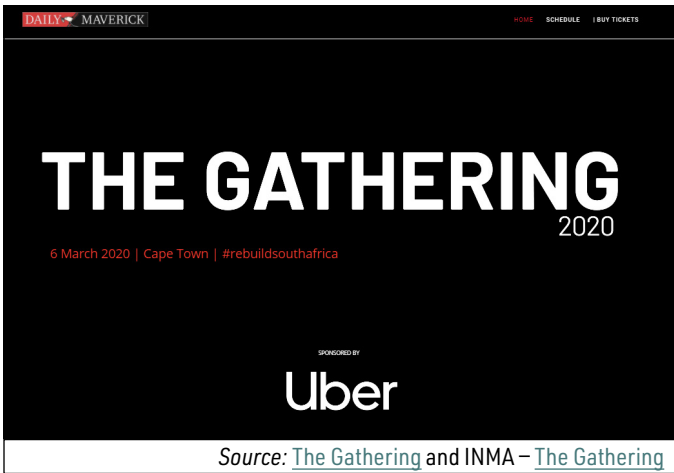
The Daily Maverick, Cape Town, South Africa

Amidst economic upheaval, state capture of news media, extensive corruption, and the collapse of major enterprises, *The Daily Maverick* in Cape Town convened a conference in March 2020 to bring together stakeholders and address those issues. Held on the eve of the pandemic's arrival, it attracted more than 1,000 in-person attendees and nearly 9,000 who streamed online. Sixteen panel discussions covered topics as diverse as politics, unemployment, civil society, and the need for a fourth industrial revolution.

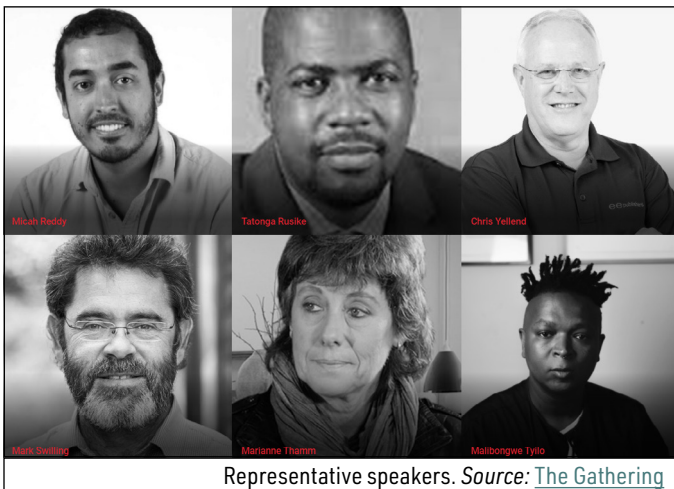
The event generated sponsorship revenue from eleven commercial partners who valued the brand association with the event and its overall credibility.

Audiences also contributed to the revenue stream. However, rather than setting fixed ticket prices, the event asked people to pay whatever level they wanted to ... or could afford. The event producers wanted to reach the broadest possible audience and include a wide range of voices. Income was not to be a barrier to inclusion.

The national broadcaster, eNCA, live streamed the event in its entirety and it was later posted on YouTube. Watch the livestream [here](#).



Source: [The Gathering](#) and INMA – [The Gathering](#)



Representative speakers. Source: [The Gathering](#)

Examples

Hindustan Times Leadership Summit 2020 New Delhi, India

The *Hindustan Times* holds an annual leadership summit focusing on urgent and intertwined matters of local, regional, national, and global importance. Hosted during the 2020 pandemic, the summit was held virtually on the Thursday and Friday of each week over a four-week period. It was livestreamed and simultaneously webcast on the social media platforms of key leaders, including those of the Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, and the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman.

The summit attempted to recreate the most interactive parts of live conferences by offering the participants the opportunity for live Q&A during the sessions; providing an “exhibition” area for sponsors; and creating a virtual networking lounge for attendees to meet and chat informally with others.

Overall, the summit reached a vast audience with 11,000 registered guests, 31 million video views, 35 million engagements, and an estimated total reach of more than 400 million viewers.



Sources: [Hindustan Times](#), [Leadership Summit](#); INMA Best Practice, [Leadership Summit](#)

‘Diálogos Transformadores’ Event Series

Folha de S. Paulo

[Folha de S.Paulo](#), a prominent news organization in Brazil, has developed a focus on [social entrepreneurship](#). With the support of many sponsors and strategic partners, Folha has launched a [Social Entrepreneur of the Year award](#), recognizing the impact of entrepreneurs on social issues including health, community resilience, and social inclusion. In addition to this, Folha has hosted events in the ‘[Diálogos Transformadores](#)’ series, a set of debates and convenings with experts and entrepreneurs discussing relevant issue areas including entrepreneurship, creative technologies, and economic inclusion.

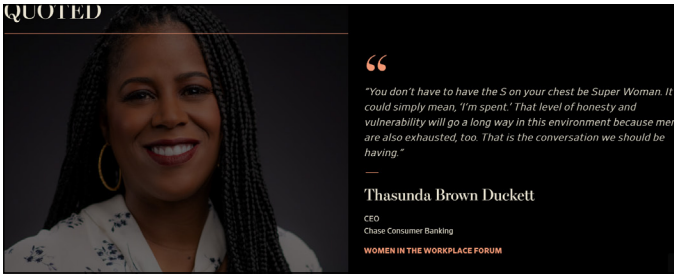
Past recordings of the event series can be found [here](#).

Examples: Targeting Women’s Issues

The Wall Street Journal Women In Series

Events can also target the needs or issues of a specific group of people. For example, [The Wall Street Journal](#) has created a series of events, conversations, and reports to identify how to create more opportunities for women at every level in business. In parallel to its Women in the Workplace Forum, this effort results

in news reporting in its pages and special reports. Sponsors underwrite the effort.



Source: Wall Street Journal, [WSJ Women In Series](#)

Read [a more in-depth case study](#) on how Amakhosikazi Media, a multimedia platform in Zimbabwe focused on increasing the quality and frequency of women's views, has created a sense of community and engagement with its audience through roundtables and networking events. Amakhosikazi has hosted networking events for women journalists and discussions with government officials, community members, and opinion leaders.

6.3 Member Clubs and Events

Being a member of something has profound emotional benefits. People feel included and special.

Many news companies have developed membership clubs, both virtual and in person. These are designed to create an even deeper level of relationship between the news company, its readers, and its advertisers. The key to having a good **membership program** is to offer unique benefits that members cannot get elsewhere.

These can be clubs that allow people to hear speakers, or try unique foods, or participate in special events.

Many media companies create a membership feeling among advertisers, especially those that are the largest revenue sources for the company. Managing these relationships is an important priority. Top advertisers are always invited to special events in conjunction with sporting events, community forums, fashion shows, theater, or other unique venues.

In addition, media companies often create membership opportunities for readers.

Mada Masr, an independent news organization in Egypt, has developed a membership program to engage with its audience more closely through events, members-only content, merchandise, and access to training and workshops. The membership program is marketed as an opportunity to support independent journalism in Egypt and join a community of individuals interested in critical discussions and protecting the freedom of expression. The membership tiers are shown below, which offer different levels of access to events and workshops.

Other media companies have developed member programs that target a niche or offer an exclusive benefit. In those activities, revenue is generated by the sale of club memberships, products, and tickets to events.

MEMBER 1	MEMBER 2	MEMBER 3
<p>LE 600 /yr US\$ 60 /yr</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year-long exclusive members' events Trainings and workshops <small>limited access</small> Recordings of events and trainings One publication <small>(PDF)</small> Editors' insights 	<p>LE 2000 /yr US\$ 125 /yr</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year-long exclusive members' events Trainings and workshops Recordings of events and trainings One publication <small>(print)</small> Mada merchandise 	<p>LE 4800 /yr US\$ 300 /yr</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year-long exclusive members' events <small>plus one guest</small> Free access to all Mada public events <small>plus one guest</small> Trainings and workshops Recordings of events and trainings One publication <small>(print)</small> Editors' insights Morning Digest Mada merchandise
<p>MEMBER US\$ 2,000</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year-long exclusive members' events <small>plus one guest</small> Free access to all Mada public events <small>plus one guest</small> Recordings of events and trainings Five Morning Digest subscriptions Trainings and workshops Editorial services Two publications Editors' Insights VIP dinner Signed photo Gift box 		

Source: Mada Masr, Mada Membership program

For example, various media companies that routinely cover dining and cooking have created wine clubs that allow members to receive high quality wines not commonly available elsewhere. Wines are shipped on a regular schedule or on demand. Examples include the [Sunday Times Wine Club](#), the [Wall Street Journal Wine Club](#), and the [New York Times Wine Club](#). These are premium media brands and these high-end wine clubs reinforce that positioning.

In addition, the news companies often organize in-person tastings and other events during the year. Those events target readers and build a unique community within the larger audience framework. Advertisers also participate as guests and are invited and treated to special "VIP" benefits: meetings with famous people or celebrities, select wines, private tastings or events. The events are branded under the media label but are often operated by a company that specializes in wine and merchandising.

The following chart breaks down how responsibilities are typically divided between a news organization and a partner with the specialized experience needed to plan for and host these events:

News Organization Responsibilities	Partner Responsibilities
Brands the member club under its name; the partner may be co-branded	Has specialized knowledge and programs
Provides customer lists and targeting	Selects and supplies specialized items needed
Supports the club with media visibility and promotion	Creates a branded look for the club
Hosts events and arranges locations	Arranges materials for events
Puts its branding on all marketing and promotional materials	Creates promotional materials ready for co-branding
Makes money from ticket sales; merchandise sales; membership fees	Shares revenue with media partner

6.4 Sports Marketing: Spectator Sports and Participatory Sports

Sporting events have huge appeal. From the excitement of seeing a goal kicked in a soccer game, to the thrill of running in a race, audiences love a good competition.

Sport marketing takes many forms. It can include:

- Promoting a team, event, or category of sports;
- Promoting products and services in the context of either sporting events or teams;
- Gaining brand enthusiasm for sponsors and the news organization itself; and
- Creating a sense of community and engagement among fans or participants.

Spectator Sports: These are activities where a limited number of participants, such as football, hockey, or baseball teams, compete with one another and attract audiences. They generate revenue from brand advertisers, sponsors, tickets, merchandise, and a host of licensing arrangements.

Media companies, with their strong relationship to reporting on sports, have naturally become sponsors and hosts of a variety of spectator sports-related events. They have often, in the past, owned sports teams; but the mix of team ownership and reporting has not always been healthy. It is hard to maintain editorial independence when you own the team.

More commonly, news companies have acquired *sponsorship rights* to events by becoming media partners; they offer large packages of media promotion (including advertising, social media marketing, signage, on-air time, interviews, etc.) in exchange for brand visibility, box seats, tickets, and being included in events.

In many instances, these deals also include cash exchanges from one partner to the other.

Participatory Sports: These engage a wide range of people who may be acting individually, in groups, or in community leagues. Some examples include grass-roots level baseball, football, or basketball; golf and tennis; field hockey, badminton, and distance running.

Media companies also *create their own participatory sporting events* and use them as exciting and creative ways to build strong community relations. They are a rich source of revenue. Income sources include sponsorship, signage, entry fees, tickets, merchandising, VIP promotions, trade fairs and expositions, and advertising.

Sports events don't have to be huge. They can be as small as a local competition or 5k run. They can target a certain age group, such as youth or seniors, or social groups.

Examples

Success with Sponsorships Hosting Sporting Events, Uplands FM

A small community radio station added 3,000 Tanzanian shillings (approximately \$1,300) to its monthly income by instituting a local soccer tournament. In 2019, Uplands FM founded the Uplands Super Cup. The station broadcast the first tournament live and invited local business owners. "We marketed our events through digital posters, radio jingles, and local WhatsApp groups," explains Nobby Swale, a manager at Uplands FM. "We attracted seven big sponsors and a few small advertisers, who paid the station handsomely." Given the success, Uplands FM is looking to host additional local entertainment events.

Learn more about Uplands FM [here](#).



The Uplands Super Cup attracts a strong attendance from Uplands FM's youth audience.



Uplands FM launched Uplands Super Cup after attending a media marketing forum hosted by Internews in Dar es Salaam.



Uplands FM hosts monthly events which it broadcasts live and markets through digital posters, radio spots, and WhatsApp. Source: Uplands FM

The Detroit Free-Press Marathon

The [Detroit Free-Press Marathon](#) is an annual event involving tens of thousands of people and is an example of how something that started small can be grown into a rich experience and a profitable operation. It generates significant revenues for the media company, provides a world-class event for runners, involves thousands of volunteers across the community, raises funds for charities, and provides an outstanding marketing environment for sponsors.

From its simpler origins in 1978, the marathon has grown to include multiple events and people from all walks of life and from many countries around the world. In addition to the sanctioned marathon, it offers a:

- Disabilities division for people in handcycles
- Marathon relay that allows teams to compete
- Competitive 1-mile race that is a speed test
- Fun run for kids sponsored by a major local grocery store
- Health and fitness exposition where brands meet with athletes and both sell and demonstrate their products and services



Source: Detroit Free Press.

The marathon generates revenue from many different sources. Prior to the marathon, there is a 2-day health and fitness exhibition where companies set up booths and interact with 50,000 attendees. The newspaper sells advertising into the race program and a special section published in conjunction with the event. Sponsors pay to have their company names associated with the event and their logos appear on signs and other promotional materials.

Merchandising — the sale of items with the event logo — also contributes to revenue.

<p>Detroit In-Training Sticker (13.1 or 26.2) Detroit Marathon Gear \$4.00</p>	<p>Unisex Detroit Finisher Hoodie (13.1 or 26.2) Detroit Marathon Gear \$55.00</p>
<p>Source: Merchandise, Playmakers</p>	

Sponsorships are a major source of revenue. The *Detroit Free Press* has been successful in targeting and engaging a wide range of sponsors, including local businesses and governments, health food brands, athletic shoes and equipment brands, media partners, and beer brands.

The event also plays a key role in the **company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** efforts. Charities are encouraged to enroll runners on their behalf; the runners seek individual sponsors who will give the charity a certain amount of money if the runner completes the run, or for every mile. The marathon has raised more than \$23 million for charities since it was founded.

SPONSORS

There are several opportunities in which your organization can participate. If you are interested in event sponsorship or space at our Health & Fitness Expo, please contact Leah Yamazaki at lyamazaki@freepress.com.

Official marathon sponsors.
Source: [Detroit Free Press Marathon](#)

6.5 Events as Corporate Social Responsibility

News media hold a strong belief that the world can be changed for the better and, thus, often sponsor or partner in support of charitable activities. This is an important element of their own **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**, which is defined as the self-imposed efforts an organization undertakes to be socially accountable, whether to itself, the public, its community, and/or its stakeholders. CSR initiatives can be focused in a specific area, such as improving the environment, or on a specific group, such as women or youth. CSR activities can also be used to raise funds for various charities or to meet needs in the community.

CSR activities are also an important driver of employee loyalty, as employees deeply value being in a company that works to enhance their community, society, and environment.

The keys are to have a clear goal, good partners, and a well-defined target audience. Good CSR also requires transparency and strict financial accountability.

CSR activities are often scaled to the size of their organizations. There are global, national, regional, and local needs that all merit attention.

Examples

During 2020, as the Coronavirus pandemic raced across the world, media house TTELA, in Trollhattan, Sweden, [focused on the needs of children at Christmas](#), especially those in poverty and the many refugees who had arrived in Sweden with very little. They created a drive-through event where donations, tagged with information about the intended recipient's age and gender, could be dropped off, contact-free. Sponsors helped underwrite the campaign and social media promotion yielded significant turn-out. More than 3,000 gifts were collected, and SEK 57,000 (USD \$6,700) was donated to the Red Cross.

In Lima, Peru, Grupo El Comercio launched a 2020 campaign called [#DetrásDeUnaMascarilla](#) (#Behind A Mask) to encourage users to wear masks during the pandemic. It used various platforms (digital, newspapers, newsletters, and magazines) to spread the message and delivered a sample K95 protection mask, free, to one million people. Print sales increased more than 25% on the days the masks were included in the newspaper and the campaign was viewed a half million times. Watch one of these videos [here](#).

Amar Ujala's Aparajita: 100 Million Smiles

Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh, India

In another example, the regional news organization [Amar Ujala](#) launched a broad multi-media effort examining the hardships facing Indian women and seeking solutions. It was endorsed by prominent figures in government and society, including the Dalai Lama and important national figures.

Its event strategy included holding focus group discussions, presenting a lecture series, offering women counseling, providing health camps, and conducting equality awareness workshops. Goals included connecting women of all ages to a wide range of resources and support. The events reached thousands of women in-person, and millions online.



Sources: INMA, [Best Practice: Amar Ujala 100 Million Smiles](#); [Amar Ujala](#)

6.6 Broadcast and Radio Remotes

Broadcast media often market themselves on ‘sight, sound, motion, and emotion.’

When these advantages are combined with **event marketing**, the results can be powerful. A common practice is for radio or television stations to conduct “live remote” events. A disc jockey or station host — the broadcast “personality” — sets up at a partner business and broadcasts live from that location. In addition to normal programming, the station host encourages people to come there, meet the station’s celebrities, and look at the store’s merchandise. The time and address of the event are shared repeatedly on air for days before the event and on the websites of both the business and the media partner. Frequent repetition is needed to get people to turn out.

While these can be fun events, they have a serious purpose. The goal of the partner is to bring buyers into the store and make sales.

The radio or television station comes prepared with giveaway items for people who come into the store. They set up the event with attention-grabbing materials — such as balloons, free food, prizes, and places for children to play. The broadcast personality promotes the event on-air in advance and during the event. The station host interviews buyers and talks with salespeople.

For these events to work, the partner business needs to be well-prepared and have salespeople ready to greet people, good promotions, and a strong message about why customers should buy its products or services.

Example: Radio 021

In Serbia, [Radio O21](#) in Novi Sad had a strong line-up of live music events at its own café. In early 2020, when the pandemic began and the café shut down, it shifted to radio remotes. Local artists performed live, streaming their performances from their homes. This kept the radio station’s brand reputation for live musical events alive and offered listeners a welcome break from the quarantine lockdown.



Source: Charles Rice, *Developing Radio Partners*

Resources

A [guide](#) to making the most of radio remote broadcasts.

Read [7 tips](#) about how to successfully plan a radio remote broadcast.



A mix of news and entertainment content supports audience growth for broadcasters (Kenya).

6.7 Trade and Consumer Shows

Sometimes the best way to do a deal is face-to-face. That's why many media companies organize trade and consumer shows. It is common for local media to bring together key advertisers and businesses directly with potential customers by organizing, hosting, and promoting various trade, automotive, real estate, travel, and home improvement shows.

At a community level, news organizations have hosted book fairs, community sales, and other events. This can be as simple as offering a space in a parking lot and promoting a small-scale market, or as complicated as having a full-blown event.

Examples

The New York Times, building on its vast audience of people interested in travel, organizes a major travel **trade show** each year (cancelled during 2021 due to the pandemic). Bringing together travel professionals and travel enthusiasts, it is a 3-day event that offers lectures, classes, exhibitions, and education. More than 35,000 travelers and industry professionals attend, with more than 750 exhibitors from 175 countries. In February 2020, the event featured more than 400 industry speakers.

Given its popularity, the show typically attracts a wide variety of **sponsors** that are tiered at Presenting, Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze levels. Exhibitors also receive thousands of leads to follow up on from the

show's lead retrieval system. The event also attracts a wide variety of media partners. In this case, revenue comes from the sponsorships, booth rentals, tickets, and trade fair exhibition fees.

As another example, The Indian Express Group is a prominent Indian media brand that owns [Express Food and Hospitality](#) (EF&H), an international Business-to-Business trade show. With different editions in cities across India, the trade show promotes opportunities for networking in the growing food and hospitality sector. The trade shows bring together brands, retailers, and trade professionals in the Indian food and hospitality market, offering workshops, exhibitions with participating brands and partners, and an opportunity for participants to market directly to other businesses in the food and hospitality space. For The Indian Express Group, the trade show is also used to market the [Express Food and Hospitality publication](#).



Sources: INMA, [Best Practice: Amar Ujala 100 Million Smiles](#); [Amar Ujala](#)

6.8 Events Under Niche or Separate Brands

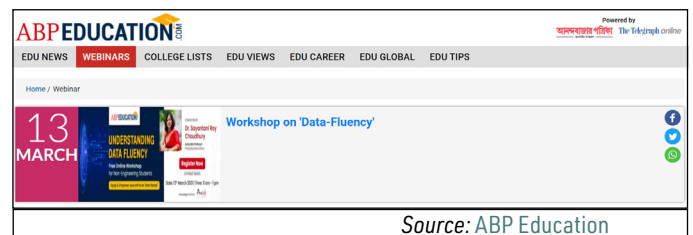
Niches such as fashion, travel, automotive, and lifestyle offer revenue opportunities outside traditional news brands that can be used, if needed, to cross-subsidize newsgathering. Many media companies have started sub-brands or new brands to fill these niches and gain revenues that would otherwise be unavailable. They lend themselves to **event marketing** opportunities and can open the door to new sources of revenue that are unavailable to news media.

One example is *Dep* magazine, a Vietnamese publication that focuses on the country's maturing fashion scene. Founded in 1999 by LeMedia as an offshoot of VNA, the Vietnam News Agency, *Dep* has been a leader in creating Vietnam's cutting-edge fashion industry.

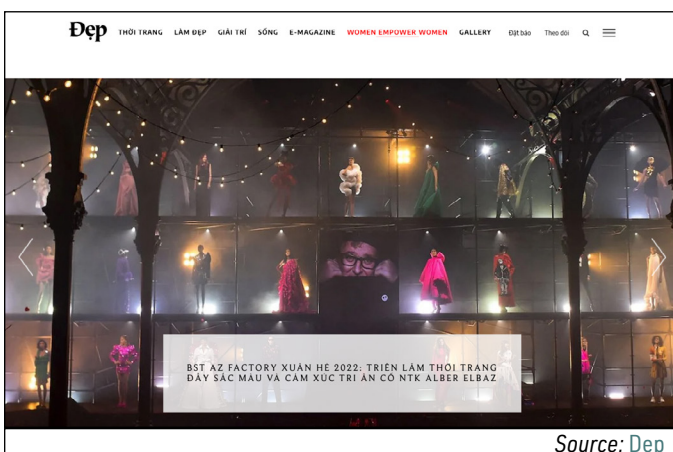
Initially hailed as 'the *Vogue* of Vietnam,' *Dep* created a unique place for high-end and luxury brands to market to an emerging affluent market segment.

It played a key role in founding Vietnam's influential Fashion Week and holds its own fashion and beauty events. Its overall success has led to the development of an entire portfolio of lifestyle publications.

In another example, the *Telegraph* in Calcutta, recognizing that students' needs in the eastern part of the country were unmet, founded ABPEducation.com in conjunction with ABP Pvt.Ltd. Through its website, online webinars, and virtual events, it continues to offer students a wide range of guidance on courses available at all academic levels, as well as information on scholarships and deadlines. Its webinar series in 2020 ultimately featured more than 250 speakers and included 30 events, netting tens of thousands of registrations. Watch videos explaining the series [here](#) and [here](#).

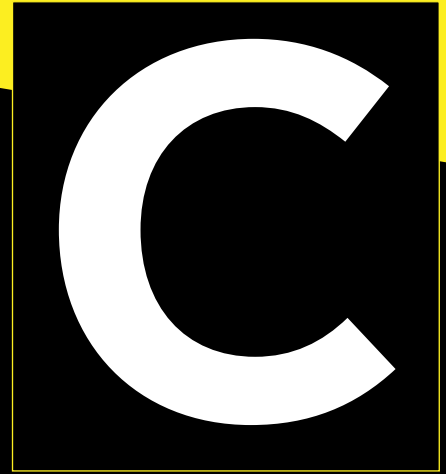


Source: ABP Education



Source: Dep

As the pandemic unfolded, niche events also went online.



Case Studies

Building Viability: Case Studies in Making it Work

News organizations are resilient. These case studies show how media, operating within their unique contexts, have found ways to strengthen their organizations.

Overall, they demonstrate nimble management, a willingness to experiment — and even fail. They know their audiences and shape their content to meet user needs. They brand their organizations and build close community ties. Data is at the heart of decision-making.

Importantly, successful media organizations have diverse revenue sources. They constantly grow, change, and innovate.

Radio Daljir, Somalia

Creating Somalia's Largest FM Network: Peacebuilding and Empowerment



Ziarul de Gardă, Moldova

Creative Brand Marketing Propels Audience and Revenue Growth



Chai FM, Tanzania

Attracting Advertisers with "People-Oriented Programming"



Actualite.cd, DRC

Holistic Management of a DRC Start-Up



Observatorul de Nord, Moldova

Audience Data — A Business Strategy Roadmap



Gurjaani TV, Georgia

How a Traditional TV Station Built and Monetized an Online Audience from Scratch



Agora.md, Moldova

Audience Insights and a Strong Brand: Foundations for Growth



Amakhosikazi Media, Zimbabwe

Paths Forward with Technology



El Surtidor, Paraguay

Capturing Attention and Revenues with Visual Journalism



Kakhetis Khma, Georgia

Sponsored Content in a Rural Market





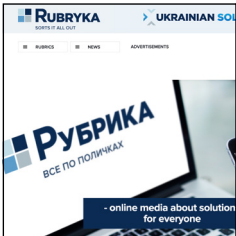
Uplands FM, Tanzania

Success with Sponsorships
Hosting Sporting Events



Uralskaya Nedelya, Kazakhstan

The Art of Attracting
Local Advertisers



Rubryka, Ukraine

Ukrainian News Start-up
Challenges the Status Quo with
Savvy Technology and Marketing

Case Study

Chai FM, Tanzania

Attracting Advertisers with “People-Oriented Programming”

By identifying and catering to local business needs, a small radio station is attracting big sponsorships in an area believed to have little ad market. In the rural farmlands of Southwest Tanzania, Chai FM's strategy is to produce highly localized content — what it calls “people-oriented programming.”

In 2020, Chai FM, run by a tea cooperative, started airing programs catering to local dairy farmers. Shows feature conversations with veterinarians and experts in the livestock and milk-processing industries. Listeners call in or send questions via SMS. By teaching local farmers new methods for caring for their animals and improving milk quality, Chai FM has not only increased its audience but has contributed to a rise in local milk prices.

Previously, advertisers could easily disregard the small radio station. Now, with the number of listeners calling into the programs, they see the potential benefit. “Advertisers saw the opportunity of reaching many customers through us. Many of them flocked to our studio by themselves. We also created a small marketing team to present the opportunity in nearby towns,” says Ally Kingo, Chai FM Station Manager.



“We had overlooked the market in our local area while competing for big advertisers in cities. Now we know without good people-oriented content, no business owner will be interested in investing in us.”

— Ally Kingo, Chai FM Station Manager



The staff at Chai FM. Source: Chai FM



As a result of its “people-oriented programming,” local businesses are eager to market their agricultural products on Chai FM. The station has also attracted sponsorships from national advertisers such as Tigo Telecommunications and one of Tanzania's largest milk processors. While Chai FM was previously dependent on association fees and grants, the new income is helping to cover the station's operations costs and to pay staff salaries on time. In the future, Kingo hopes the new strategy will allow Chai FM to procure new transmitting equipment to increase its broadcast range and reach more people.

[Learn more here.](#)

Chai FM receives support and training from Internews and Internews' local partner, Jamii Media, through a 5-year media and civil society strengthening program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Case Study

Observatorul de Nord, Moldova

Audience Data – A Business Strategy Roadmap

To grow their online presence, Moldova's 23-year-old newspaper *Observatorul de Nord* (OdN) invested in audience analytics and engagement to inform a new content strategy.



Since 2016, OdN has worked to increase its online audience. In 2020, OdN invested in a dedicated web analyst tasked with monitoring online audience traffic daily using Google Analytics. The analyst presents the results at the weekly editorial meeting. This way, the team regularly reviews audience trends, such as total end-users, new users, traffic per platform, and readers' ages and locations. Team members also receive daily notifications about top-read articles and posts. The team uses the data to set objectives and strategize content production.

“We adapt the types of content we produce, taking into account the readers’ interests. As a result of studying the analytical data, we decided to focus on video products.”

— Elena Cobasneanu,
Director of Observatorul de Nord

From audience data, OdN determined that readers are particularly attracted to video content. The team developed their expertise in video production, including learning to repackage a topic for various platforms and hiring an intern who specializes in recorded news and live feeds. In 2020, they increased [video output](#), focusing on news reports, debate shows, interviews, and live shows, including the transmission of local public administration events.



Victor Cobasneanu, editor-in-chief of OdN

The team also learned that readers are eager to interact with OdN. The team developed a [“Report a problem”](#) portal inviting input from readers on issues of concern. “Using the audience data, we have adjusted the rubrics for interaction with readers,” explains Elena Cobasneanu, Director of OdN. “As a result, not only are we addressing the issues, but we organize public debates on the respective topics, inviting local authorities, civic activist experts, etc.”

By prioritizing audience analytics, OdN charted a new course and ultimately developed a competitive advantage in video production.



Ludmila Marjinean, video news reporter

Throughout 2020, the team doubled their output of journalistic materials, increasing both audience reach and revenues.



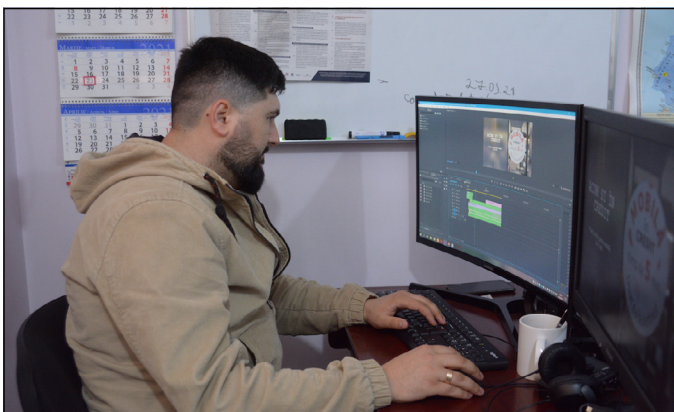
Vadim Sterbate, journalist and photojournalist



Inga Tapalaga, social media manager

“We understand that audience knowledge is the barometer of preferences and content. The skill of reading audience data has become indispensable to our media editorial office.”

— Elena Cobasneanu,
Director of Observatorul de Nord



Denis Tighinean, cameraman and video editor

OdN received support from Internews’ “Audience Understanding and Digital Support” (AUDS) project in 2020, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

Case Study

Agora.md, Moldova

Audience Insights and a Strong Brand: Foundations for Growth

In Moldova, where the commercial market for media is small and dominated by political elites, investigative and independent news is largely supported by donor funding. [Agora.md](#) seeks to be the exception to the rule. This digital native grew its unique audience by 77% in just three years to reach 3.8 million readers in 2020. The team developed several profitable revenue streams over the same period, and have outlined a 4-year path to self-sustainability. Their secret to success? Not being afraid to fail.



Business Strategy

Since its start in 2014, Agora planned to be a 100% commercial venture. However, today half of its budget is still financed by international grants. Managing Director, Irina Ghelbur, wants to change that. She explains, “I remember in 2017 when I started to manage this company. I was giving out salaries from our last remaining grant and that summer we couldn’t pay our journalists. I thought, ‘I need a roadmap for how to work, to not be in this situation again. You can’t access a grant, even an emergency grant, in a

month.’” With support from the MEDIA-M project, the team outlined a business strategy that included defining clear roles within the newsroom, continuous technological development, and aligning their collective efforts towards revenue diversification.

“It’s the idea of the mission uniting the whole team. Everyone understands where we want to go and why it’s important to support each kind of activity. It’s about promoting this mindset in the company to try new things and not being afraid to fail.”

— Irina Ghelbur, Managing Director at Agora

Restructuring the Newsroom

“Previously 90% of staff resources were focused on editorial,” explains Ghelbur. “Now we are diversified so each department can specialize and support the efforts of the others. The newsroom is part of the team, not the entire team.” The staff of 30 now concentrates their efforts in four areas. The editorial department produces news content, the commercial department sells the content, the production department creates audio/visual products for the newsroom and commercial clients, and the development department manages new technology applications and online platforms.

Continuous Innovation

Agora has become known as a pioneer of online media technology. The team invested heavily in its website and social media design to deliver news and information with the highest quality user experience.



Images Source: Agora.md

“We believe it is 50% about the content and 50% about the technology used to distribute.”

— Irina Ghelbur, Agora Managing Director

Their progress has not been in a straight line. Only after overhauling the website design, for example, did the team learn that 80% of their readers access Agora on mobile. “Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t, and we are learning our lessons,” explains Ghelbur. “Now, media managers are calling us and asking for anybody that knows how to do this or that, because we already took that path, and learned how to do it.”

The vast majority of Agora’s web audience is directed through Facebook, Instagram, and the Telegram messaging application. As such, the editorial and production teams are continually developing new formats for social media including infographics, video graphics, live streams, and interactive content.



Diversifying Revenues

The team applies the same iterative mindset to their commercial strategy, trying a wide range of monetization tactics from crowdfunding to selling branded bottles of wine. For Agora, revenue diversification helps ensure its independence. “If we are not dependent on politicians or oligarchs to pump money in our company to survive, then we can say that we are free from any interests that could put our editorial credibility in danger,” says Ghelbur.

In 2017, Agora hired a salesperson and a native advertising editor to focus exclusively on selling advertising and native options to local companies to decrease the company’s reliance on declining banner ad revenues. Towards the same goal, the editorial and production departments experiment with new content formats to offer more diverse products and services to clients. “Everything we can produce in the newsroom we can sell,” says Ghelbur. Agora’s portfolio includes, for example, advertorials, long reads, interviews, video production, live streams, and interactive formats. The team devotes particular energy to video production. By developing their editing capacity and ability to work with graphics and animation, Agora has been able to offer more competitive packages to advertisers.

Yet, Ghelbur still notes “the thin line between the commercial and editorial departments.” Agora has lost profitable accounts from advertisers, notably a telecommunications company, that disliked how they were portrayed in the newsroom’s reporting. “It is really painful,” says Ghelbur, “the exclusion of that revenue, but it only made us work harder to find new advertisers.”

With the exclusion of a reduction in advertiser demand due to COVID-19 in 2020, Agora has seen a steady increase in ad revenue from local businesses and international organizations since 2017.

Bridging Gaps with Events

In 2017, Agora invited readers to meet the news team, taking advantage of roof space on top of its office building. When 200 people showed up, the team realized the potential. They branded the events #ROOFFOFFLINE, and featured speakers, entertainers, discussion panels, and interactive activities. Agora hosted two more events in 2018 before introducing

\$2 ticket sales and sponsorships at monthly events in the summer of 2019. Each turned a profit, amounting in all to about 6% of Agora's budget. While this is a relatively small sum, the money Agora earned from events helped make up for the typical summer drop in advertising.



Agora #ROOFFOFFLINE event, 2019.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Agora drafted concepts of small event formats to allow for social distancing, but they were not financially viable. In 2021, the team is testing virtual and live-stream formats and looks forward to relaunching #ROOFFOFFLINE in the coming years.

Finding a Membership Strategy

Above all, Agora sees reader revenue as the key to self-sustainability and decreased reliance on grants. In April 2020, after 9 months of preparations, Agora launched its membership program, the first of its kind in Moldova. Considerable planning went into the design, including researching existing models, testing audience appetite, and IT development. Surveys showed that 68% of readers would be interested in the benefits and rewards that came with a subscription. With these insights, Agora set a goal to register 800 members in four years, with a yearly KPI of 200 sign-ups.

The program includes three levels, in ascending order: Supporter, Fan, and Ambassador. Agora's editorial content remains free for all on their website, but



Launch event for Agora's new membership program, 2020.

Supporters receive free access to the mobile app and the ability to chat with the newsroom. In addition, Fans receive exclusive content and special event tickets. On top of all of this, Ambassadors also have access to the website ad-free. Members pay 2 Euro (Supporter level), 5 Euro (Fan level), or 8 Euro (Ambassador level) per month.

DESIGNING THE MEMBERSHIP OFFER: BENEFITS		
SUPPORTER	FAN	AMBASSADOR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mobile App ✓ Closed chat with the newsroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mobile App ✓ Closed chat with the newsroom ✓ Exclusive content ✓ Theatre Tickets & Partner products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mobile App ✓ Closed chat with the newsroom ✓ Exclusive content ✓ Theatre Tickets & Partner products ✓ NO ADS ✓ FINANCIAL REPORT

Agora's membership levels.

“We liked the idea of a membership program that includes and engages readers into our policies, everyday work, and editorial ideas. We were not afraid in the sense that we were the first to do this in Moldova.”

— Irina Ghelbur, Agora Managing Director

The program's launch was met with challenges. Despite a carefully planned marketing strategy that included journalists' appeals to readers, the messaging resulted in an immediate decrease in readership from May through October 2020. "People somehow didn't understand, in the sense that some thought that they now had to pay to read the content, and became more and more cautious," says Ghelbur. Membership was also impeded by the lack of recurrent payments processing technology that didn't exist in Moldova at the time.

With changes, the program eventually became a success. By testing new messaging approaches, Agora recovered its readership. In January 2021, the team also succeeded in integrating a payment system to more easily facilitate member sign-ups. Eleven months after the launch, Agora achieved their KPI with over 200 members and made 5,000 Euro in profits.



Internews' 5-year MEDIA-M project (Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova) was launched in 2017, with funding support from USAID and the UK, with additional funding awarded by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2017–2022.



The Future:

Agora is on track to reach 80,000 registered readers and 800 paying members by 2024. In that time, the team's goal is to reduce their dependence on grants by 20% to have an operational budget made up of 30% membership fees, 40% advertising dollars, and 30% donor support.

“Editorial independence depends on financial independence.”

— Irina Ghelbur, Agora Managing Director

Case Study

El Surtidor, Paraguay

Capturing Attention and Revenues with Visual Journalism

In Paraguay, *El Surtidor* (*El Surti*) is disrupting the media landscape with powerful reporting published as illustrations. This digital native's signature infographics illuminate the society's most pressing challenges and capture the attention of Paraguay's youthful majority. Yet, *El Surti*'s expertise in visual journalism is not only a case study for how a news organization can mobilize social change; it is proving to be a strategy for achieving financial sustainability. It has commercialized its expertise and provides both communications consulting and training.



El Surti was launched in 2016 by a student of international relations and two graphic designers, all turned journalists. They were frustrated by the inequality in Paraguay between wealthy cattle and soy farmers and the landless majority. This inequality extends to the media. Land-owning elites own and influence most news organizations. Observing the growth of digital media, the three co-founders saw an opportunity to bypass the issue of media concentration and speak directly to Paraguay's largest population — young people.



Capturing Attention

They needed a way to capture the young people's attention. "We wondered, why would they listen to us? Why would they care to read our information?," explains Jazmín Acuña, co-founder and editor of *El Surti*. "Our answer to that challenge was to produce visual journalism — powerful images that are easy to produce, remix, copy and share on social media, combined with the best quality reporting."

"It's the combination of quality, rigorous reporting with strikingly powerful images."

— Jazmín Acuña, Co-founder and Editor of *El Surti*, on Visual Journalism

Low internet penetration, mobile data costs, and low bandwidth presented challenges. *El Surti* knew that most Paraguayans access the internet via mobile. So it adapted its content for mobile and social media, where young people are known to engage. Despite the growing trend of reporting with video and live streaming, *El Surti* chose a less data-heavy format — the JPEG file.

For In-Depth Stories, El Surti Invested in "Scrollytelling."

El Surti's infographics combine powerful, engaging imagery with easy to read text. The news team's visuals report the processes behind a news event. They break down complex issues to be easily understandable and shareable. For more in-depth stories,

El Surti invested in “Scrollytelling.” With Scrollytelling, the infographic is extended, providing reporters and illustrators more space. “The format is based on the gesture we make when we navigate social media. It’s a gesture that probably defines our generation: scrolling,” says Acuña.



El Surti’s “Scrollytelling piece – the story of girl that stood up to a Paraguayan dictator when she was 12 years old.” Source: [El Surtidor](#).

“The user navigates the information and the illustration at their own pace. It’s an alternative to video – something so simple as the up and down movement of the thumb – without using much internet data.”

— Jazmín Acuña, Co-founder and Editor of El Surti explaining El Surti signature Scrollytelling format

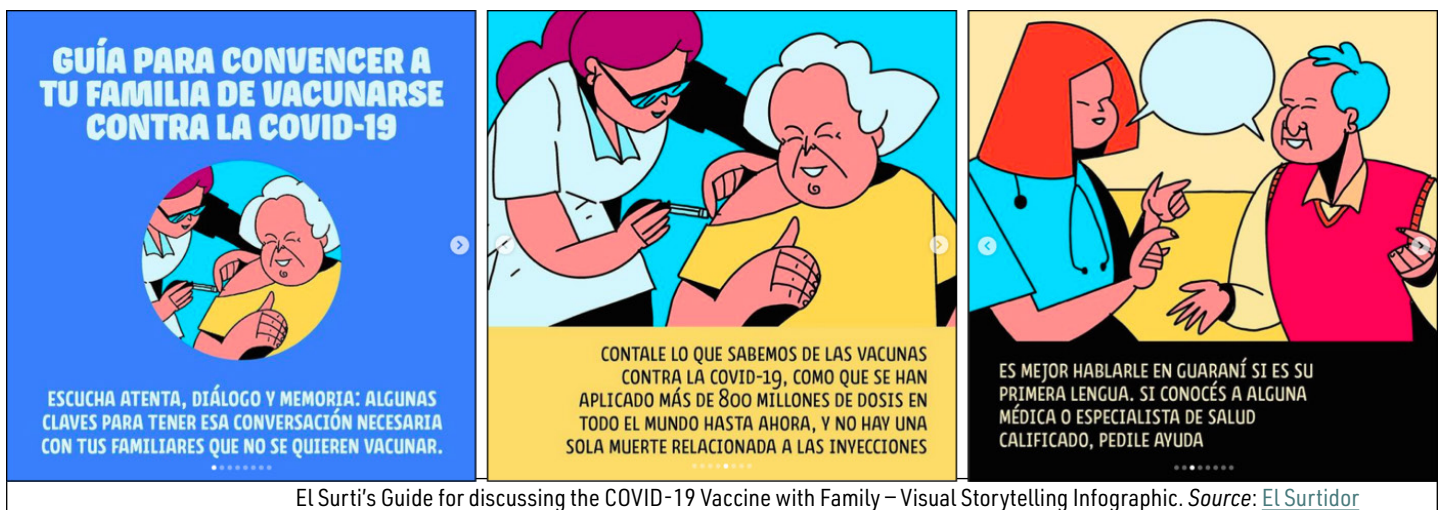
El Surti can also share the JPEG files on WhatsApp, providing access for individuals with more limited data. “If a person has a cell phone, that person most certainly has WhatsApp,” says Acuña. Apart from their infographics, El Surti is also producing long-read articles and podcasts.

Today El Surti’s award-winning infographics are tackling issues of power, gender relations, climate crisis, infodemics, and drug use. As of April 2021, its visual stories were reaching nearly 60,000 readers on Instagram, representing a 98% increase from 2020. El Surti is also reaching 83,000 readers on Facebook, 33,000 on Twitter, 4,000 on the website, and 2,500 through their Spotify channel. El Surti’s WhatsApp list has also grown by 188% between 2020 and 2021 to reach 6,500 people.

Creation Process

El Surti publishes a visual story daily. One graphic takes roughly two days to produce, with collaboration from the whole team. The team of 15, composed of editors, reporters, designers, illustrators, web developers, and a product manager, meets on Mondays to plan content and production flow.

Audience insights guide content decisions. Apart from Google and Facebook analytics, the staff interact with readers on Instagram and WhatsApp to learn about their interests. Acuña explains that, “when the pandemic started, we wondered how we could be useful. Our audience had the answer. They wanted us to fact check the information they were getting about COVID-19 on their WhatsApp groups.”



El Surti’s Guide for discussing the COVID-19 Vaccine with Family – Visual Storytelling Infographic. Source: [El Surtidor](#)

“We all work with the illustrators and designers very closely. They attend all our editorial meetings to discuss themes we are going to cover, and what kind of images we will use to approach an issue.”

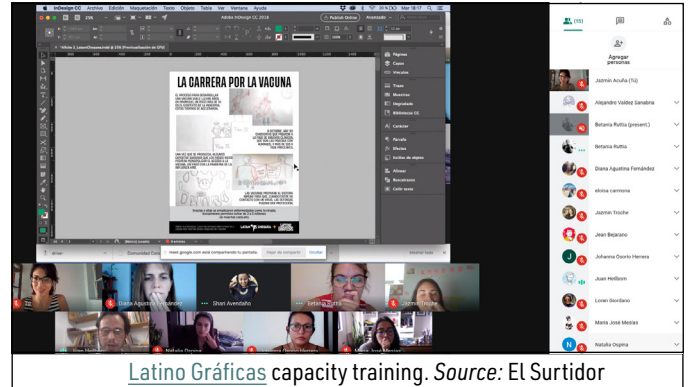
— Jazmín Acuña,
Co-founder and Editor of El Surti

Once a topic is chosen, the next step is to produce the written text. The investigative journalists write the story as a series of short text segments that help the team visualize it as a JPEG file. The content then goes to the designers and illustrators who work with the journalists and editors to brainstorm the best images to pair with the story. They look for pieces of the text which can be cut and replaced with illustrations. A rough sketch is produced for the graphic designers to create a digital version.

Selling their Expertise

The El Surti team has learned that their skill in visual journalism is in high demand. The team is now marketing this expertise. Seventeen percent of El Surti’s revenues are generated from communications consulting. Established as a separate business unit, El Surti has trained an ad hoc team to replicate its infographic products for private organizations and firms. A further 6% of El Surti’s revenue comes from selling editorial licenses for use of El Surti’s content, with a small portion generated last year from audience revenue for an experimental thematic magazine El Surti produced.

An additional 17% of the news site’s revenues come from their grant-supported regional training program, [Latinográficas](#). Its goal is to foster visual journalism throughout the region by training other newsrooms in El Surti’s methodology. The program launched in 2020 with a call to designers, illustrators, and reporters to help combat misinformation about the Covid-19 pandemic. “We taught them how to transform their quality reporting into visual pieces that are easy to read,



Latino Gráficas capacity training. Source: El Surtidor

understand, produce, remix and share, right where this information becomes more harmful — on social media and messaging apps, like WhatsApp,” remarks Acuña.

“Our training program combines theory master classes, delivered by experts in the field of visual journalism, with hands-on practice. It can be a source of revenue during times of uncertainty, and maybe even become a cornerstone of our business model.”

— Jazmín Acuña,
Co-founder and Editor of El Surti

The Future

“We want to be more independent so we’re working towards diversifying our revenue streams,” says Acuña. At the same time, El Surti wants to maintain its independence and keep its content free to the public. To do so, the team is investing in growing their consulting and training services. “Our strategy is to go regional,” says Acuña. “When I think of where we will be in the next couple of years, that is where I see growth.” El Surti has also seen initial success with an experimental membership program and plans to continue to test models that attract paying members with special perks.



El Surtidor developed its consulting and Latinográficas programs with training and support from [Sembra Media's 'Velocidad'](#) program in 2019.

Case Study

Radio Daljir, Somalia

Creating Somalia's Largest FM Network: Peacebuilding and Empowerment



In 1983, Jama Abshir's family joined the exodus from a war-torn Somalia to the U.S.

Today, he is a CPA and the founder of Radio Daljir, the largest network of FM radio stations in Somalia, with 10 FM stations and multi-media platforms reaching throughout Somalia and covering parts of the Somali region of Ethiopia, the Indian Ocean, and the Gulf of Aden.

either using it to create trouble or buy drugs, mainly the local khat; and for most men, there really was no effort at pacification among the clans.

In 1999 I returned to help rebuild my country. I was in Galkayo, Puntland, and saw that media was basically dead in that part of the world. People had these little radios they listened to, but all they heard was rumors and lies about what other clans had done: "so-and-so did this to us, to our clan." Whether they were deliberately trying to create clan conflict, or simply lacked an agenda for national development, the result was that they were propagating the clans. There was nothing educational, nothing factual, it just served to deepen clan divides and promote further conflict.

Q: How did Daljir get started? What remain some of its core, foundational values?

A: In 1996, to help overcome the clan hostilities and take part in the rebuilding process, we established one of the first telecoms in Somalia. It started with landlines and then became the first mobile company; I was a founding member and the CFO. By then I recognized the deep need for trusted media. So, I started a newspaper in Galkayo, the *Yamayska*, but quickly learned that in a society with a strong oral tradition and low literacy, it was not the best approach. In 2003, I founded Radio Daljir in Galkayo.



The company established the Radio Daljir Women's Desk (dWd), an all-woman team that reports on, and advocates for, Somali women and girls' human rights and rights to education, training, employment, and dignity. To help at-risk Somali youth develop resilience — especially boys at risk of terrorist recruitment — he also established the Daljir Youth Learning Center (DLC), an education and skills improvement center.

Abshir also cofounded and is a former Treasurer and Board Member of the Somali Development Center (SDC), Inc., a not-for-profit advocacy and social service agency, and is a cofounder of Mudug Relief & Development Association (MuRDA), an educational and mentoring institution in Puntland, Somalia.

Q: When it was safe for you to return to Somalia, what did you find?

A: Clan wars were still brewing, and men were basically "walking wounded," traumatized from the civil war. With whatever little money they had, they were

A: A central tenet of Radio Daljir is its commitment to reflecting the large role that Somali women play in society. Somali women have always been strong, and they became stronger in the context of the civil war because they had to run their households, send kids to school, and operate small family businesses. Indeed, I was raised by a very strong mother with those values. Although my father was around, it was our mother who raised us, fed us, and made sure we stayed in school when others in the village perceived modern

schooling as a lost cause. Mom did it all and put me on a straight path. From that upbringing, a commitment to women was built into Daljir's core.

Daljir is also deeply committed to stopping the bloodshed and sustaining stability by transcending clan lines, not exacerbating them. Our focus has always been and remains on the larger goals of rebuilding the nation and keeping the peace.

Q: Women are active leaders at all levels in your organization. That is unusual in the region. Why is there such a commitment to women leadership and visibility?

A: I hired a team of guys, local stars from other media outlets to manage the station. I was based in Boston and funding Radio Daljir by sending money to them. I told them they needed to include women, as well. But after six months, it was not working. Salaries weren't getting paid. The managers were using the money for drugs. So, I woke up and remembered that I should practice what I preached. I brought women managers into top roles and throughout the organization. It needed managers who didn't cheat, managers who didn't steal, and managers who didn't do drugs. At that point in time, only women could fulfill that role. It was the right thing to do because, first, I was raised that way. And second, because it worked.

That commitment to women in the organization and women in society has only grown over time. We founded the Daljir Women's Desk (dWd) in 2005; it gives voice to otherwise voiceless Somali women and girls. We cover topics that include the education and prevention of FGM, underage marriage, and violence against women. dWd reporters use radio programs, advocacy, and social media to reach our audiences and further the dWd cause.

Q: Daljir has gone from one station in Galkayo to 10 around the country, and you have further plans to expand. What does it take to open a new location?

A: You have to be local. People really want content that transcends clan lines, and when we add stations, we cross clan boundaries. It shows the power of the Daljir brand that it is easy to cross clan boundaries as long as you can convey a positive message to the people.

We only add a station to a community when we are invited. We meet the community elders and request their support, the community's support, to get established. We also ask for that support in the form of discounted or free electricity, capacity on a local broadcast tower, and sometimes discounted or rent-free space for a period of time. That gives us time to get established and know the community; it also provides a period when the elders and others can introduce us to the local telecoms, banks, and local businesses.

Having Radio Daljir benefits the entire community. Locally, our content helps educate and inform people. But Daljir also shares the progress of the community with the rest of Somalia and the world on our platforms. Unlike other radio stations, there is local content produced at every station, it's not just outside programming. It creates a radio that is truly local, with local voices and stories. We share the stories of local NGOs that are working across clan boundaries. We learn a lot about local issues: what are the strengths of the community, the weaknesses, what are the community's trials and tribulations? In addition, we continuously contribute to local causes by airing "Help the Cause (Tabarucaadka Daljir)" a fundraising talk-show program that raises \$20–\$30,000 per month.

Q: Daljir isn't just FM anymore, right?

A: Daljir is a multi-media platform and is on social media. Our content is streamed nationwide. Our Facebook page is one of the more influential pages in Somalia with more than 10 million minutes viewed monthly. We've expanded into video production. It has changed how we train and equip our journalists: they have laptops, video cameras, and professional production equipment.

One of the most exciting things we're lately producing is the documentary series, "The Daljir Journey (Sahanka Daljir)." We travel all over the country reporting on communities, introducing them to the rest of Somalia and the world. Our reporters showcase what makes each community unique and valuable, but also introduce core local issues. That way the area is viewed through a lens of opportunity and development, rather than clan or politics. Sahanka airs on Radio Daljir and is also published on [Daljir Facebook](#), YouTube, Twitter, and [Daljir's website](#). It became a hit in 2020 and we are now seeking project sponsors.

Q: How have funding and revenue sources changed over the years?

A: I funded it initially and for many years. Our biggest station is in Bossaso; in the beginning, business owners would laugh if you asked them to buy an ad. They would say, “why would I advertise? There’s no competition and people are begging to buy whatever I have.” And that’s why we needed the community to give us practical, tangible support. As the country became more stable, we were able to develop local ad revenue.

In the early days, 80% of our revenue came from NGOs sponsoring content in areas like human rights, good governance, FGM, and peacebuilding. And it helped us get established. But NGO money was either feast or famine, and that was a killer. It was difficult to build a strong, sustainable organization on unstable funding. So eventually we built up other revenue sources, including advertising and programs sponsorship, that are more stable and that we have more control over. We keep knocking on doors, we keep expanding, we keep educating local businesses.

Q: I would not imagine that Al Shabaab is supportive of your organization.

A: Al Shabaab has repeatedly targeted Daljir. Essentially, our role is to directly or indirectly counter terrorism by working with local authorities, local women, youth, educational institutions, and civil society. That’s what we’ve been doing, and it has fueled Shabaab’s hatred towards us. Our stations often receive threatening calls.

But it isn’t just threatening calls. Al Shabaab directly assassinated three Daljir employees. Each of the victims was threatened first. They bombed our Galkayo offices twice. They pulled one of our managers from a car and shot him point-blank at his head, but the gun misfired or were blank shots, and he survived. And there are more stories.

But the key issue is that Radio Daljir is community driven and once Daljir is established in that community, it becomes very difficult for al-Shabaab to recruit and to persuade people to their cause and take over the area. I believe Radio Daljir is the best available ‘soft power’ in Somalia today.

Case Study

Zairul de Gardă, Moldova

Creative Brand Marketing Propels Audience and Revenue Growth

Established in 2004, [Ziarul de Gardă](#) (ZdG) is one of Moldova's first investigative news organizations and nationally celebrated for its reporting on issues of corruption and human rights. In 2017, after more than a decade of operating with limited staff and resources, ZdG has transformed itself. By taking a hard look at its strengths and weaknesses, and those of the competition, it overhauled its business strategy. Through audience analysis and creative marketing, ZdG grew its print circulation to all-time highs. In just one year it increased web traffic by 150% and its Facebook followers by 130%, with posts reaching 2 million people weekly.



Citizen Support of the Mission

ZdG's success is largely owed to its devotion to supporting the people of Moldova with uncompromised journalism that tells the truth. Translated in English as the 'newspaper on guard,' its investigations have influenced criminal cases and resulted in the resignation of corrupt figures, earning the newspaper a loyal public following. ZdG's CEO, Alina Radu, explains, "We consider another kind of support as important as money. This is the emotional support from the community...if not for this support, I don't think we would be where we are today."

"Our readers are fighters for justice, for human rights, and fighters of corruption. They are people who want transparency and democracy."

— Alina Radu, ZdG Founder, and CEO

Yet, high-quality journalism alone won't overcome the economic and political threats to ZdG's survival. Moldova's oligarchy controls the market and the legal system sides against media autonomy. ZdG endures frequent attempts at silencing its journalists and struggles to find advertisers that won't compromise its editorial standards.

To support its investigative work ZdG relies on international donors, with grants funding about 70% of its operating budget. The remaining 30% is made up of reader subscriptions (15%), monthly donations (5%), and advertising (10%). Aware of the inconsistency of grant funding, ZdG's leadership invested in the organization's first-ever formal business plan with the intent to increase the newspaper's audience and commercial revenues.

They began in 2017 with support from Internews' MEDIA-M project. As Radu explains, "A lot of changes happened. Until then we were in a small office and were very very afraid. We knew we had a lot of people who loved us, but we were afraid to hire more reporters and to develop the news department. We stayed like this, very small, being afraid of everything."



Readers gather at ZdG's offices to pick up a fresh newspaper and share story ideas. *Images Source: Ziarul de Garda*

Sizing up the Competition

The ZdG team received assistance from the project to conduct an organizational capacity assessment and competitor analysis. The exercise helped them realize the unique quality of their journalism and the value of their brand reputation as defenders of the truth.

“We started to evaluate our competitors,” reflects Radu, “and we learned we were in a very good place. Till then we were considering ourselves only in competition with investigative media. We started to look at being in competition with bigger news portals doing only general news, not investigative news. It made us courageous to move forward because now we knew the quality of our reporting was very good.”

With newfound confidence, the team brought on new staff, developed a focus on audience analytics, and invested in a creative brand marketing campaign to grow consumer and advertising revenues.

Tracking Audience Behavior

ZdG has long enjoyed a close relationship with its readers, fielding their daily letters, calls, and visits to the office to share story ideas. As part of their new business strategy, the team is using technology to incorporate audience data into their planning process. Using Google, Facebook, and Twitter analytics, each department performs a monthly audience impact analysis. ZdG also conducts a biannual audience survey and frequently posts questionnaires on social media to gather insights on reader interests. You can see the data gathered in periodic updates published online, including this [example from fall 2020](#).

Aggressive Brand Marketing

ZdG has also implemented a smart brand marketing strategy, advertising its corruption-fighting reputation. The campaigns include promotional videos that detail the amount of time it takes to produce its investigations and targeted subscription campaigns that appeal to the public for support.

The first creative brand campaign ran in 2019 during Halloween. In the print, online, and social media platforms, the newspaper ran a banner ad inviting readers to “scare a corrupt official” by subscribing the official to the print edition. The result of the campaign was a 15% growth in print subscriptions. ZdG has continued this winning strategy, with the latest campaign featuring the spring-themed messaging, “Don’t let corruption bloom this year.”



Fall, 2019 Brand Marketing: “For Halloween, scare a corrupt official. Subscribe him/her to Ziarul de Garda!”

ZdG followed a similar marketing tactic in 2020 with the launch of a Patreon [fundraising program](#). Donors are asked to support investigative work with \$2, \$5, or \$10 contributions per month in exchange for special access to video content, print, or PDF editions. Sign-ups started the first day and have increased month-over-month with spikes on Thursdays when the team publishes their most important investigative articles. As of March 2021, ZdG had 134 patrons resulting in \$861 of monthly revenue.



Spring, 2021 Brand Marketing.

Advertising to Attract Advertisers

Brand marketing has also influenced Zdg’s advertising sales. By highlighting its commitment to truth and fighting corruption, the newspaper is essentially waving a flag that attracts and encourages advertising from ethical companies and wards off bad actors. Despite a drop in advertising due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Zdg has found success building a client base of small, local advertisers and international NGOs for whom it runs banners and advertorials across its print and online platforms.

“We published officially that we don’t want to work with corrupt businesses. We’ve started to develop nice relationships with small businesses, such as with people who are producing some agricultural foods or medical services, but that are small and clean. We take money from them for advertising...but we trust each other.”

— Alina Radu, Zdg Founder, and CEO

Impact

Since implementing their new business strategy and making investments in brand marketing and audience analytics, Zdg has seen continuous growth. In January 2021, the print edition’s weekly circulation reached an all-time high of 11,000 copies. In 2020, the website received 27 million page views, representing a 150% increase from 2019. The corresponding success with consumer revenues and advertising encourages Zdg to continue to diversify its financial portfolio beyond grant funding. Over the next few years, it seeks to grow reader subscriptions by 15%, and advertising revenues by an additional 20%.



Zdg staff during a typical day in the newsroom during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Internews’ 5-year Media-M project (Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova) was launched in 2017, with funding support from USAID and UK aid, with additional funding awarded by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2017–2022.



Case Study

Actualite.cd, DRC

Holistic Management of a DRC Start-Up

Launched in 2016, [Actualite.cd](https://actualite.cd) has quickly become one of the most popular online news outlets in DRC with an average of 1,500,000 unique visitors per month. The outlet introduced fact-based independent news, an innovation in the Congolese media landscape, and its content is well-received on its own platform and on social media. The team creates news series on key public interest issues: the economy, health, the environment, and women.

The news outlet also operates as a successful business: despite a 40% decrease in revenues in 2020 resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, Actualite.cd increased revenues by 25% in 2018 and 60% in 2019 from its integrated management approach.



In addition to having a clear-eyed newsroom strategy, it has adopted other innovative practices. Actualite.cd's model centers on training young journalists, pioneering mobile journalism techniques, and introducing digital marketing to key influencers in the Congolese advertising market. Through its Kinshasa News Lab, Actualite.cd has also started to lead research on innovative income-generating activities and new products. In these ways, Actualite.cd combines an innovative journalistic approach with a focus on credibility and maintaining a successful business model to enhance sustainability.

The Beginning

Patient Ligodi, founder of Actualite.cd, knew the outside world was starving for information from the DRC, particularly in the roiling environment of 2016's postponed elections, simply because the country's mainstream media outlets lacked an online presence.

He typed "actualités en RDC" (news from DRC) in search engines and landed on articles from media abroad like Jeune Afrique and RFI, but nothing from Congolese media outlets.

Patient decided to change that.

He founded Actualite.cd at a time when there were no provisions for digital media in DRC's existing law. To establish the news outlet, Patient created a communications company, Next Corp, and developed Actualite.cd and Kinshasa News Lab, a knowledge exchange initiative that organizes discussions with experts in other sectors, as the company's services.

The name "Actualité" was both a placement strategy and a risk. With the word "actualité," (meaning 'news' in English), there was a high probability that the site would appear first on search engines. It was also a risk because the name was associated in the Google algorithms with compact disk and music-related topics. However, instead of being discouraging, this became a challenge to overcome to gain recognition.



Patient Ligodi, founder of [Actualite.cd](https://actualite.cd), Kinshasa News Lab and Next Corp. *Images Source: Actualite.cd*

Building Credibility and a Team

When Actualite.cd was founded, the government viewed internet news as external propaganda, managed and controlled by the opposition in the diaspora. “The goal was to make the information from the Internet credible, produced by well-known journalists, who have certificates and professional ID cards,” said Patient Ligodi. One strategy was to put the name, the location, and even the contact of the journalist at the bottom of each article to show that they were not ghost journalists.

For more credibility, Actualite.cd approached leaders, among them the Minister of Communication, to introduce themselves as an online media outlet led by journalists identified by the media self-regulatory body.

Another important strategy was to bring on board youth who understood how the algorithms of the major platforms work and were up to date with optimization trends. Although only his mid-30s, Patient felt the need for the support of younger users.

Through grant support, Actualite.cd reinforces the capacities of these young journalists eager to learn digital media as interns. Actualite.cd trains young journalists in fact-checking, online news formats, and mobile journalism to create easy-to-read-and-share factual news reports and investigative content. In this way, Actualite.cd created human resources and adapted to its needs, with a lower cost structure than hiring experienced journalists who have fewer competencies using online formats.

A New Media Landscape

Actualite.cd was also the first Congolese online media outlet to understand the role of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp) to disseminate public interest news information, notably through mobile phones. With more than 520,000 Facebook followers, 370,000 Twitter followers, 73,000 Instagram followers, 10,000+ app downloads, and 25,000 subscribers to its newsletter, Actualite.cd has become a market leader.

With the rise of Actualite.cd, competition emerged. Other online media were born and existing outlets reorganized themselves to compete. Many of Actualite.cd’s journalists left to start online media, such as Actu30.cd, but they “share the same ideologies and the same writing style as us,” said Patience. This writing style is factual, “who did what, and where, how and why” and this, Patient claims, has influenced other news websites in DRC that do not want to act as tools for political propaganda in a context where most commercial media outlets are owned by politicians.

Indeed, during the last 2019 electoral cycle, important media outlets joined the Actualite.cd movement for factual and independent information. As a result, access to electoral information considerably improved in comparison with the 2011 general elections. The most visited websites in DRC are now news media outlets, an indication that digital media outlets are becoming increasingly credible.

Obstacles to Sustainability

Despite this success, Actualite.cd faces several challenges in enhancing its sustainability. One of the biggest challenges that digital media face in the DRC is the Internet penetration rate; “we cannot go beyond the threshold, the Congolese capacity to have access to the Internet. The concentration is in the cities.” Besides the penetration is the quality of the connection. “While developing applications, we are conscious of this challenge and sometimes this is an obstacle in implementing projects, like live content online — we have it in mind but are skeptical to launch.”

Internet costs are also high. According to Patient Ligodi, Actualite.cd’s monthly internet cost is about US \$800. Due to the connection’s instability, “we use



Actualite.cd and Next Corp team in 2017

four providers to allow us to shift from one to another in case of connection drops.”

Obstacles are not only technical. There is a lack of a startup support policy in DRC and a high tax rate on digital media. There are internal challenges as well. Actualite.cd has difficulty retaining its best journalists. Once trained, they are attractive to other news organizations. “When a good journalist emerges, he is automatically solicited, and we have no financial muscles to retain him,” said Patient.

Business Model and Attracting Advertisers

To overcome these obstacles, a sustainable structure is essential to build a quality and successful digital media organization. In a country where most media do not pay their taxes due to impunity and political ownership of outlets, digital media that pay their taxes and have strong business models are better off and more independent.

With a bachelor’s degree in Journalism and a Master of Media Management, from being a journalist to owning and managing a radio station that he later sold, Patient launched Actualite.cd with strong editorial and managerial experience that he relied on to build up the business.

Patient says: “Today I cannot say that Actualite.cd is totally profitable. Our business model is based on advertising which accounts for half of the revenue of the media outlet.” They also use their platform to post job advertisements, identified opinion pages, and calls for tenders to generate revenues. Before the pandemic, Actualite.cd also organized some events that generated sponsorship revenues.

In advertising, Actualite.cd strives to be the market leader because, as Patient observed, “when you are ranked among the top three digital media in the country, it is a lot easier to approach companies and pitch on our capacity to provide them with all the statistics that come with advertising with us.”

Actualite.cd’s strategy is to stick to advertiser priorities: to target the small but growing middle-class. Actualite.cd advertisers come from the financial sector, telecommunications, tourism, and online services. Most financial and telecommunications businesses

use Actualite.cd to promote innovative e-services. Through its Kinshasa News Lab, Actualite.cd works on new services that generate new audiences or revenues, notably through platforms like WhatsApp.

However, the internet penetration still limits approaches based on audience revenues and the online advertisement market was small in 2016 in DRC, a country with one of the world’s lowest GDP per person. Most companies did not budget for online advertising at the time, and there was a lack of data from market research agencies that could quantify the impact of digital marketing. Actualite.cd started to gain credibility when its audience began to increase, which attracted advertisers and helped online media to become recognized as a growing segment in the media landscape.

To unite online media and help each other to grow in impact, Patient also co-founded the Association des Médias d’Information en Ligne (MILRDC), a digital media association in DRC. The initiative helped announcers to understand opportunities for online advertising in the context of the rapid development of mobile internet communications. Members of the association give grouped offers to clients or engage in the co-production of quality content to help attract clients.

Actualite.cd and its Kinshasa News Lab activity are supported by Internews, with funding from the EU, Sida and USAID. Since 2019, Internews has worked with Actualite.cd to build on its editorial capacity, business development, and revenue strategies, as well as on initiatives contributing to the building of a digital ecosystem in the DRC and advocacy for media reforms



Actualite.cd’s Kinshasa News Lab hosts a presentation of the online media association (MILRDC) on the digital advertising market

and health issues. These initiatives are contributing to Actualite.cd's overall sustainability and capacity to overcome key challenges in the media market.

About the Authors:

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Blaise Banyabo "Bany" is the Project Manager of Medias2I at Internews and serves as the DRC focal point of Inclusive Media Project. Before being named Project Manager in June 2020, Bany was Project Assistant of the Goma office and was responsible for supervising the support of the programs in Goma, Beni and Butembo, including the logistics, administration and human resources. Prior to joining Internews, Bany was a freelancer in research, translation, interpretation, and a private French teacher. Bany earned an MBA from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, and a Bachelor of Business Information Technology from Strathmore University. Bany is also a musician.

Case Study

Gurjaani TV, Georgia

How a Traditional TV Station Built and Monetized an Online Audience from Scratch

[Gurjaani TV](#) began broadcasting news and entertainment programs to the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia in 1993. In 2017, after relying for more than a decade on selling TV airtime, this traditional TV station remade itself. With limited staff, Gurjaani TV transformed its content for the web, leveraged audience analytics to track impact, and developed cutting-edge multimedia ad packages. The transition has added approximately 13,000 GEL (US \$1,500) to the station's monthly income.



Reimagining Content

Gurjaani TV developed its new strategy with training from Internews Georgia. The team learned to repack-age broadcasted content to better suit online and mobile audiences. A key aspect was shortening segments. Nino Samniashvili, Head of News for Gurjaani TV, explains, “On TV we could run a segment for five to seven minutes, but on Facebook, it needed to be just two or three minutes.” In particular, Gurjaani TV focused on reformatting its local and cultural content for YouTube and social media platforms. A new content piece that had particular success was a short how-to video featuring a recipe for a regional dish, Khachapuri.

A First Look at their Audience

Gurjaani TV also began using Google and Facebook analytics. It was the first time the team had a clear picture of who their audience was. As Samniashvili explains, “I was surprised that people who live outside our region like our content. We learned that emigrants, who live abroad in Italy, the USA, and Russia

also like our topics. So we began planning content for and about emigrants.”

While it took the team time to learn how to best use Google Analytics in English, the effort paid off. Now the team uses the tool daily to plan content and track impact. In 2018, Google Analytics reported the monthly web-based audience at 4,095 users and 6,666 sessions. By June 2020, Gurjaani TV reported 43,065 users and 73,580 sessions monthly.

“Before, we did not have information about our audience. We did not know if they are men, or women, or their ages. We didn’t know their likes and dislikes. We could only assume.”

— Nino Samniashvili, Head of News, Gurjaani TV

Monetizing the Growth

To capitalize on the audience growth, Gurjaani TV crafted multimedia advertising packages showcasing their online reach. Yet, the team was initially skeptical about approaching advertisers. Their regular clients who bought traditional airtime were unaccustomed to web-based ads. Gurjaani TV’s small staff could not afford a professional salesperson to help overcome their reluctance.

With training, the team assembled a professional media kit that demonstrated Gurjaani TV’s audience reach and profile, and the various marketing services the station could offer across the web, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Armed with the media kit, the staff began to approach potential advertisers themselves.

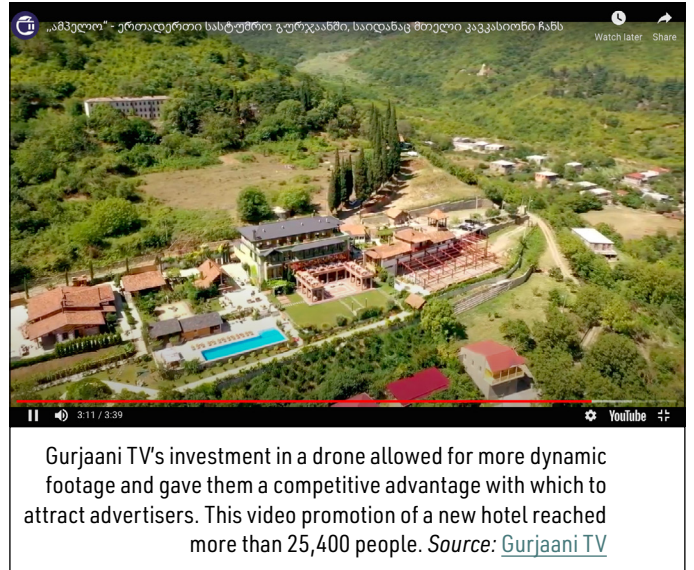
Advertisers’ attitudes changed after Gurjaani ran a particularly successful campaign for a local hotel. The



team created a [promotional video](#) of the hotel chef demonstrating five ways to cook eggs. Within days, the video gathered more than 260,000 views on the website. On Facebook, it received 3,600 likes and 4,600 shares. The hotel became a long-term client, and the promotion's success attracted the attention of other hotels and businesses.

Gurjaani TV also invested in a camera drone to produce more dynamic content and advertising formats. As the first media organization in the region to offer drone footage, it was a competitive advantage. The tool has helped Gurjaani TV attract additional advertisers, such as a local university interested in capturing footage of their campus for marketing materials.

Advertising sales dropped for Gurjaani TV in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The station is located in Georgia's traditional wine country. When international travel ceased, many hotels and businesses catering to tourists closed down. Yet, Gurjaani TV was able to adapt its sales strategy. Leveraging the goodwill they had developed with clients, the team successfully persuaded some hotels to run ads designed to foster local tourism.



“During the pandemic, many hotels did not want to advertise. We asked them to trust us. It was a challenge, but we helped them see that promoting regional tourism would be better for their business in the long run. Now, we are seeing local people visiting.”

— Nino Samniashvili, Head of News, Gurjaani TV

Impact

By reimagining its content and practicing data-based planning, Gurjaani TV remade itself, transitioning from a traditional over-the-air broadcast to a digital, multi-platform media organization. The transition resulted in an overall increase in audience and revenues. As a result of the project, the station generated approximately 29,000 GEL or 8,467 USD in new revenues from online advertising, including a 173% increase in online sales between March and November 2020.

Internews Georgia supported Gurjaani TV through its “Strengthening Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia” project between October 2017 and September 2020, with funding from the U.S. Department of State. Gurjaani TV also received targeted business support from the “Audience Understanding and Digital Security” project in 2019, with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

Case Study

Amakhosikazi Media, Zimbabwe

Paths Forward with Technology: How Amakhosikazi Media is building community and generating content through online groups



Before the pandemic: Women journalists speaking to female journalism students from various colleges at a past Amakhosikazi Media networking event. *Images Source: Amakhosikazi*



AMAKHOSIKAZI MEDIA
A Women's Media for Development News Platform

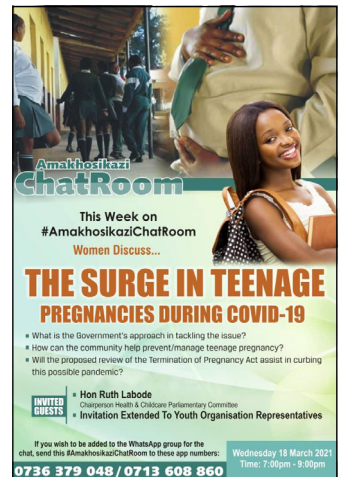
Sibusisiwe 'Busi' Ndlovu-Bhebhe. At 7:00pm nearly 230 women from across Zimbabwe will be joining her team on a special WhatsApp group for their weekly 'Amakhosikazi Chat Room' discussion.

The anticipation for this publicized virtual roundtable has been high. All week, members of their other 'Network' WhatsApp group have had robust conversations about media reports around teen pregnancy, the effect of the pandemic, and the work that needs to be done to protect young girls.

Busi says the 81-member networking group, which is open to women from all walks of life through a public link, is like a "community bore hole, (in a traditional African context). It is where women would gather to get water at certain times of the day, share information...That's how the old African communities would spread news."

She works with 12 contributors to publish articles, podcasts, and social media content, using perspectives from the messaging app to inform their content focus and the angles they should take.

"I would say the networking group is the backbone of our content production. Our members will flag for us the issues that people are talking about, and the things that they are experiencing on a community level," she says, adding that the audience reception from this first experiment with WhatsApp inspired the creation of the weekly chat room.



Highlights

- Amakhosikazi Media is the media production unit of the Women's Media for Development News Foundation in Zimbabwe. They run a multimedia platform focused on increasing the quality and frequency of women's views on all issues in the media. They also provide networking opportunities, training, and consultancy in women's projects.
- Zimbabwe boasts 14.76 million mobile connections, and a large majority of the country's 5.01 million internet users use their mobile phones to access the internet.
- A 2017 news report indicated that WhatsApp accounted for nearly 50% of Zimbabwe's internet use. Local media are innovating around the use of WhatsApp to engage audiences, increase traffic, generate content, and build community.

It is Wednesday afternoon, and it's a busy day for Amakhosikazi Media's Editing Director

“We had already created the other network for socializing, and women were very vibrant on that group. So, we thought: how can we create a more formalized group that we could control and then run like a formal dialogue or meeting where people just stick to the issue at hand. We experimented for about two weeks and we realized that it worked, and then we have been perfecting and growing the idea.”

Before COVID-19, they held in-person networking events, thematic roundtables, and even mentorship sessions for budding female journalists — activities that built momentum for the multimedia outlet. But as the pandemic restrictions closed spaces for in-person activities, the Amakhosikazi Media team went back to the drawing board.

“We had just gotten a new grant for 3 years where we were supposed to have face-to-face meetings with women in the communities...we realized 3 months into the lockdown that nothing was really happening. That’s when we thought to experiment by having the dialogues through WhatsApp,” she explains, noting that the free mobile messaging app is affordable and accessible for mobile users with internet access.

Amakhosikazi invites government officials, community members, and opinion leaders to join the robust 2-hour Wednesday evening discussion where participants are encouraged to send voice notes, images, and text contributions. Reporters produce a podcast from the voice notes, publishing other content highlights on their website and social media platforms.

“We felt that women needed a safe space where they comment on issues and share their ideas. We cover a number of topics and various issues that are happening in the community. It is also from here that we get to feel the impact of different stories. From there we take them to the other controlled platforms for more in-depth analysis or experts’ input and so forth.”

— Sibusisiwe ‘Busi’ Ndlovu-Bhebhe, Amakhosikazi Media, Editing Director

Moving forward, the team would like to continue with this programming. “While this started in response to COVID-19, we now realize it can continue (after the pandemic)...a lot of women can’t afford transport when we meet in person, and time is also an issue. It is easier for them during those late hours, to sit at home comfortably and chat about issues that they encounter,” Busi says.

Her team has a third group — this one focused on business and economic empowerment, as Zimbabwe’s women deal with the economic realities of the pandemic. Amakhosikazi’s use of “WhatsApp to build online communities and women’s stories is only bound to grow in the future,” Busi says as she rushes off to respond to yet another WhatsApp notification.



From physical community to virtual networks: WhatsApp has helped build a sense of community, offering much needed support through the pandemic.

Case Study

Kakhetis Khma, Georgia

Sponsored Content in a Rural Market

Kakhetis Khma is a women-led NGO that operates as a digital-first organization on its [Knews.ge](https://knews.ge) platform. In an economically distressed agricultural area, it has pioneered the innovative use of sponsored video content on its platform. It targets its content to the 19,000 residents of Telavi, the administrative center for the province of Kakheti, and farmers in its area.

The media house has cultivated diverse revenue sources in addition to relying on donor support. There is no local advertising culture. Although the director and her staff have a professional media kit and pricing listed on the website, and make sales calls, there is little result from these efforts. The organization has turned to selling paid press releases and public relations announcements, charging 100 Lari for those produced by clients (around \$30), and 150 Lari (around \$45) for those produced by the media house. Kakheti Khma also operates a small, professional training center and a wine garden, both of which generate revenue to support the organization.

The Telavi region, however, is largely agricultural and is now growing as a tourist destination because of its vineyards. Kakhetis Khma developed a relationship with an agricultural supplements company to develop a series of short, educational films about livestock nutrition and care. They did this relying only on in-house talent. The team has one professional video camera and includes a staffer proficient at using Adobe's Premiere Pro editing software.

Sold as a package, the staff worked closely with the company to produce high quality materials that resonated with local farmers (who were featured) and showed them employing contemporary farming practices. With high production values, the pieces had a cinematic quality that showcased the region's beauty.



Although vineyards and tourism are growing businesses, Telavi and the province of Kakheti, along with neighboring provinces, remain largely agrarian. Source: [News Consulting Group](#)

Case Study

Uplands FM, Tanzania

Success with Sponsorships Hosting Sporting Events

A small community radio station added 3,000 Tanzanian shillings (approximately \$1,300) to its monthly income by instituting a local soccer tournament. In 2019, Uplands FM founded the Uplands Super Cup. The station broadcast the first tournament live and invited local business owners. "We marketed our events through digital posters, radio jingles, and local WhatsApp groups," explains Nobby Swale, a manager at Uplands FM. "We attracted seven big sponsors and a few small advertisers, who paid the station handsomely." Given the success, Uplands FM is looking to host additional local entertainment events.

[Learn more here.](#)



Uplands FM hosts monthly events which it broadcasts live and markets through digital posters, radio spots, and WhatsApp.



The Uplands Super Cup attracts a strong attendance from Uplands FM's youth audience.



Uplands FM launched Uplands Super Cup after attending a media marketing forum hosted by Internews in Dar es Salaam.

Case Study

Uralskaya Nedelya, Kazakhstan

The Art of Attracting Local Advertisers

Operating two thousand miles away from the capital city of Nur-Sultan, Uralsk's [Uralskaya Nedelya](#) (Uralsk Week) is one of Kazakhstan's truly independent news outlets. Uralsk Week's dedication to fighting corruption and providing local citizens with truthful news is remarkable; so too is the news outlet's resourcefulness. Despite continual intimidation attempts from local authorities and an objectively small advertising market, this news team generates 70% of its income from ads and the rest from diverse and innovative sources.



Since 2001, the news team's local and regional investigations have earned Uralsk Week a reputation as a trusted authority in the community. The news organization reaches the majority of its audience over the web and social media. Five years ago, its weekly print circulation was 20,000. Today, it is down to 3,000. Meanwhile, Uralsk Week has gained 140,000 followers on Instagram alone — an impressive number when considering that the city of Uralsk is home to just 318,000 residents.

“Uralsk Week will say and write information that no one shows anymore. Without Uralsk Week, it would be easy for corruption to exist. This is our mission. This is what inspires us.”

— Raul Uporov,
Deputy Chief Editor at Uralsk Week

Raul Uporov, Uralsk Week Deputy Chief Editor, notes four factors influencing audience growth online, and particularly on Instagram:

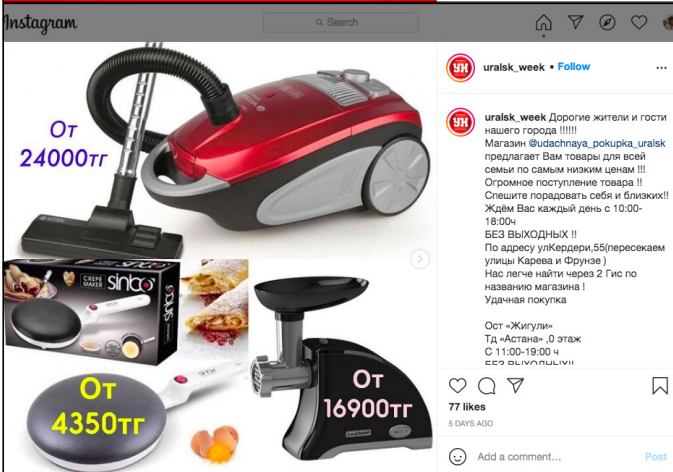
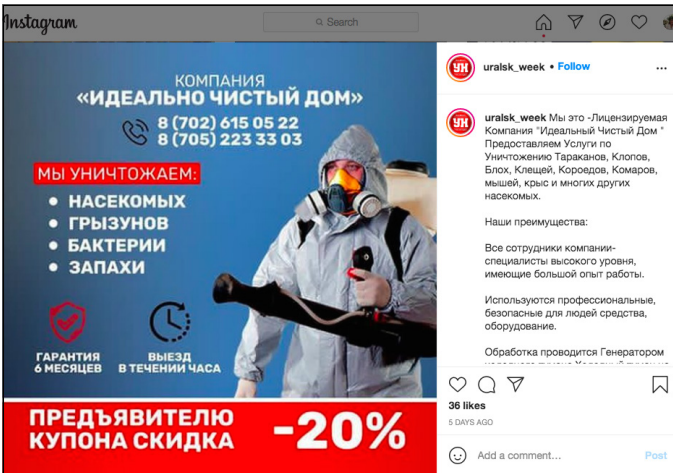
1. Uralsk Week reports original, local news. While competitors frequently re-post existing content, Uralsk Week is known as a primary source for reliable information.
2. The news team caters to the public appetite for live video. Reporters live-stream local cultural and civic events via social media.
3. Uralsk Week journalists explain the news rather than simply reporting facts. For instance, if a new regulatory document is released, Uralsk Week explains, in simple terms, how policy changes will impact daily life.
4. Uralsk Week continually experiments with new content, including animation and short-text formats that link to their long-read material.

Apart from minimal revenues generated from print subscriptions, crowdfunding, and hosting local events, almost 30% of Uralsk Week's budget comes from donor funding. The rest comes from advertising. With their creative content, the team is adept at attracting local advertisers, big and small.

Instagram Advertising

Seventy percent of Uralsk Week's ad revenue comes from its [Instagram page](#). The audience is highly engaged, and followers often write comments and questions on the platform. With visible reach, advertisers can easily see the impact of their marketing. Anyone can post an ad, whether it is an individual selling a used computer or a company marketing a service. Private citizens and businesses pay different rates for packages of five posts. Ads appear as photos with text, in carousels, and as short and long-form videos.

Uralsk Week's emphasis on Instagram advertising is also motivated by the fact that it is easy for the team to create and upload ads on the platform using its native formats, saving them time. Since January 2020, the price of a post on Uralsk Week's Instagram page has doubled.



Local businesses prefer to advertise on Uralsk Week's Instagram page where impact is visible. [Source: Uralsk Week](#)

Fishing for Advertisers

Uralsk Week has also published a [map](#) of public and private fishing spots using Yandex.maps, a platform similar to Google Maps. The map offers four levels of advertising to local businesses. Resorts can purchase long-reads about their lake and services. Small businesses targeting anglers can pay for brief text ads or post a phone number. Lastly, outfits that cannot afford to pay now but have the potential to do so in the future are offered space at no cost. The project turned a profit for four years in a row.

Where is the best place to fish in WKO (INTERACTIVE MAP)

Uralsk Week invites local businesses targeting anglers to advertise in their custom map of local fishing spots. [Source: Uralsk Week](#)

Native Ads for the Holidays

In 2019, with grant support from Internews, Uralsk Week developed an online magazine devoted to local New Year celebrations. Designed on the Tilda.cc web-builder platform, the 'Everything about the New Year' catalog promoted local business through native advertising, with articles and videos advising readers on the best places to purchase decorations, gifts, and dine-out during the holiday. Links to the catalog were cross-promoted on the website and social media. In one month, Uralsk Week earned 1,300,00 Tenge (\$3,900). The project's success motivated the team to plan an International Women's Day catalog.

«Электро-Запад» уже много лет предлагает своим покупателям огромный выбор световой и кабельной продукции ведущих отечественных и зарубежных производителей. У нас есть все! От обычных ламп накаливания до промышленного оборудования. К новому году мы подготовили широкий ассортимент праздничной светопроductии и гибкую систему скидок, как для постоянных клиентов, так и для тех, кто впервые посетил наш магазин!

Uralsk Week's 'Everything about the New Year' catalog featured local businesses catering to New Years celebrations. [Source: Uralsk Week.](#)

Pandemic Directory

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly curtailed ad sales for Uralsk Week. For a time, the news outlet ceased printing the newspaper and could not pay employee salaries. While Uralsk Week was fortunate to fall back on donor funding and a crowdfunding campaign, the team still managed to earn commercial income while supporting local businesses. Much like their holiday promotion, Uralsk Week produced a catalog featuring restaurants and cafes equipped to deliver to private homes. This effort earned a modest \$1,000, but it made a difference during a year of scarcity.

The Future

While Uporov acknowledges the role donor funding plays in supporting the innovation and survival of independent news, he emphasizes the importance of revenue diversification for sustainability. Despite the success Uralsk Week is currently seeing with advertising on Instagram, Uporov is skeptical about investing too heavily in one channel. In coming years, he wants to see the organization develop a consistent strategy and expand advertising across platforms, including building on its past success with native advertising.

“We are motivated to exist, to write, to give the people access to alternative information. It is this motivation that drives us to find new and different sources of revenue.”

— Raul Uporov,
Deputy Chief Editor at Uralsk Week

Uralskaya Nedelya’s “Everything about the New Year” project was supported by Internews, Strengthening Independent Media in Central Asia project.



A journalist of Uralskaya is covering a protest in Uralsk city.
Source: [Uralsk Week](#).

Case Study

Rubryka, Ukraine

Ukrainian News Start-up Challenges the Status Quo with Savvy Technology and Marketing

Three years ago a group of young journalists in Ukraine had a vision for a new kind of news outlet; one that not only confronts their country's leading social and cultural dilemmas but details possible solutions. What began with moonlighting to get the organization off the ground has turned into [Rubryka](#), a progressive online news portal in Ukrainian, Russian, and English that receives over three million visits per month.



“From the very start, we didn’t have a lot of finance. We did it all ourselves. Many of our journalists worked without fees voluntarily. As we grew that changed, but at the beginning, we worked with the idealism of how progressive it would be and how modern.”

— Anastasia Rudenko,
Rubryka Founder, and Editor and Chief,

They saw demand from a growing, socially active population for news that explains the “how and why” behind a problem and the bright ideas emerging to tackle them. Their hunch was right. Now branded as ‘Ukrainian Solutions Media,’ Rubryka’s content is competing with much larger oligarch-run media outlets. It has seen incredible growth, including a 48% increase in average daily audience in 2019 alone. Beyond content, this success is heavily impacted by the team’s technological investments and a united approach between editorial and marketing to attract advertisers.

Website and Search Optimization

A 2019 audit of Rubryka’s WordPress site, supported by Internews Ukraine, helped the team realize that to compete in their market, investing in technology was as important as their focus on producing quality news. It was clear that improvements to the platform’s user experience and accessibility were necessary for the outlet to grow. The team identified and fixed coding errors on the website, learned and introduced new WordPress plug-ins, registered with Google News, and optimized the site for mobile viewing. Most importantly, they invested in search engine optimization (SEO).

While the team had previously understood the basics of SEO, seeing its improved results were eye-opening. Founder and Editor and Chief, [Anastasia Rudenko](#), explained, “Why do independent media lose out to oligarch-controlled media? Because media that are big and controlled by the oligarchy have the resources and money to optimize every piece of news, to gain more traffic. Even when we can make news faster, it doesn’t matter. They will gain the visits because they have the resources to optimize.”

Improving the consistency of article translations was key to Rubryka’s SEO. “We know that most Ukrainians Google information in Russian so for indexation purposes it’s better to have the content in Russian. We’ve also started doing it in English,” explained Senior Editor Maryna Smahina. Previously the journalists would translate articles themselves as they had time. The team began outsourcing this work to professional translators to have more complete versions of their content in each language. Audience growth made up for the extra cost of outsourcing. As Smahina explains, “The traffic grew and the traffic is what can be monetized. And besides, the [multi-language content] is part of our selling proposition to advertisers.”

“Any news media that has the opportunity, should use their resources and put them into SEO development.”

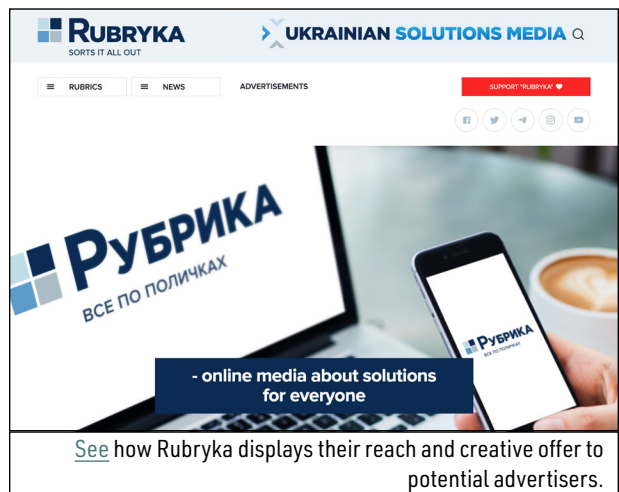
— Anastasia Rudenko, Rubryka Founder, and Editor and Chief,

Rudenko admits that SEO did not bring immediate change: “So it wasn’t fast, it took about one year to see the results — the growth in visits to our website and readership. But the traffic also diversified. Before we were dependent on social media clicks. Now, we get more leads from search traffic.”

Aligning Content and Marketing

While 40% of Rubryka’s budget is grant-supported with periodic impact investment to bridge finance gaps, the team is highly focused on developing commercial revenues. Already, 60% of Rubryka’s revenue comes from advertising. Seventy percent of the ad portfolio is made up of native advertising and custom package campaigns, which may include a mix of video, text explainer, and interview content. Another 20% comes from running clients’ creative content, and the final 10% is from Google ads. To grow the ad portfolio, Rubryka is aligned across its marketing, editorial, and creative efforts.

Rubryka’s biggest challenge has been finding advertisers. To date, the team recruits clients through personal connections. They nurture these relationships and have achieved long-term agreements with companies by leveraging the team’s creative muscles. “We are like a PR agency,” explains Rudenko. “We run whole campaigns for our clients. The work is creative. We hear them out, what they need, what requests they have, and then we offer what we can do, and advise on what would be best for their particular case and the best way to reach the target audience.”



To attract clients, Rubryka is also strategic with its content. The team has developed special article series to gain a new readership considered valuable



Project
8 feb, 17:58

"Borysov's Food in KOLO" launched in Kyiv: "one euro" restaurant dishes appear in stores near your building



Project
5 may, 16:52

Business during a storm. How the near-house stores "KOLO" expand even during the crisis

Rubryka produced a series of native ad articles for KOLO supermarkets. The team worked consistently with the new retailer, conducting interviews with company executives to design company promotions.

to advertisers. “There is this niche, this demand, for media for progressive women,” says Rudenko. “In Ukraine, we only have one or two media outlets that are targeted at progressive women. There is always an advertiser that should be targeting this big audience, which is not covered.”

In 2019, with support from Internews, Rubryka launched its “Caring” series, profiling women who are social change makers volunteering or working in the public sphere. The team continues to develop this audience with their current series “She’s Got It,” and a new project focused on women in business. As part of the new content strategy, Rubryka was able to launch and build a following on the messaging app, Telegram, as well as an e-newsletter.

“It’s hard to recommend something that works for every media outlet but, probably, in our digital age, it’s best to try to make yourself some sort of creative lab, to develop your unique competitive advantages, so that in future you could turn them into your selling points.”

— Anastasia Rudenko,
Rubryka Founder, and Editor and Chief

Impact

As a result of the new content strategy, website optimizations, and more strategic use of SEO, Rubryka saw a 48% increase in its average daily audience between April and December 2019. Consequently, 2019 was Rubryka’s highest-earning year to date, with the outlet earning 113,200 UAH (US\$4,626) over this period and achieving a 433% increase in online ad sales.

Internews Ukraine’s “Caring” project supported Rubryka between April of 2019 to November of 2019 as part of the Audience Understanding and Digital Support (AUDS) program, supported by Sweden.



Anastasia Rudenko,
Founder and Editor-in-Chief, Rubryka



Maryna Smahina
Senior Editor, Rubryka

Glossary

Chapter 1: Strategic Business Planning

B2B, or Business-to-Business Marketing: Marketing and selling products from one business to another. In media, this can include selling advertising, sponsorships, creating events, providing marketing services, or offering distribution services. It can also involve selling training, technology services, or website design and support.

B2C, or Business-to-Consumer Marketing: The process of a business selling products directly to consumers. For media, examples can include selling memberships and subscriptions, personal advertising to individuals, crowdfunding opportunities, merchandising, event tickets, and access to unique content.

Business-to-Government (B2G): Selling services such as advertising and training to the government.

Consumer-to-Business (C2B): Selling services such as freelance reporting.

Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C): Creating marketplaces for the exchange of goods and services such as automotive, real estate, or job sites.

Market Share: A metric that shows how large a specific market is and how it is divided among different businesses or offerings. For media, a common metric is audience share. Nielsen and others define that by measuring the total number of people or households tuned into a specific station relative to all people viewing at that time. If 100 households are watching television at the same time, and 30 are watching a specific station, it has a 30% share. However, market share for local news media is often used to estimate what percent of all local ad revenues a media organization is capturing. If there is a \$10 million advertising market, and a media house generates \$1 million in ad revenue, it has a 10% market share. This is an important variable to track. If that same media market is growing 15% a year, but the news organization only increases its ad revenue 3%, it is losing ground relative to the market. It would achieve only 9% market share.

Operating Environment Assessment: A review of the external environment within which media organizations operate. A review of the various laws, environmental factors, trends, demographics, and market conditions that support, empower, constrain, or define its performance. Often conducted using a PESTEL analysis.

Nonprofit vs. Not-for-Profit: Although similar, these two terms are not identical. A nonprofit organization works to achieve its social purpose, its mission. A not-for-profit organization typically works to achieve the goals of a group or people or members. For example, a not-for-profit organization might be a members-only sporting club, or a social group.

Organizational Assessment: A review of the internal operating environment, staffing, performance, and capabilities of a specific media organization.

Strategic Plan: The tool that comes out of that process. It is a map to get to the organization's desired results. It typically includes specific goals, objectives, baselines of performance, and plans for achieving the goals and financial resources.

Strategic Planning: A process that relies on the above assessments and stakeholder inputs that helps the organization create a direction for its future and identify ways to achieve it. As noted in the two examples above, it is also created within the context of an organization's broader vision, mission, and values.

SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. This is a method used by many organizations to prioritize their activities. Many marketers recommend assessing a market's opportunities or threats first before considering an organization's strengths and weaknesses. A perceived strength could be irrelevant in the context of market opportunities.

Value Proposition: Describes in one short, clear sentence what your organization is offering, who you are offering it to, what benefit they will receive, and how it is different from others.

Chapter 2: Audience Insights, Analytics & Targeting

A/B Testing: A user experiment in which two versions of the same headline, page, or other form of content are compared to determine which performs better.

Analytics: Data that is extracted and categorized for analysis, and often include dashboards and reports.

Key Performance Metrics (KPIs): Performance measurements that are used to track progress towards an organization's goals.

Metadata: Provides a description of data.

Metrics: Put different pieces of data together to create a measurement of performance. They often show something in relation to something else.

Qualitative Data: Descriptive data — it is derived from focus groups, interviews, and other sources.

Quantitative Data: Data that can be counted, measured, and compared using numbers. It can be used to generate charts, graphs, time-series, and comparisons to other data sets.

Statistics: A type of mathematics that collects, classifies, analyzes, and interprets numerical facts. It can draw inferences using tools such as probability and projection.

YOY: Year-over-year variance — comparing one set of data to the same data set from the same time a year previously

X = Y: The values of X and Y are the same

X ≤ Y: The value X is less than or equal to the amount Y

X ≥ Y: The value X is greater than or equal to the amount Y

Δ%: Percent variance. This shows how much relative growth or decline there has been in two numbers. For example, if the average selling price of something last year was \$112, and this year it is \$131, the Δ% is 17%. It is calculated by subtracting the benchmark number (112) from the new number (131), and then dividing that result by the original benchmark number. So $(131-112)/112 = 17\%$. Please note that this is a statistic that

shows the relative variance between two numbers. It is different from comparing two percentages. For example, if a metric grew from 50% to 60%, a ten-point increase, it would actually be a 20% variance.

Chapter 3: Media Brand Marketing

Advertiser Marketing: Encompasses the activities and efforts made to attract commercial clients to your media outlet.

Brand Attributes: The elements that define a brand — its qualities and personality — in the mind of the customer. They convey the brand's spirit and tone, and guide external communications and internal culture.

Brand Awareness: Customers' ability to recognize a brand and its value proposition, even in a crowded field, and sometimes with only minimal brand reference. Brand awareness campaigns are often run when launching new brands.

Brand Differentiation: The perceived distinctiveness of the brand.

Brand Equity: The importance of a brand from the customer's perspective. It is the brand assets or liabilities linked to a brand that either contribute to — or diminish — the value of the brand. It is comprised of brand visibility, customer loyalty, and brand associations. For more on this topic, [click here](#).

Brand Identity: How users experience the brand via its language, colors, fonts, imagery, sound/video elements, and messaging. These include the brand name and mark, logo, tagline, and specific use of language.

Brand Image: A user's perception of the brand based on all its dimensions of product, price, service, and expectations. A non-user's perception based on reputation, lack of information, or attitude.

Brand Mark: A symbol, mark, name, slogan, or visual/audio piece that individually, or in combination, identifies the maker or seller of a product, service, or offering.

Brand Marketing: The deliberate process of developing and marketing a company or product distinctively to its target consumers.

Brand Personality: The human personality traits attributed to the brand: serious, austere, friendly, warm, environmentally aware, congenial, intelligent. These differentiate the brand and are reflected in marketing materials, packaging, and in-person moments.

Brand Preference: Measures customer choice in a category of goods or services. Brand preference, in combination with brand awareness, creates opportunities for brands to charge premium prices.

Brand Standards or Guidelines: A document that shares the brand's core values — its mission, vision, principles, and legacy — and highlights its personality and attributes.

Brand Value: The financial worth of the brand.

Brand Values: The brand's core values and guiding principles. They signal its purpose and reason for being; they guide its decisions and activities.

Competitive Differentiation: A strategic positioning tactic a firm undertakes to set its products, services, and brands apart from its competitors.

Engagement: The number of interactions made with social media content (this can include shares, likes, or comments on a post or story)

Impressions: The number of times digital content or an advertisement is shown to users across the platform.

Reach: The number of unique individuals who are shown social media content.

Chapter 4: Business-to-Business Marketing

Ad Impression: A view of an advertisement.

Ad Server: An online platform used to manage advertising delivery settings, including ad positions, start date, end date, geographical locations, and device types.

Ad unit: An area of a page in which an ad tag is placed, reserving that space for ads.

Brand Guidelines: A style guide to direct and govern the composition, design, and general look and feel of its branding. It also dictates how brand symbols and logos may be applied in various scenarios and different mediums.

Brand Safety: The practice of organisations protecting the environments their brands are promoted within.

Brand Suitability: A subjective measure by brands regarding the types of ad environments they consider acceptable for their ads.

Branded Content: A paid content format that encourages audiences to engage with it based on its entertainment, informational, or educational value. Its foremost objective is to engage and provide value to the reader or viewer to establish a stronger brand connection. The content can be written and produced through brand-publisher partnerships, in-house by the brand, or by creative agencies.

Click-through Rate (CTR): Number of clicks on an advertisement divided by overall number of views (impressions).

Content Marketing: A form of marketing focused on creating, publishing, and distributing various content types for a targeted audience online. It may be through unpaid/owned channels and platforms and/or paid channels. Content marketing as a discipline requires specific online marketing and advertising expertise and skills to optimize efforts' performance.

Continuous Improvement: Sometimes called Kai-zen, the idea that small and ongoing positive changes can add up to significantly improved business results over time.

CPM: Stands for Cost Per Mille, or the cost per thousand ad impressions purchased. Although cost is an advertiser metric, CPM is used interchangeably by both publishers and advertisers. See also RPM.

Creative Brief: The document used by creative professionals to outline a client's business and campaign goals and other specifics about the brand. In writing it up, a media outlet's creative lead and the client agree on what messaging, and concepts will be explored during the creative process and what should be included in the final deliverables.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM): The practice of managing a prospect or client relationship before, during, and after the sale or project term. The goal of which is to drive revenue generation for the media outlet.

Display advertising: Advertising placed on digital platforms in the form of text, images, and video. Display advertising containing images is sometimes referred to as banner advertising.

DSP: A platform used by advertisers and media buyers to access programmatic advertising marketplaces.

ECPM: Stands for Equivalent Cost Per Mille, or the cost per thousand ad impressions when the advertising is sold on a per-click or other basis, instead of being based on volume.

Interstitial: An intrusive advertising format that acts as a roadblock to accessing content. See examples on the Coalition for Better Ads website.

Inventory: The advertising space a publisher can sell. It is the product of all ad units and all page loads.

Lazy loading: A technique for only loading elements of a web page, such as images and ads, when a user scrolls down a page so that the image or ad is just about to come into view. This prevents content being loaded into a page until it is necessary.

Microsite: A brand-specific website or single page used to promote a product, event, or other initiatives. It is typically hosted on a brand-owned platform or domain. Today, microsites are also commonly created through collaborations with publishers and live on a publisher's platform for efforts like new product launches that the publisher may be helping to market.

Native Advertising: A form of paid media where the ad experience matches the natural form and function of the platform's user experience.

Page RPM: Revenue per 1,000 page loads.

Paid Content Creative: The concept and design of content that your organization can produce for advertisers.

Pop-up: An intrusive advertising format that acts as a roadblock to accessing content. See examples on the Coalition for Better Ads website.

Programmatic Advertising: The automated placement of advertising into digital platforms using software, targeting, and settings instead of manual placements.

Programmatic Inventory: The amount of ad space a publisher makes available programmatically on the open ad market. The inventory may be allocated to various types of programmatic media — including native ad channels.

Rich Media: Content that combines text, graphics, sound, and sometimes video. It is a term that can describe ads or other media content, including a piece of journalism or branded content that utilizes several multimedia elements.

In digital advertising, rich media is a digital advertising term for an ad that includes advanced features like video, audio, or other elements that encourage viewers to interact and engage with the content.

RPM: Stands for Revenue Per Mille, or the revenue per thousand ad impressions delivered. It is usually used by publishers at the ad unit level.

Sales Funnel: The buying process that a seller leads prospective customers through to purchase a product or service. This process runs parallel with a media outlet's general overarching sales process. Your media outlets' sales funnel stages may be labeled and defined as you see fit. Typical stages may include awareness, interest, decision, purchase, and retention. Ideally, once a client makes a purchase and their campaign is consummated, they enter the retention stage. Here, a sales team may engage in activities and communications that strengthen the relationship, like reporting good results or offering free bonus benefits. Then, that client reenters the top of the funnel when your sales team makes them aware of new opportunities to advertise with you.

Share of voice: The percentage of a media platform's audience reached by a particular ad or campaign. It can be calculated as platform, page, or ad unit level. For example, if an advertiser wants 50% share of voice in the top ad position on a homepage that generates 500,000 page views per month, it would need to buy 250,000 ad impressions.

Solution Selling: A sales approach in which sales reps help prospective clients and clients understand their needs and provide services and products to solve their problems or pain points. The practice is best applied to B2B sales scenarios where the selling company's offering is customizable, like media services.

Sponsored Content: A piece of brand journalism that lives on a publisher's website. It is commonly written or produced by the publisher's staff, so the content matches the surrounding journalistic context's tone and voice. It is common for the terms branded content and sponsored content to be used interchangeably to denote paid content.

Sponsorship: The practice of matching an advertiser with a particular piece or series of content. The matching is on contextual nature, the audience served, and most importantly, the values the content delivers that the advertiser wants to support publicly.

SSP: A platform used by publishers to access programmatic advertising marketplaces.

Tech Tax: Refers to the many intermediaries in the programmatic advertising ecosystem that may or may not add value but retain some of the gross ad spend.

Unique Users: The number of distinct individuals requesting pages from a digital platform during a period of time. It is often expressed as a monthly metric to indicate the reach of a digital platform within its addressable market.

Value Chain: A set of activities that a firm operating in a specific industry performs in order to deliver a valuable product for the market.

Chapter 5: Business-to-Consumer Marketing

Acquisition: The process of gaining a user, reader, or customer. Google Analytics offers data on the source and medium of users, along with other acquisition dimensions. It offers reports on users that come to a site from organic, social, or paid search.

Active Users: The number of people currently viewing content on a website.

ARPS: Average Revenue per Subscriber

ARPU: Average Revenue per User

Audiences: A group of readers who share common characteristics. As a metric, you can use Google Analytics to create custom audience groups to assess how marketing campaigns perform.

Average Page Speed: A metric of how quickly a website page loads. How fast a page loads is an essential element of overall engagement and user experience. Slow load times are detrimental to the process of converting users into subscribers.

Average Pages per Visit: The average number of pages a user visits during a single visit. It is a key measure of user engagement. Users who visit multiple pages during a visit are more committed to the content and the brand.

Average Time Spent/ Average Session Duration: The average amount of time users spend on a website during one visit.

Average Visits per User: Of all users on a website, the average number of visits per month.

Brand Preference: The brand that users prefer in a specific situation, such as when searching for local or breaking news.

Churn Rate: The number of non-renewing customers as a percentage of total subscribers.

Contribution Model: A revenue model in which publishers encourage readers or listeners to financially support their organization.

Conversion Rate: The percentage of potential customers converting from unpaid to paid.

Conversion: When a user completes a goal or makes a purchase. Converting an unpaid reader to a paying subscriber.

Crowdfunding: A method of requesting contributions from a large group of people. Typically used to raise one-time funds to support a specific initiative or goal

CRM/Customer Relationship Management: Refers to both a set of processes and the tool used to manage them. CRM is the processes, techniques, and strategies that acquire, retain, and upsell customers. A CRM Management tool is software that manages those functions, automates key parts of the sales effort, generates productivity reports, and provides management with key performance metrics.

Donation: A charitable gift.

Engagement Metrics: Used in combination to learn how deeply users are using a website and its content. For Facebook, engagement metrics include the number of comments, shares, likes, and clicks. For a news website, engagement metrics can include the bounce rate, time spent on site, page/scroll depth, and pages per session.

Freemium Model: When a business cultivates a relationship with a customer by offering free services, but then charges to access upgrades or premium offerings. It has been commonly used in the online gaming environment and is used by news media to widen their base of potential paying customers by offering a certain type of content at no charge.

Frequency: How often a reader accesses content.

Funnel (Subscription Funnel or Subscription Conversion Funnel): A model of the journey a prospective customer goes through en route to becoming a paying customer and, once having paid, how that customer is remarketed to and retained.

Lifetime Value: LTV, the financial value of a customer over time.

Membership Model: Model in which an organization offers members a set of benefits for their involvement.

Membership Program: The structure of the membership effort. It includes member benefits, payment mechanisms and levels, the opportunities for member engagement, and avenues for membership participation.

Membership Strategy: The overall approach your organization takes to membership and where/how it fits within your overall operation. It covers organizational approaches and alignment with content. More importantly, it is the program's vision, comprised of its mission, values, principles, and aspirations.

Meter Stop Rate: A metric of the percentage of unique users who hit the website's subscription paywall (unique users who hit the paywall divided by monthly active users per month).

Meter: A paywall that allows users to access a specific amount or type of content or before requiring a paid subscription. Some metering schemes only allow access to non-premium content in front of the paywall; others define a set number of articles that can be accessed before the paywall activates.

Monthly Active Users: The number of users during a defined period.

Pagers per Session: An engagement metric that shows the average number of pageviews in a session.

Paywall: A method of limiting access to content to paid subscribers. It can take many forms: a hard paywall that stops all non-subscribers. A freemium or metered model. Or a hybrid model that allows content sharing and other methods that make the paywall more porous.

Recency: How recently a reader accessed content.

Registration Wall: A page on your website that asks users to register their email addresses and perhaps captures a minimum amount of other information about them. This allows the media organization to market to them with subscription offers and content promotion.

Retention/Retention Rate: Among subscribers, the percentage that renew. It can be evaluated by campaign, audience segment, or offering.

Returning Visitors: A visitor that returns to your website within a specific period.

Revenue per User: An average amount of revenue generated by each user measured by the total revenue divided by the number of users.

Segmentation: Audiences are segmented in many ways to distinguish how to market to one group in a different way than when marketing to other groups. Segmentation can be based on demographics (gender, age, income), psychographic or lifestyle behaviors, purchase behavior, or loyalty metrics.

Sponsorship Program: Many programs hold events for their members. They are often funded not only by member donations, but also by business sponsorship or underwriting.

Subscribers: Users who pay for access to content for a defined period.

Subscription Model: A method of repeatedly selling products or services to customers over a fixed period and for a set amount of money.

Technology (Tech) Stack: The technology solutions that implement each step of the subscription funnel.

Unique Visitors, Known: Known visitors are those who already have a relationship with the brand, such as registered users or email and newsletter subscribers. They are more likely to convert.

Unique Visitors, Total: Total visitors to a website during a set period of time.

User Experience (UX): The complete experience that a person has when using a website. UX includes page speed, the ease of access to content, and other less concrete aspects such as imagery, beauty, and the use of language. It also represents the integration across the site of common design elements, clear branding, usability, and strong functionality.

User: An individual browsing a website as tracked by a unique browser cookie. When someone visits a website using a mobile phone, tablet, desktop, or other device, those are each treated as separate users. There is a user ID feature within Google Analytics that allows you to track individuals rather than devices.

Chapter 6: Event Marketing

Attrition Rate: The difference between the number of people registering to attend an event versus the number who actually attend. For example, if 1000 people register for an event, but only 600 attend, the attrition rate would be 40%.

Event Management: The process of planning and implementing an event. Key areas include budgeting, scheduling, venue selection, security, food services, logistics, marketing, and arranging for speakers or entertainers. The event manager is responsible for all aspects of the event, including delivering good value to both participants and sponsors.

Event Marketing: An approach to marketing a brand that is based on creating memorable, unique experiences. It creates opportunities for a brand's representative to interact directly with customers, potential customers, or other valuable groups. Events are used to create emotional connections to a brand or organization and can form long lasting impressions.

Event Venue: The location of the event. Venue selection is an important aspect of creating a strong event. A premium fundraiser benefits from being held in a unique environment, while an outdoor marathon route needs to be selected with security and crowd-control considerations.

Honorarium: A payment to a speaker or other person for what is essentially a voluntary contribution to an event. It is meant to cover incidental costs, such as transportation, but is not considered payment.

Hybrid Event: An event that combines a live, in-person event with a virtual online component. The virtual component can expand the reach of the original event geographically, reaching people who could otherwise not attend.

Keynote Speech: The opening address to an entire event or to a particular session. The speaker is usually a well-known person, authority on a specific subject, inspirational speaker, or industry leader.

Net Promoter Score (NPS): A loyalty metric that gauges how likely an attendee would recommend an event to someone else.

Post Event Report: A report produced by the event manager, with inputs from all stakeholders, on how the event functioned. Its purpose is to evaluate the separate components of the event and provide guidance on improving the next one.

Registration: Event registration is a cornerstone of any organized event. It is when a person makes a financial and/or time commitment to attend your event. It is the pre-event process that the event manager uses to estimate actual attendance, generate lists of known users, and communicate with them.

Early-Bird Registration: Registrations for large events often have a time-limited "early-bird" payment period, when the earliest registrants receive a meaningful discount off the event price for making an early commitment to attending. Those early registrations can often be partially or wholly refunded for a period of time. The closer to the event date, the less likely they are to be refunded. These early, paid registrants are valuable to organizers because they signal the attractiveness of the event and allow the event manager to make reasonable judgments about contracting for services. They provide up-front revenue that can help offset early expenses.

Sponsorship: An event sponsor supports an event in exchange for brand visibility, data, personal involvement or speaking roles, special benefits, and/or hospitality opportunities. Sponsors sign contracts for the level of benefit they will receive and either pay directly or in trade for their sponsorship. While cash sponsorship usually provides essential funds, trade sponsorship also has value and can help with cash flow. For example, if an event is held at a restaurant, it could be promoted as a sponsor in exchange for the use of the venue and for covering some or all of the food and beverage costs.

Trade Show: An event in an industry where goods and services are exhibited and demonstrated. A trade show is good for generating leads and forming initial relationships. Common examples include technology fairs, travel shows, and college expos.

Beyond Journalism: Additional Resources for News Organizations

Many organizations provide support to the media development community. In addition to CIMA's overview of the environment, below, we've broken out some resources that are targeted to support news media and their sustainability strategies.

Overview

[CIMA](#), the Center for International Media Assistance, has a comprehensive list on its website of:

- [Donor organizations](#) that fund media and media development efforts around the world
- [Implementing organizations](#) that work with media partners in the field and provide capacity building, consulting, and tactical support
- [Advocacy organizations](#) that support freedom of speech, internet governance, journalism, and training
- Research organizations that research media-related topics and offer fellowships

Within those, there are specific tools and resources that support media organizations in their efforts to professionalize and develop revenue.

[Media Impact Funders](#) has captured and mapped activities related to media content and platforms; telecommunications infrastructure; media access and policy; and journalism news and information that foundations have supported worldwide. It is designed for funders, nonprofits, and journalists to scan the funding landscape. It has a searchable map that includes nearly 27,000 funders, 52,000 recipients, and \$21.6 billion worth of grants.

Google Resources

[Google Analytics Academy](#): Google has created Google Analytics, a tool for publishers that allows them to look deeply into their website and content performance. Those rich data provide insights into who audiences are, what content they engage with, where they are located, and other useful information. Google has developed its Analytics Academy, an online learning resource, to guide users through basic and more advanced analyses. Once completed, users are certified. This is a free resource.

[Google Ad Manager](#) is an ad management platform for large publishers who have significant direct sales from buyers.

[Google Ad Exchange \(AdX\)](#) is an online advertising marketplace used by publishers to monetize their content. Using AdX, publishers can sell their advertising inventory to agencies and directly to advertisers using real-time bidding technology. It creates an open marketplace where ads can be allocated efficiently, and publishers can control who can advertise on their sites. It is an SSP, a supply-side platform, and typically yields higher CPMs than other Google ad networks. There are monthly page-view thresholds that must be met to qualify for participation.

[Google AdSense](#) is an ad network that offers publishers access to demand from advertisers. It is suited to smaller publishers with a limited team allocated to managing digital advertising.

[Google AdMob](#) is a mobile ad network and monetization platform. It enables mobile developers to monetize their content from ads, gain insights, and serve ads globally. It offers automated tools and ad formats.

(Here is a comparison of Ad Manager, AdSense and AdMob, and here is a comparison of AdX and AdSense)

Google News Initiative: Google is working with the news industry “to help journalism thrive in the digital age.” Its website outlines its available resources, which include:

- **Products** — that help news organizations work better and grow their digital businesses
 - **AMP** — Tools to create strong user experiences and the fast, accurate delivery of ads to websites
- **Partnerships** — which focus on collaborations that solve business and industry-wide challenges
 - Examples include Local Media Consortium, Coalition for Better Ads, The Trust Project, Journalism 360, IAB, WAN-IFRA and others
- **Programs** — that help drive innovation in the news media environment, reaching journalists, news organizations, and entrepreneurs; examples include:
 - [The Google News Initiative Innovation Challenges](#)
 - [The Digital News Innovation Fund](#)
 - [The Local News Experiments Project](#)
 - [A program designed to help small newsrooms adopt product thinking](#)

Google has also committed to helping publishers diversify their revenue sources beyond advertising. It has created the [Reader Revenue Playbook](#), a guide with accompanying exercises, to help news organizations create a digital reader revenue model. It covers contributions, membership, and subscription models.

[Subscribe with Google](#) is then a suite of free products to help grow those reader revenues.

Facebook Resources

[Meta Journalism Project](#) works with publishers to strengthen the connection between journalists and their communities, and to address the business challenges of the news industry.

It has three pillars:

- **Build Community Through News** — by investing and working with organizations that fund quality journalism and are focused on building sustainable futures for community news
- **Training Newsrooms Globally** — by working in person and providing online courses to train journalists with a focus on using social tools to enhance storytelling and reporting
- **Creating Partnerships** — with nonprofits and publishers on key areas of deep concern to news media, including combating misinformation, funding new initiatives, sharing best practices, promoting news literacy, and improving journalism on Facebook’s platforms (including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp)

[Meta Accelerator Program](#) is a three-month program designed to address specific business challenges facing the news industry and brings together news organizations to innovate, collaborate, and learn. Representative topics include expanding digital video storytelling and building a digital subscription business. The focus of the Accelerators is to build sustainability into a publisher’s business and storytelling. The lessons learned are then collected and shared.

In its first three years, the Accelerator program has focused on ways to increase reader revenue on publishers’ owned platforms. The program helped publishers create more than \$60 million in customer lifetime value, gain more than 200,000 paying supporters, and 2.5 million new registered users. Sample Accelerator programs include:

[Meta Sustainability Accelerator](#): its participants were selected by Facebook staffers, [International Center for Journalists \(ICFJ\)](#), and Accelerator coaches. It is a program to provide mentoring and support to news organizations led by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color in the US. ICFJ is also administering a \$500,000 alumni grant fund to support digital transformation initiatives.

[Meta Reader Revenue Series](#) came out of Accelerator learnings and includes a comprehensive 5-part video series on getting started with a subscription model. Focused on a holistic approach that places the newsroom at the center of a cross-functional strategy, it builds out the specific approaches and tools needed to acquire and retain paying customers.

[How to Make it Easier for Readers to Subscribe](#) is a case study of how one news organization refined its registration page to increase sign-ups and subscriptions.

[Meta](#) also provides a hub of tools for publishers seeking to monetize their content on its platforms.

Media Development Investment Fund Resources

[Media Development Investment Fund Membership Puzzle Project](#) (MPP) collects and shares information about ways that membership programs can help sustain independent news media. It is founded on the idea that readers play an essential role in supporting public service journalism through both financial contributions and volunteer services. Founded in 2017 with funding from Luminate, it is a key program within MDIF.

MPP, in partnership with [The Lenfest Institute](#) and Google News Initiative, launched a comprehensive [Membership Guide](#) that details how to develop, implement, and measure a membership strategy. This practical guide is an essential tool in understanding how to build the culture, tools, and techniques of a successful membership model.

Other Resources

[INMA](#) — International News Media Association is a member organization that is a leading provider of global best practices for news media companies that seek to grow revenue, audience, and brand. It charges an annual membership fee to individuals or companies; members have access to 20+ newsletters, webinars, best practices, conferences, and award competitions. INMA conducted a free virtual Summit

for African publishers during 2020 and plans others to occur in diverse regions worldwide. Registered users can access INMA's free content. To register, go to [INMA's website](#) and select the Free Registered User account.

[Journalism Trust Initiative](#) (JTI) is a collaborative standard setting process that, ultimately, is designed to build trust in journalism and make it clearly distinguishable from other forms of digital content by both humans and algorithms. JTI provides indicators for media outlets to self-assess and comply with that in turn signal benchmarks of quality and independence. JTI is led by Reporters Without Borders in partnership with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and Agence France Presse (AFP).

[News Revenue Hub](#) is a nonprofit B2B that helps news organizations build financial sustainability through crowdfunding and membership initiatives. It provides strategy, technology, and training to its partners. It is funded by a range of foundations, individual contributions, and partner fees.

[The Trust Project](#) is an organization that seeks to help the public make informed news choices by amplifying journalism's commitment to transparency, accuracy, inclusion, and fairness. It is an international consortium of news organizations promoting journalism standards and working with technology platforms. It has developed globally recognized [trust indicators](#). Its [Trust Mark](#) is a logo showing that a news page was produced by a participant in the Trust Project consortium.

Media Sustainability Essentials
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