

Building and engaging specific audiences

Lessons from the third round of Table Stakes Europe





World Association of News Publishers

WAN-IFRA PRESIDENT

Fernando de Yarza López-Madrado

CEO

Vincent Peyrègne

COO

Thomas Jacob

ABOUT WAN-IFRA

WAN-IFRA is the World Association of News Publishers. Its mission is to protect the rights of journalists and publishers around the world to operate independent media. WAN-IFRA provides its members with expertise and services to innovate and prosper in a digital world and perform their crucial role in society. With formal representative status at the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, it derives its authority from its global network of leading news publishing companies and technology entrepreneurs, and its legitimacy from its 80 national association members representing 18,000 publications in 120 countries. www.wan-ifra.org

ABOUT TABLES STAKES EUROPE

Table Stakes Europe is a WAN-IFRA led programme in partnership with the Google News Initiative Digital Growth Programme, created to help establish and grow the online business of news publishers who have more recently started developing their digital platforms.

A transformation and coaching programme for regional and local news publishers, Table Stakes Europe uses a challenge-centric, performance-and-accountability change methodology to identify and then close shortfalls against seven core performance challenges, the "Table Stakes". The so-called 'table stakes' is an expression for the money needed to have a seat at the table in a poker game. The Programme builds upon the successful track record of an initiative designed and led by Douglas K. Smith. In the United States, "Table Stakes" is a project of the Knight-Lenfest Newsroom Initiative.

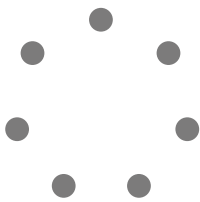


TABLE STAKES EUROPE



Google News Initiative

PROJECT LEADS

Valérie Arnould, Laurel Wennen

CONTENT & BEST PRACTICE LEAD

Teemu Henriksson

TSE ARCHITECT AND LEAD COACH

Douglas K. Smith

COACHING TEAM ROUND 3

Valérie Arnould, Alexandra Borchardt, Pepe Cerezo Gilarranz, Lyndsey Jones, Stéphane Mayoux

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE REPORT

Valérie Arnould, Alexandra Borchardt, Khalil A. Cassimally, Pepe Cerezo Gilarranz, Robin van Deutekom, Martin Fröhlich, Marina de Haan, Patric Hamsch, Teemu Henriksson, Stéphane Mayoux, Douglas K. Smith, Brian Veseling

Google News Initiative

EERO KORHONEN

Lead, Partnerships and Ecosystem Strategy, News Partnerships, EMEA

ANGELICA VELATI

Head, Partnerships and Ecosystem Strategy, News Partnerships, EMEA

ANA ROCHA DE PAIVA

Manager, News Ecosystem and Innovation Programs, EMEA

ABOUT GOOGLE NEWS INITIATIVE

The Google News Initiative represents Google's largest-ever effort to help journalism thrive in the digital age. Through its partnerships, programs and products, the Google News Initiative works with thousands of organisations worldwide to support quality independent journalism, financial sustainability, and development of new technologies that drive innovation. Google allocated \$300 million over three years to energise these collaborations, and to lay the foundation for new products and programs for a diverse set of news publishers, to benefit the entire ecosystem. This includes supporting thought leadership on topics like consumer revenue, advertising and data that are critical to the future of the news industry.

REPORT DESIGN

Gordon Steiger

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It's time to address your specific audiences

There's a pattern that emerges when you look at publishers that are succeeding in the digital news environment. These tend to be companies that are committed to identifying specific target audiences, learning their needs and interests, and producing journalism that meets their expectations.

In other words, providing general news to the general public is no longer enough.

The good news is, there are tried-and-tested methods for engaging potential audiences around topics they would like to see better covered in their news platforms. The challenge lies in identifying those audiences – some of whom are defined by geography, others by interests, and some by current life situation – and knowing how to serve them.

Curious to know more?

- Find further information about the Table Stakes Europe programme at www.tablestakes-europe.org. The reports from the previous TSE editions can be downloaded in the section "Resources".
- Browse case studies from all previous editions on the TSE Knowledge Base, available at wan-ifra.org/cases.
- For best practices and case studies from the news publishing industry, check out WAN-IFRA's blog: wan-ifra.org/news. Members can download WAN-IFRA's reports at wan-ifra.org/insights.

These are some of the key lessons from the third edition of the Table Stakes Europe (TSE) programme. Most of this report is based on the 12-month coaching initiative, during which 23 teams from around Europe worked to implement a new, audience-first mindset in their companies.

Read on to learn, for instance, how teams in Sweden, the UK and the Czech Republic created new news products and distribution channels that (successfully!) reach **young audiences**. Or how publishers in France and Germany built lively communities around **local sports teams**, both professional and amateur.

You'll also discover how companies in Germany and Scotland created new audio and video products that engage audiences interested in **law, order and criminal investigations** – and how they also funnel those audiences into paying readers. Also included are examples of teams from Germany and the UK targeting **families** through innovative verticals.

We also wanted to highlight a few **niche audiences** that some TSE teams focused on, such as cross-border commuters and a local Muslim community. You may not have the same potential audiences in your area, but we hope these examples encourage you to think creatively: Is there a target audience that *only you* can address? How do you get started with that?

Along the way the report also checks in with a couple of teams from earlier TSE editions. Their case studies show how these companies continue to implement the transformation process that started during their TSE participation.

As the case studies dive into the teams' challenges and outcomes, they occasionally refer to terms from the Table Stakes methodology: "mini-publishing teams", "stop doing", "performance driven", and so on. But knowing the TSE method is not necessary to draw learnings from this report. Instead, we believe that any publisher who is interested in targeting specific audiences and in creating

new revenue based on those audiences can learn from the examples included in the following pages.

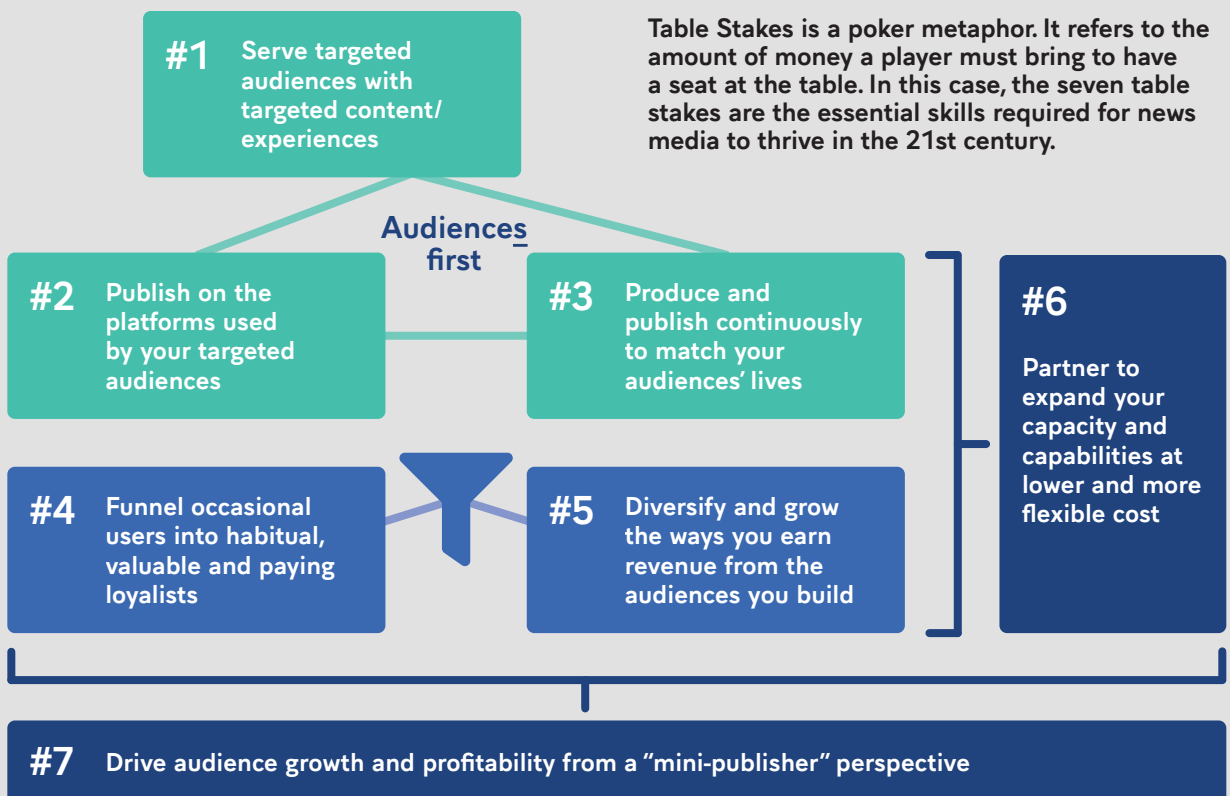
Whether your newsroom has already adopted an audience-first approach, or you are just looking for ideas on how to engage your readers more deeply, this report will provide inspiration, advice, and practical takeaways.

– TSE team

Participants of Table Stakes Europe round 3



The seven Table Stakes to be in the game



Introduction

Is your news enterprise winning the battle for the scarce time and attention of audienceS?



Douglas K. Smith

Launched in the United States in 2016, Table Stakes is his brainchild. Smith developed the initiative for the Knight Foundation after spending much of his career working with dozens of different industries across the private, non-profit and government sectors.

By Douglas K. Smith

Think for a moment about the blessing of giving birth, of the joy and happiness parents share together and with family and friends. You might remember how you felt when you discovered you were pregnant. Maybe it was among the most welcome moments of your life; maybe not. Either way, you had many questions and concerns.

These might have included: Do we go through with this? What do we need to do to make sure our baby is born healthy? How to find good doctors? What diet to pursue? When will you 'begin to show'? Where to get clothes? How can we afford this? Will either or both of us have to stop working for a while? What is an ultrasound? These are but a small list of examples, especially with the first pregnancy.

The questions do not stop with the arrival of your child. Will you suffer postpartum depression (and, how to deal with that)? Where to get the best, healthiest baby food – and needed furniture, diapers, and so on? Should you breastfeed? Where to find good pediatricians? Should you put your child in daycare and if so, when? And on and on and on.

Where can you find the best, most reliable information about all these questions? Especially where you actually live? Yes, there are any number of websites that provide insights. But, what about *local* doctors, *local* retailers, *local* day care, *local* new parent groups, *local* babysitting services, *local* counselors, *local* activities for children: *local, local, local*.

Imagine there was a local, trusted and reliable information service you could turn to regularly to help you through the joy and worry of birth and parenting? A site easy to access and full of cross-linked and timely information?

Fast forward a bit. Perhaps your baby girl grows up loving football. You support her passion by enrolling her in lessons and team activities from an early age. Regardless of her natural talents, she loves to play the game. She loves to team up with others. She becomes a fan of local teams at amateur and professional levels. She's an avid reader of anything and everything about football and you join in her enthusiasm by reading and viewing and listening to the same material.

She wants to know about the lives of players, the heroes and heroines whose posters and pictures she pastes to her bedroom walls. She looks for interviews and videos for tips about how to get better. She wants the scores of matches – but much more than just the scores. She wants to live every aspect of being both a fan and participant in her favorite sport.

So, she seeks a trusted, reliable source – *particularly local* – providing the information and news she seeks and, even better, does so through great storytelling, suspense (oh no, will this team get relegated? Promoted?), and emotionality – all of which is *created by local journalists who love football as much as she does*.

Your little, football loving daughter eventually grows up. Maybe she is now expecting a child herself or already has a family – and she's a 30-something young professional woman navigating her career in a world that each day grows in uncertainty. She knows and even works with

other 30-something young professionals in the same situation – folks like your adult daughter who share hopes and anxieties about finding, keeping, enjoying and prospering from professional choices. Yes, she pays attention to news about pandemics, wars, growing or shrinking economies, globally integrated supply chains, the promises and perils of out-of-control technology over which she feels too little control.

She has lots and lots of questions about all this and how it affects her, her friends, her colleagues and those she loves. That is, how it affects real people, not just the too often impersonal “news” about institutions, politics, “society”, the environment, climate change, and other “subjects/topics” – let’s call them “beats” – that can so overwhelm her and others because such content is created without any concern for how all this affects her and what she cares about.

She really wants to find – and use – a trusted, reliable source of expertise on all this that goes beyond the impersonal – that, yes, keeps her informed but does so in a way that really seems to her to be done through her lens, the choices she confronts, and her needs, interests and problems.

From baby girl’s parents to football lover to young professional: each of these describe a *specific audience* selected, served – *and successfully grown* – by Round 3 Table Stakes Europe participants: *Rheinische Post* (“Welcome Baby”), *La Voix Du Nord* (female football players and fans), *The Conversation UK* (“Quarter Life”/young professionals).

Other TSE groups selected different audienceS. What remained the same, though, across each audience was how success tied directly to identifying the needs and interests and everyday, real problems those audiences had to solve – and then providing compelling, often multimedia, journalism that delivered valuable content, news and information where and when (different platforms, different times of day) those audiences sought out what they needed.

Twenty plus years ago, news providers did not do this. Nor did they have to do this. Instead, publishers and journalists operated on a deeply held assumption about their primary purpose: providing *general* news and

information to the *general* public – the general, *undifferentiated citizenry* defined by the geography – the towns or cities or suburbs or rural enclaves – where folks lived. That assumption, though, no longer holds.

As I describe in *On Value and Values*, most people today *live their actual lives* in the complex contexts of markets, networks, organisations, friends and family. Today, young parents, retirees, foodies, fans, political activists, job seekers, job holders, entrepreneurs, executives, front line workers, consumers, employees, investors and networkers live out their lives in the organisations for whom they work, the physical and/or online companies where they shop or invest, the companies large and small that help them vacation, volunteer, pursue hobbies, find companionship and meaning and so forth – and all this while they text, youtube, tiktok, instagram, google, and even doomscroll.

Time and attention – as well as the need to find ways to actually connect with other people – have joined financial resources as today’s scarcest resources. And the most precious – and valuable – indicators of journalistic and economic sustainability for news providers are now about *winning the battle for scarce time and attention and the need for connectedness*.

The most important OKR, KPI, core metric – or, whatever else executives and management consultants and gurus wish to name it – is *habit*. The habit of regularly seeking answers, guidance, help, information from trusted and reliable – and *local* journalists who actually and demonstrably *care about you*. You as parent, you as fan, you as foodie, you as environmentalist, you as commuter, you as teacher, you as student, you as worker, you as entrepreneur, you as retailer, you as a woman or a man or an immigrant or a person of color or different faith heritage.

And, every single individual and team member in your news enterprise – from the most senior to most junior and across the newsroom, advertising sales, technology and more – now have the wonderful opportunity to weave together real communities of shared interest and, in doing so, support and sustain the tapestries of life as *actually lived in the 21st century*.

All of us in Table Stakes Europe have been thrilled and impressed with the efforts of our participating teams to help make this bright and sustainable future happen – and do so today. Right now.

Supporting publishers on their digital transformation journey

The Google News Initiative (GNI) is Google's effort to work side-by-side with publishers and journalists to build a more sustainable, diverse and innovative news ecosystem. A transformational programme such as Table Stakes Europe matches that mission, perfectly: through dedicated, hands-on coaching and consultation, the programme supports publishers in their journeys to execute critical management changes that drive new revenues and cost efficiencies at their organisations.

After three rounds of Table Stakes Europe, we continue to be impressed by the progress all participants make with each consultation. The achievements detailed in this report are evidence of the potential that the Table Stakes approach has for developing new skills and techniques

to a sustainable future. We hope that publishers in Europe and beyond will be inspired by these success stories.

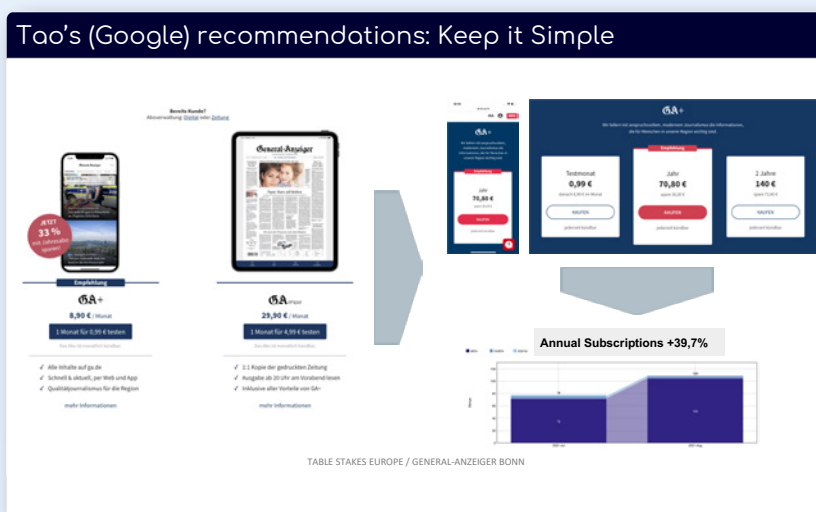
Here are some of the ways Google is working to support Journalists and Publishers:

Training

- **The Digital Growth Programme** (of which Table Stakes Europe is a part of) has provided over 857 publishers across 20 countries and 7 languages, with the training needed to deploy new digital subscription tools and revenue models.
- **Google News Lab** has provided digital skills training for over 168 thousand journalists and journalism students across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Products:

- **Google Search and Google News** connect people in Europe with publishers' websites more than 8 billion times each month. The traffic we send to news sites helps publishers increase their readership, build trust with readers and earn money.
- **Subscribe with Google**, which we built with news publishers, helps publishers reach new subscribers and engage existing readers. SwG has generated over 400,000 new paid subscribers for our news partners.
- **Google News Showcase** helps participating publishers share their expertise and editorial voice through an enhanced storytelling experience. This experience lets readers dive deeper into more complex stories. It helps them stay informed on the issues and events that local, national, and global newsrooms highlight through their Google News Showcase panels.
- **News Consumer Insights (NCI)** helps publishers make data-driven business decisions that increase profitability and build deeper relationships with their readers. The Decision Engine will deliver personalised actionable recommendations based on your Google Analytics data so you don't have to spend time analysing insights.



Picture shows General Anzeiger Bonn's results from using NCI and direct conversations with GNI expert Anntao Diaz

Young readers

The answer comes quickly when editors are asked about desperately needed new audiences: young readers! Easier said than done as many news publishers realise. But it can be done if newsrooms start to think in new ways and leave the well-trodden paths. In this first chapter you will read cases that cover this essential challenge of the media industry. Creative minds from Sweden, the UK and the Czech Republic showed bravery and endurance in their transformation. Learn how they did it, which platforms and channels were used and how the definition of the term “young” plays a decisive role. As you will see, one of the secrets of success is the right choice of topic that engages a younger audience.

Case Study 1: NWT, Sweden

Six steps that helped gain younger readers and increase reader revenue

An ageing subscriber base in print. A weak flow of new young paying digital readers. And no real focus on how to tackle the problem. That was the situation for NWT, a regional Swedish news outlet, in October 2021. One year later – a total change. This is how NWT succeeded in reaching young audiences and increasing revenue from that target group, and what six steps it took to build a better and younger future.

NWT

NWT covers regional and local news in the region of Värmland, in west-central Sweden. The main city in the region is Karlstad with a population of 100,000.

Founded in 1837, NWT is Värmland's main news outlet, with a print edition published six days a week while its website is updated 24/7. Online, it has about 300,000 unique visitors a week. 40 journalists work in the newsroom, and the publisher also has podcasts around sports and crime.

NWT is part of NWT Media, one of Sweden's leading media houses with 279 permanent employees. Through 17 local brands in three counties, it delivers local journalism via sites, apps and print products. NWT Media also assists companies with media consulting, strategy and production of advertisements, films, campaigns and broadband.

Challenge: Finding new paying readers to replace churning subscribers

The challenge ahead was tough. Really tough. NWT were about to start working on one of their most difficult and intricate challenges ever: increasing the number of readers under 45 and getting them to stay as paying subscribers.

“At first, I was quite uncertain about what we could expect. We had tried different things in the past to reach young audiences but with little or no real success,” says Patric Hamsch, Deputy Head of Media and responsible for NWT's Table Stakes Europe participation.

Nya WermlandsTidningen, or NWT, is a legacy news outlet and a stable part of people's lives in Värmland as the main provider of local news. NWT's business model is subscription based, and the outlet has a hard paywall with articles free only for the first hour after their publication. Reader revenue forms 70 percent of the total revenues with advertising generating the other 30 percent.

During the past decade, NWT's print edition has been losing both readers and revenue. Of course, strong growth in digital has helped moderate these losses. But there is no avoiding the harsh reality. The average age of their print reader is 71, and online platforms can't fully compensate for the speed with which the company is losing print subscribers.

“When we looked at our situation more in depth, we could see that we needed several parts of NWT to work together

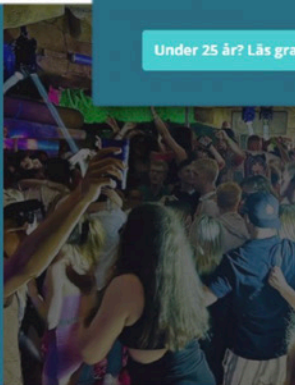
One example of NWT's projects aimed at young readers was a series about new graduates that included reporting from a student trip to Ayia Napa. This was combined with a special offer campaign for under 25-year-olds.

BILDEXTRA: Första utekvällen i Ayia Napa

Under tisdagen landade en stor del av Karlstads studenter i Ayia Napa för den klassiska studentresan. På kvällen var givetvis fest! Här är alla bilder från förra festivalen.

[Se bilderna här](#)

Är du under 25 år? Då läser du alla digitala artiklar på sajten och i appen gratis. Klicka här




MISSA INTE!

NWT åker till Ayia Napa

Amos och Nea direktrapporterar från Ayia Napa. Vimmelbilder och reportage utlovas, detta vill ni inte missa. Följ studentlivet här.

GRATIS läsning för alla under 25 år

[Under 25 år? Läs gratis här](#)



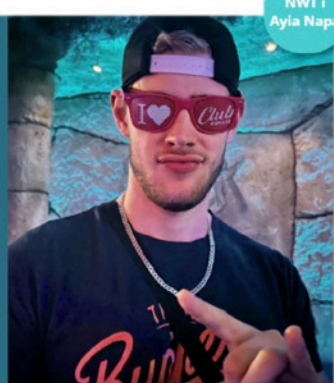
NWT i Ayia Napa

Titta tillbaka på dagarna i Ayia Napa

Här kan du se bilder, filmer och reportage från festligheterna i Ayia Napa. Missa inte direktrapporteringen i livechatten!

[Till superlivet](#)

Är du under 25 år? Då läser du alla digitala artiklar på sajten och i appen gratis. Klicka här



er with the challenge. The newsroom solely did not have the capacity to drive the change, and we had bad examples from the past of working in silos with no real effect. That's why we started by connecting the newsroom with colleagues from marketing, analysis and editorial development," Hamsch says.

A working group of five people at NWT was formed, consisting of managers from different parts of NWT: Patric Hamsch (Deputy Head of Media), Kasper Norling (Editorial Director), Sandra Thörnstrand (Head of Data), Sara Frieditis (Head of Marketing) and Caroline Englund (Project Manager Editorial Development). Two reporters focused on young audiences were also recruited: Amos Friedman and Nea Liljegen.

"This was key for us. We had little or no experience in working together like this. And the most important thing was, this group shared all the challenges," Hamsch says.

Decisions: Actions to understand the target audience

The group started with an analysis of the target audience: people younger than 45. The aim was to learn about their needs and interests, with the goal of feeding that knowledge into the activities of the newsroom and the marketing department.

Realising that more precision was needed, NWT divided this target audience, and the insights it learned, into two groups:

18- to 29-year-olds. For this target group, the best suited actions were brand building measures and generous campaigns. This group likes to read about:

- Entertainment
- Relationships and touching stories
- Careers, either of other young people or celebrities
- Breaking news

30- to 45-year-olds. This target group was seen as having more potential for digital conversion to support reader revenue. This group likes to read about:

- Society and investigative journalism
- Real estate
- New stores and restaurants
- Topics about kids and family life

These efforts were supported by an external focus group, which helped get more insights on how young people viewed NWT. The company also did a similar type of research internally.



Patric Hamsch
Deputy Head of Media, NWT

The results included some positive findings:

- NWT is a well-known brand.
- It has high credibility and strong relations and collaborations in the local communities.
- It has a high local reach (146,000 people every day, half of Värmland's population).

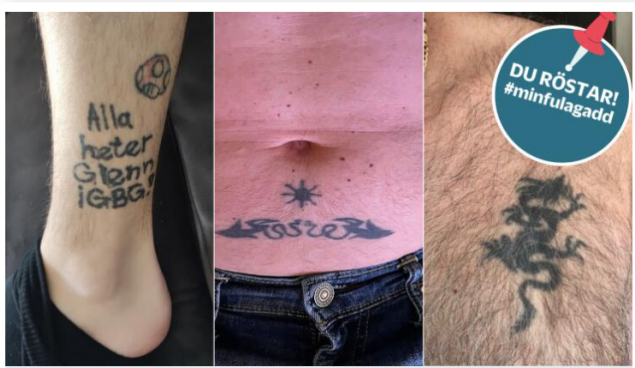
... as well as some negative ones:

- NWT is more closely related to history than present.
- The goal to attract paying customers is a challenge because many of the competitors are free.

“It was very helpful to receive feedback from the external focus group,” says Hamsch. “Together with our own analysis and research, we could see that we had to focus on effective change. We also saw that we needed to sharpen our activities aimed at younger audiences.”

After the period of insight gathering in October and November 2021, NWT formulated its challenge statement:

“We will guarantee the future of NWT and local independent journalism by dramatically increasing the number of younger subscribers and becoming Värmlands number one digital news brand for people under 45.”



NWT's competition “Värmlands ugliest tattoo” received a lot of traffic from under 45-year-olds. The prize of the competition? A new tattoo.

“We almost immediately started producing both journalism and marketing activities totally focused on the challenge statement and the new knowledge we had around these target groups. We could instantly see the results with early wins and reaching the set goals,” Hamsch says.

One of the best performing projects was “Värmlands ugliest tattoo,” which the newsroom, marketing department and social media editors worked on together. Readers were asked to take part in the competition and send their own examples, which generated several articles both online and in print as well as Instagram Reels. The tattoo project both converted a lot of readers and gave NWT a number of new followers on Instagram.

NWT also did successful live reporting and interactive chats focused on young audiences, such as a chat with a relations expert on love, live reporting when the bars opened after the lockdown and stories on dating locations in the area. All of these were combined with marketing activities to ensure reach and engagement.

Outcomes: A strong influx of younger readers

From the beginning, NWT had five objectives for their TSE participation:

- 20 percent of subscribers will be under 45. ✓
- 65 percent of all new digital subscribers will be under 45. ✓
- 30 percent increase in subscriptions on e-paper. ✓
- 20 percent of page views from logged in users under 45. ✓
- 37.4 percent increase in digital subscriptions. ✓

For the team, the results were stunning. NWT reached all five objectives and can clearly see the digital transformation advancing in other measurements. For example, an analysis from the survey company Novus showed that from October 2021 to October 2022 NWT increased its digital reach among 18- to 39-year-olds by 10.7 percent (from 24.4 to 35.1). The same trend is apparent regarding total reach among the same age group: an 11.8 percent increase. During this period, NWT's digital reader revenue also improved more than expected.

Sexexperten tipsar – så hettar du upp ditt sexliv i sommar

UPPDATERAD: 2022-06-15 PUBLICERAD: 2022-06-15



NWT's interview with a relations expert was coupled with a live chat, where readers could get their own questions about sex answered.

“We are so happy and thrilled about the results, they are amazing! We can really see why this has been so successful,” says Patric Hamsch.

Finally, as promised, the six steps that NWT advises others to follow to reach more young readers:

- Learn more about younger audience's needs, interests, problems and passions.
- Start to produce relevant content for the right people, on the right channels at the right time.
- Educate and recruit both current and new staff.
- Radical change of the current digital product to serve younger audiences.
- Constantly test and evaluate against set goals.
- Develop and implement a social media strategy.

Achievements during TSE:

In addition to its success with attracting and engaging younger audiences, NWT Media is **introducing the TSE mindset at two of its other newspapers**. It has **organised dedicated workshops to distribute the TSE tools and methods** internally. NWT Media has also changed the organisation inspired by TSE and since September, NWT Media has a department for reader revenue including all of the company's 15 newsrooms, marketing, print and product teams. A big mini publishing team!

Key learning from TSE:

“The most important thing is that we started to work directly with focus on the goals and activities, not on the process itself. And that we connected the newsroom with data and marketing.”

– Patric Hamsch

Case Study 2: The Conversation, UK

Using audiences-informed commissioning increased engagement among young professionals

The UK-based publisher planned to adopt a new approach to covering topics relevant to people in their twenties and thirties. The result – **Quarter Life, a series of articles for young professionals** – has been an eye-opener in showing the impact of audiences-targeted journalism.

By Khalil A. Cassimally

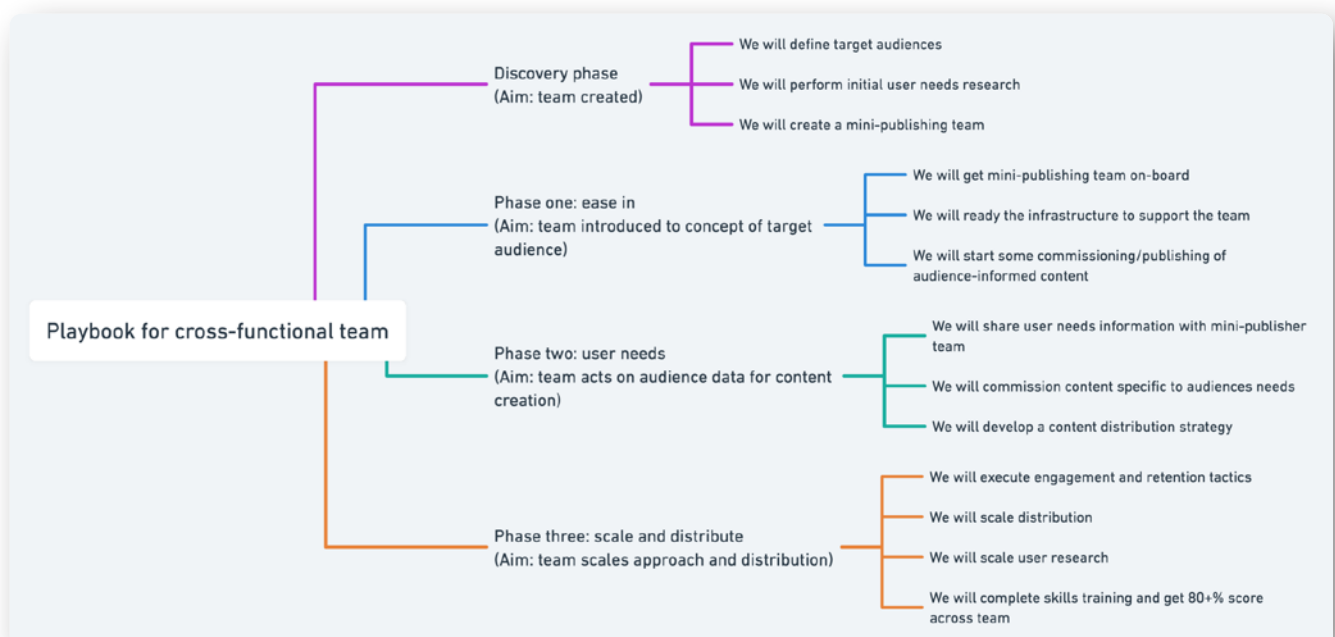
- 60% greater share of UK-based readers
- 45-50% greater completions

These numbers show just how powerful an audiences-targeted approach to content publishing can be. They show how understanding our readers can help us publish articles that are even more valuable to them, and increase our reach at the same time.

In March 2022, a UK-based team at The Conversation started experimenting with a different approach to

commissioning. Instead of our typical desks/topics-led approach, the team started commissioning stories with a specific target audience in mind. The team was cross-functional, made up of editors and audience development people. None of us had much experience with this audiences-targeted approach. Plus, it was the first time this approach was used at this scale within The Conversation.

Here’s how we started publishing audiences-informed articles, with limited experience and limited resources – with tips for other newsrooms who also want to be more valuable to their readers.





Khalil A. Cassimally
Head of Audience Insights,
The Conversation

Discovery phase

Our aim for this phase was to agree on a target audience and create a cross-functional team that would be tasked with understanding and serving that audience.

To decide on the target audience, we brought people from our many teams (Leadership, Membership, Editorial, Audience) together. Involving those stakeholders this early in the process was extremely beneficial. It increased the collective confidence in our decision and in what we would set out to do.

We then created a cross-functional team comprising both editorial and audience development people.

By the end of the discovery phase, we had decided to target young professionals (twenties to thirties) based in the UK. And we had created a cross-functional team of half a dozen editors and a couple of audience development people who would spend 20% of their time understanding and serving that target audience.

Phase one: ease in

Our aim for this phase was to introduce the team to the concept of target audiences and to build the infrastructure to support the team (think dashboards, skills ...).

The audiences-targeted approach to content publishing was new to most of the team. Yes, editors did think about audiences when commissioning and editing stories but it's fair to say that audiences were not necessarily considered in a systematic way.

To introduce the concept of target audiences and explain the value in focusing on a small subset of our audience, we went through this logic:

- **What is it that we're trying to achieve?** Produce content that is even more valuable to people.
- **How do we produce content that is even more valuable to people?** Better understand people.
- **How do we better understand people?** Acknowledge that it's difficult to understand a lot of people well because people are very diverse, with different needs, interests and problems. But it's easier to understand a smaller group of people very well, especially if there is some form of commonality among them.
- **How do we better understand a smaller group of people?** Conduct research with users from our target audience.

- **How do we know we're producing content that is even more valuable to people?** Look at meaningful metrics such as completions, not pageviews.

We then built the infrastructure to support the team. This included building a clean and simple dashboard with just two metrics: completions and staying rate. These metrics were meaningful and would give us clarity on whether we were moving towards success. They would allow us to monitor the depth and breadth of user engagement with our audiences-informed articles, proxies of how valuable users found the articles.

By the end of this phase, the team had begun publishing *Quarter Life*, a series of articles targeted at young professionals in the UK.

THE CONVERSATION

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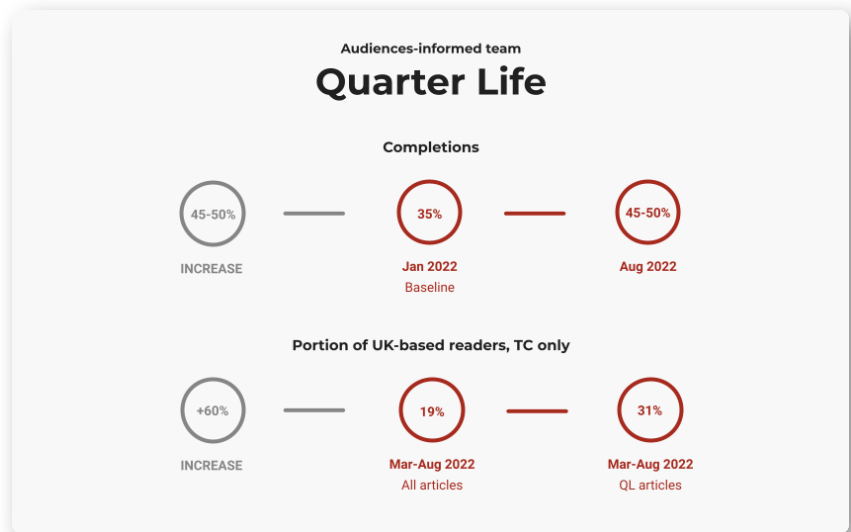
The Conversation's global network includes editions in Australia, UK, US, Canada, France, Africa, Spain and Indonesia. Overall, it has a viewership of 1 billion (200 million for the UK edition), and connects 70,000 academic authors. It is funded by universities, research bodies, foundations and donations from readers.

Phase two: user needs

Our aim for this phase was to introduce the team to insights about the target audience which would inform their commissioning going forward.

This is where the user needs model comes in. At the basis of our audiences-informed articles is a better understanding of the needs of the audience and serving those needs.

A lot has already been written about the model, such as [Dmitry Shishkin's piece](#) about user needs and how successful it's been for newsrooms; [my piece](#) about how The Conversation deployed user needs in 2021 to be more valuable to our climate readers; [my piece](#) about the decision-first approach to user research.



By the end of this phase, the team was publishing audiences-informed articles. And we found that Quarter Life articles had a greater share of UK-based readers, greater completions and greater pageviews than all articles.

Phase three: scale and distribute

Our aim for this phase is to onboard more editors on this project – and use the audiences-targeted approach more systematically in product development – as well as finding distribution partners for Quarter Life.

We'll also get to know the extent to which the audiences-targeted approach to content and product development impacts on user monetisation. The Conversation is optimistic. Getting more value more regularly brings people closer to the point of monetisation, and the data is showing that audiences-informed articles are more valuable to people.

By the end of the year, we're hoping that the majority, if not all, of the UK newsroom of The Conversation will be publishing audiences-informed articles.

Considering that The Conversation's authors are all academic experts and researchers, those articles are trusted information from experts, presented in accessible language thanks to editors, and deeply valuable to readers. A winning trifecta.

Achievements during TSE:

In addition to Quarter Life, The Conversation is planning to **expand the TSE and user needs approach to its Environment team and other teams across its global network**. It also launched an **ebook about the potential global repercussions of legal changes to reproductive rights** in the US for non-US feminists and aspiring feminists target audience, as well as **creating a resource pack with teaching material** for A-level teachers in the UK.

Key learning from TSE:

"TSE has given us a methodology to bring our newsrooms closer to our audiences. It works, it is scalable and it has even enhanced the team spirit within our newsrooms."

Case Study 3: Czech News Center, Czech Republic

How targeting the Gen Z audience helped kickstart a strong TikTok presence

Aiming to reach younger audiences, the Czech publisher conducted an experiment that used TikTok as a primary channel to distribute its sports journalism targeted at young audiences. Having exceeded their initial goal on the social network, the experiment is now inspiring other newsrooms within the company to set up their own TikTok channels.

Challenge: Using sports content to engage a new, younger audience

When Czech News Center (CNC) joined Table Stakes Europe, the team knew from the start that an important objective for them was reaching younger audiences. As is the case with many news publishers, CNC's usual audiences are getting older, and a lack of young (ideally paying) readers will be a challenge to the company's long-term business future.

Moreover, although CNC publishes a broad range of different kinds of media products, the company's TSE

team identified a critical gap in its media portfolio: the publisher only had one small outlet, a recently launched FOMO, that aimed to address the interests and needs of young people.

Using its sports newsroom iSports.cz as a test case and seeking to identify specific sports that interest young people, CNC set out to create new content and distribution channels that had a better chance of engaging the Gen Z generation, that is, under 25-year olds.

It was also clear that increasing digital skills within CNC would be an important part of the publisher's TSE journey: legacy of print was still strong in the company, with most CNC's journalists still having print related jobs, and generally there was a clear division between print and digital staff.

The youth publication FOMO was able to support this goal: although only a small part of the wider company, FOMO had a strong social media presence and could share its expertise on managing social channels.

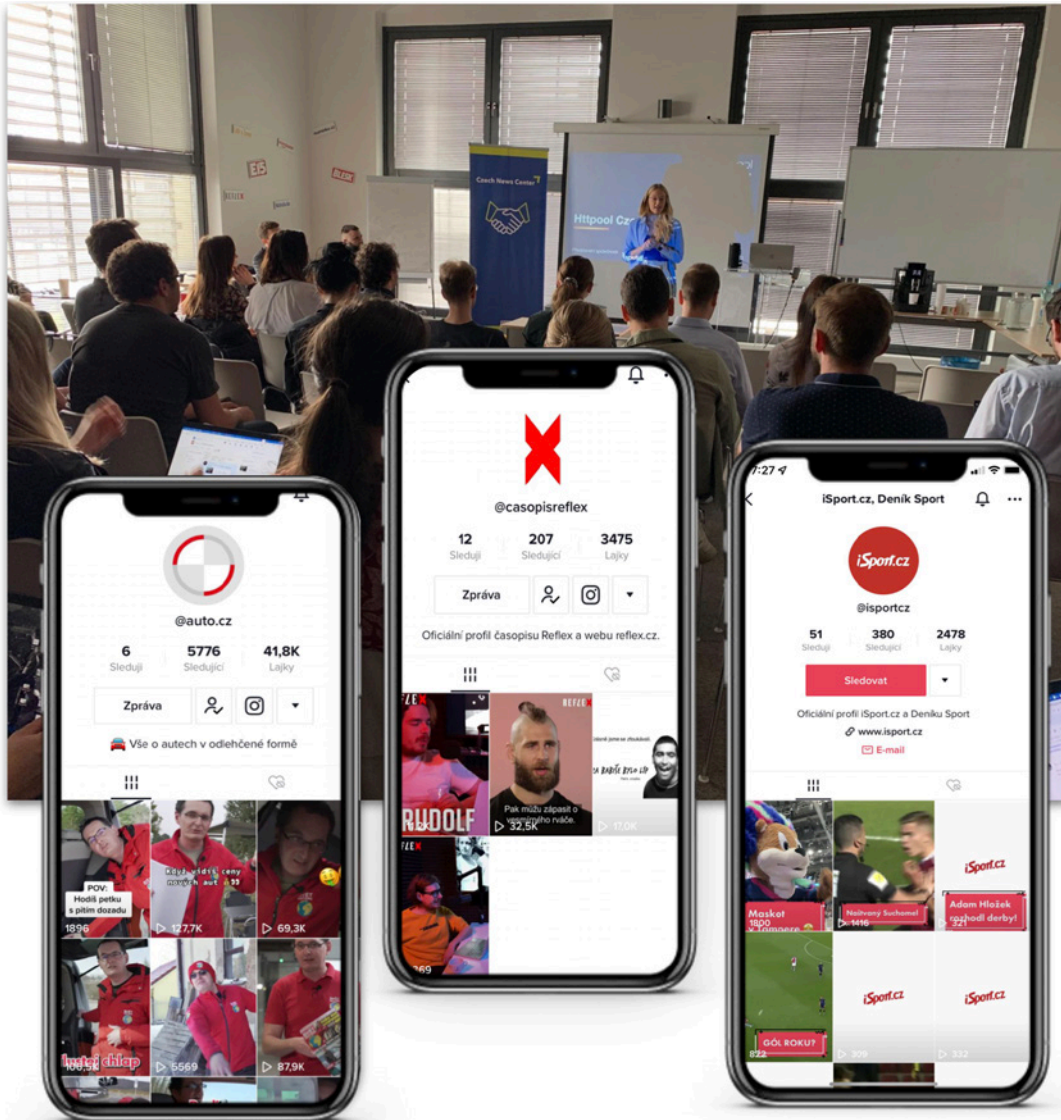
Decisions: Going where the young are – TikTok

To align its sports newsroom better with the interests of the Gen Z audience, CNC decided to focus on specific sports that it identified as being of particular interest to young people. Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) was an easy choice, as the sport is rapidly becoming more popular among young people in the country. Other focus sports for young people included Formula 1 and eSports.

Czech News Center ⁷

Established in 1992, Czech News Center is one of the biggest media houses in the Czech Republic. Its portfolio covers four daily print newspapers (including the country's biggest tabloid, Blesk), 42 print magazines, and over 40 websites.

In a country of 10.7 million people, CNC's titles reach 6.7 million people online and 5.2 million in print every month. The company has eight newsrooms and an overall staff of 1,000, about half of whom work on content creation.



CNC's training about best practices on TikTok had a big impact across the company, and following the workshop several newsrooms decided to launch their own TikTok channels.

As part of this challenge, the company hired a journalist who is a member of the Gen Z generation himself and can thus write in a voice that is authentic to the target audience. His job consisted largely of covering UFC, the largest MMA organisation in the world.

The company also wanted to experiment on how it could better reach out and engage young people on their own platforms. In this case, a TikTok channel was created for iSports.cz, and the company also hired a video manager focusing specifically on TikTok.

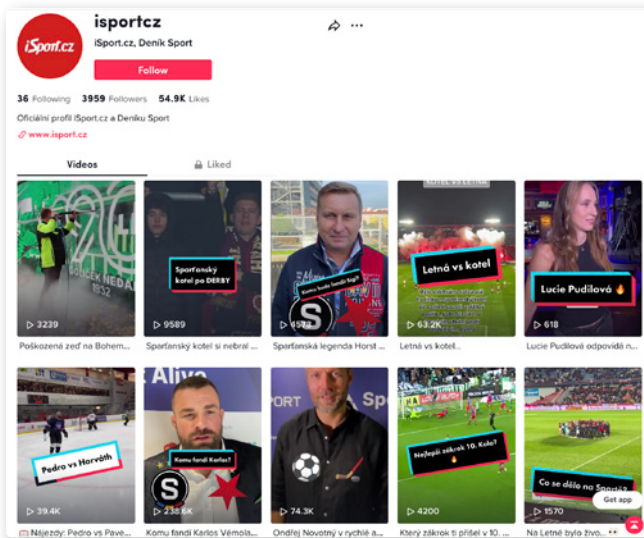
To spread the word about TikTok also more broadly, the TSE team organised a company-wide TikTok training: more than 60 people participated in a 2-hour workshop about best practices on the social media channel.

“The workshop exceeded our expectations,” said Kateřina Kadlecová, editor of paid content at CNC. “We are working on culture change in the organisation, and we saw over 60-year-old journalists come to the training and be ready to launch a new TikTok channel.”

Indeed, four other newsrooms were inspired to create their own TikTok channels following the training.

Outcome: TikTok audiences surpassing expectations

The results of these experiments were somewhat indefinite. The sports content aimed at Gen Z was indeed more successful in engaging the target audience than the rest of the publication's content on average.



However, after a few months of experimentation the total scale was low, which led to this part of the experiment being put on hold.

But the outcomes with TikTok were promising and produced some essential learnings. For example, the team realised that they couldn't handle TikTok on their own as they didn't have enough knowledge on how engagement on social platforms works. As a result, they hired three social media editors, one of whom is dedicated to TikTok.

The results speak for themselves: starting from 0, the team aimed to acquire 2,000 followers for iSports.cz's new TikTok channel; by the end of the TSE round, they had reached 4,000 followers.

"I think our whole approach with TikTok is changing now, and we're really figuring it out now. TikTok is now a huge part of our discussions when we're making new strategies," said Kadlecová.

The changing mindset has influenced decisions across the company: for instance, CNC created a TikTok channel for Blesk, the biggest tabloid in the Czech Republic, and the new channel has had "huge success", according to Kadlecová. Additional CNC newsrooms, such as Reflex, a culture magazine, are also planning to join TikTok.

Achievements during TSE:

Beyond their **successful entry on TikTok and expanding the use of the social network within the company**, Czech News Center **laid the groundwork to start redirecting this new public to their own platform** and build a monetisation funnel that will be customised for this particular audience. It also **completely reorganised the newsroom focusing on Women content**: the new structure maximises the value of high-quality content by allowing it to be published across all female targeted platforms.

Key learning from TSE:

"Even after our successful entry to TikTok and first successes in changing the thinking of print-oriented colleagues, we realised that our company has to meet even bigger challenges during its digital transformation. Thanks to Table Stakes Europe, we are now forming mini-publishing teams and putting the main focus onto our users. Our new strategy is based on the funnel and emphasises user-driven content. Next year we aim to update products, set up the registration wall, not only paywall, and serve the needs of specific audiences in each part of the funnel."

– Kateřina Kadlecová

Case Study 4: Le Parisien, France

TikTok: journey from zero to 400,000 followers

A participant in an earlier Table Stakes Europe round, Le Parisien has established a strong foundation on TikTok since it started publishing on the platform a year ago. Here, the company's head of video shares what they have learned along the way.

“Le Parisien aims to be recognisable as an online media, not only a print newspaper. Video is perfect for that.”

This is the reasoning behind the French publisher's robust video operation, according to Aurélien Viers, Editor-in-Chief of Le Parisien's Web Video Department. The team has 20+ journalists, motion designers and other people who produce videos for the newspaper's own website, TikTok, and all other major platforms: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.



Le Parisien is both a regional (with nine local editions) and a national newspaper (its national edition is called “Aujourd’hui en France”). The company has about 400 journalists, of whom 100 work in the Paris metropolitan area.

In terms of digital products, Le Parisien publishes 25 newsletters and produces a daily news podcast, in addition to having a separate video team. The publisher's website is among the top 5 news sites in France. Overall, Le Parisien has 70,000 digital subscribers.

The video team focuses especially on reports from the ground, which are shot horizontally and initially published on the website and YouTube. Many of these are then shortened and adapted into a vertical format for social networks.

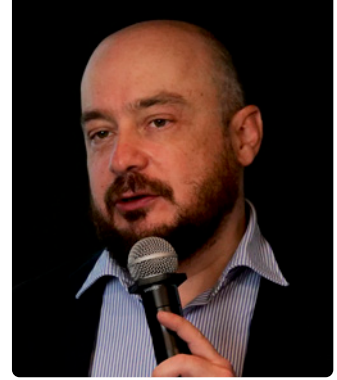
Given that users are exposed to these videos on various platforms, it's important that every video highlights the fact that it is a Le Parisien production by having the Le Parisien logo visible throughout the video. “We are targeting new subscribers, not directly through the legacy brand but through new verticals. That's why creating brand awareness is so important,” says Viers.

A big part of the team's strategy is to focus on recurring series. For example, “Food Checking” is a weekly show that fact checks food products at supermarkets, restaurants and bakeries. A typical episode lasts 7–8 minutes and is shot with a mobile phone in POV style. The show features interviews with experts and discusses the price of the products, each episode ending with a blind tasting.

Getting a young TikTok journalist essential

Going back to the beginning of Le Parisien's TikTok journey, the company took its first steps on the platform in September 2021.

“My first move was to hire the youngest journalist I could get,” says Viers. The publisher appointed Mathieu Hennequin, who had just graduated from a journalism school, as its first TikTok journalist and created a TikTok account with him.



Aurélien Viers
 Editor-in-Chief,
 Web Video Department,
 Le Parisien

“It was a good bet,” Viers says, adding that the new TikTok journalist’s being at ease with the camera turned out to be crucial.

At first the plan was to focus on explainers, especially on politics during the French presidential elections. But the team has also experimented with many different formats, testing and assessing results continuously.

Some of the key learnings from this process include:

- Hiring a TikTok dedicated journalist is key to success.
- Test & learn mindset is important, for example when experimenting with different lengths (but generally, short videos seem to work best with TikTok’s algorithm).
- Explainers work well – but you shouldn’t forget hard news either.

“We were the first one to report that Kylian Mbappé was staying at the [football club] PSG, and it was one of our biggest hits in months,” Viers says. “So hard news is also important. We see young people getting their news on TikTok right now.”

Goal: Build brand awareness among the young

Having started from zero more than a year ago, Le Parisien’s TikTok account now has more than 400,000 followers and 8 million likes. There have been ups and downs along the way, but Viers has noticed that as a general rule, growth is largely driven by individual videos that perform well.

“A hit video is also a hit for subscriptions. So you have to post regularly, and the subscribers will follow,” he says.

Although there is currently no way to monetise TikTok videos (unlike on YouTube or Facebook, for example), for Viers TikTok is a critical investment in building brand awareness among the young: “It’s for Le Parisien to exist in this universe.”

The hope is that the teenagers who enjoy the publisher’s videos now will come back later as paying subscribers. “So it’s a long-term strategy. It’s crucial, it’s a matter of life or death actually, just to be there and exist in people’s minds,” Viers says.



Local sports

Despite being a rather traditional newsroom department, the local sports desk can be an important contributor in building digital subscriptions. However, the path to success goes beyond presenting the results and stories of local amateur matches. Teams from our third Table Stakes Europe year showed what might be the right approach. Publishers from France, Germany and Italy learned about the importance of embracing diversity when building and addressing the interests of fan communities as digital audiences. And, while it might come as a surprise to some, as dominant as football may be in Europe – there are auspicious audiences for other sports.

Case Study 5: La Voix du Nord, France

Converting and retaining amateur football fans

Editorial coverage of amateur football is of interest to those who play it as well as their families, friends and sponsors: people who are loyal to their local teams in their victories and defeats. These engaged communities represent a significant potential for a regional daily newspaper. La Voix du Nord has long been aware of their importance and, since the end of 2021, has been saying it loud and clear to fans.



The French daily newspaper based in Lille has been the trusted source of news for the 4 million inhabitants of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region since 1942. It relies on an editorial staff of 310 journalists and 25 local editions (total paid circulation of 190,000 copies of which approximately 16% are digital subscribers).

La Voix du Nord is part of the Belgian media group Rossel.

A special feature of this regional news brand is its weekly title La Voix des Sports, launched in 1946, which appears every Monday in a newsprint version complemented by a magazine supplement. Readers can buy it at newsstands or subscribe (to the newspaper or to access its digital content). Sports is also present every day on all La Voix du Nord's publishing platforms.

Challenge: Reaching out to passionate local football fans to develop La Voix des Sports

The inhabitants of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region love sports in general and amateur football in particular. For La Voix des Sports, there was considerable room for improvement, as the brand attracted only 12% of these fans and followers at the start of its Table Stakes Europe project on amateur football. The challenge goes beyond La Voix des Sports because the increase in traffic on this theme puts this audience one click away from La Voix du Nord's main digital platform and all the other sections covered.

Amateur football represents half of the pages of La Voix des Sports, i.e. approximately 30 pages, and the publisher has a specifically designated journalist who is in charge of coordinating the production of local correspondents. At the beginning of TSE, that content was mostly focused on Monday's publication of weekend match summaries. The goal of La Voix des Sports during its Table Stakes year was to regain growth in circulation and audience by leveraging digital and capitalising on its expertise in amateur football (both men's and women's).

Decisions: Increasing content and frequency of use

The first action of the project group was to ask themselves how to increase the audience and frequency of use of their digital platforms. This, in their own words, meant "allocating the right resources to the right battles." In other terms, to stop concentrating the attention of their best specialists on the preparation of Monday's print pages and to plan with the sports editors a digital production



The Football Amateur challenge of La Voix des Sports was taken up by a multidisciplinary team. From left to right: Gael Meunier, Digital Performance Manager, Sebastien Varnier, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of La Voix du Nord, Clothilde Collin, Director of Strategic Marketing, Fred Retsin (sitting), Journalist specialised in amateur football, Yann Duploye, the Editor-in-Chief of La Voix des Sports, and Project Manager, Jean-François Machut.

that would no longer be only once a week but every day, after the inevitable peak of production on the results of the weekend matches.

The team initially focused on better coverage of the 60 largest clubs in the region. At the same time, they looked for solutions that would allow them to cover a greater number of clubs (in total, the region has almost 1,000 of them!). The results and major events from the weekend's games were published digitally as soon as the articles were ready, with an effort to be much faster on Sundays. In addition, the editorial staff started to encourage more frequent visits by football fans to the amateur football section by offering two or three new daily pieces of content in a wider variety of formats (analysis of the goal of the week, highlights, etc.). The message to the sports editors was to think of the editorial coverage with the same sophistication in formats and analysis that they used for the professional football teams.

In order to “structure” this new editorial approach and promote it to football fans, the team launched a weekly newsletter. Published on Thursdays, the newsletter highlights the best articles published and previews the important matches of the coming weekend.

The standout characteristic of this newsletter is that it is very personalised: an editorial by Fred Retsin and his selection of articles. He highlights some of the results and significant episodes of the week, including potential controversies, and talks about the teams that have performed well or those who are struggling. In Retsin, readers have their champion on amateur football, and he’s talking directly to them!

To measure the evolution of the results, Gael, Clothilde and Jean-François developed a dashboard containing KPIs for project management. This dashboard became

“Fred’s dashboard” within the team as their goal was to involve the editorial staff in its development and use. It provides real-time information on the evolution of digital production, the development of the audience, in particular towards paid articles, the progress of newsletter subscribers (with opening rate, clicks, and engagement rate) and the number of paid digital subscribers converted via amateur football articles.

Outcome: From assumptions to pleasant surprises

From January to October 2022, the editorial staff of La Voix des Sports significantly increased the volume of content on amateur football on its digital platforms compared to the same period the previous year (from around 10 articles per week to an average of 50). The content was increased on Sundays and Mondays, which are high audience days, and their daily offering also performed well on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.



From the beginning of the project, the team believed they could increase the audience of the sports section by strengthening their amateur football coverage, and this hypothesis has been confirmed with the audience increasing by 40% in just under a year.

In February 2022, the team launched a newsletter with the aim of gaining 500 subscribers. The newsletter quickly exceeded expectations and was approaching 1,200 subscribers by the end of the Table Stakes Europe programme in October. With an average open rate of 36%, it performs better than most of their other newsletters on other key indicators (clicks, engagement...). In October, nearly 75% of the newsletter's readers were paying subscribers, making it a good retention tool.

One of the initial objectives was to increase the number of paying digital subscribers to La Voix des Sports and thus compensate for the decline in newsstand sales. Amateur football has kept its promise and can look back on a 42% increase in subscriptions. This is only the beginning, and there are still levers to be activated (offers, marketing, social networks). However, the team has made some interesting observations in this first phase of the project. One of the most satisfying being that articles on amateur football are twice as likely to convert a visitor into a paying subscriber than any other content on La Voix du Nord's digital channels.

Future steps: Ongoing projects and opportunities to be confirmed

La Voix des Sports uses the services of Rematch, a French application that allows spectators of amateur football games to capture short videos and post them. While in theory, these videos should be an interesting addition to the work of journalists, in reality, the number and quality are not there. Despite the team's efforts to encourage this production, the experiment is not yet conclusive (few videos, low audience) and the advertising monetisation, as it stands, is not significant.

Among the levers still under utilised in the strategy of winning over new readers, having a better presence on social networks is probably the most promising. La Voix du Nord has a very large community on Facebook and the major clubs also have active groups.

The editorial staff uses the Echobox tool to automatically feed social networks, however, the team was convinced that a community manager could better highlight new content on amateur football and improve the effectiveness of social networks.

Since mid-September, this new strategy has been implemented with good initial results. In two weeks, the work of the community manager made it possible to surpass the performance of Echobox, reaching more than 1 million people on 68 posts with nearly 4,400 engagements (+400% compared to that of their automated tool).

Achievements during TSE:

La Voix du Nord energised its sports brand: during the TSE programme, the publisher saw a **+330% increase in amateur football digital content** and **+40% increase in overall sports section audience**. Articles on amateur football lead to a paid subscription twice as often as other articles since the beginning of the project. The team **has also started to deploy TSE tools and learnings more broadly** in the company, and is working towards **launching or revisiting other target audiences** (economy, real estate, employment, etc).

Key learning from TSE:

"The strength of a multidisciplinary team that worked closely together for 10 months on this subject of amateur football. From the start, we focused on the expectations/needs of a specific audience and set ourselves precise objectives... and we soon realised that we ourselves were capable of launching effective and efficient products quickly."

"This organisation can be transposed to other areas covered by the newsroom. The only condition is that we always start with a good definition of the 'problem' and the working hypothesis. The team is now focusing on women's amateur football. This growing community has different editorial expectations and its habits are almost exclusively on social networks. So we know we have to innovate in formats and stories."

– Jean-François Machut

Case Study 6: Fränkischer Tag, Germany

Engaging the local basketball team's fan community

The pandemic forced the German local newspaper to rapidly rethink its approach to sports journalism. The company quickly identified the fans of the local basketball team, Brose Bamberg, as a potential target audience, and its sports desk has revamped its content production to successfully engage them.

Challenge: Finding a new sports content strategy beyond match reports

Some teams in Table Stakes Europe struggle to choose their target audiences. But for others, the process is straightforward – or they may even realise that they've stumbled across an audience.

The team from Fränkischer Tag had the latter experience.

The German local newspaper joined Table Stakes Europe to accelerate its digital transformation process and gain more digital subscribers.

It aimed to do this by focusing on specific target audiences, forming

mini-publishing teams that serve those audiences' needs and interests, and thus become a critical source of local news and information.

But unlike many other teams, Fränkischer Tag had already taken a big step towards the audience-first approach – even if they only realised it afterwards.

The roots of this decision go back to the early days of the pandemic. When all sporting events were cancelled in Germany, the newspaper's sports team were left with daily print sports pages that still needed to be filled, even if there were no games to report on.

“Our sports team decided not to wait for games to start but to talk about the players, how the teams won or lost, and who the people running the teams are,” says Andrea Pauly, Head of Content and Audience Development at fraenkischertag.de.

With this approach, the team led by Torsten Ernstberger, Head of the sports department, identified the local basketball team, Brose Bamberg, as a particularly promising topic to focus on, thanks to its large

Fränkischer Tag

Fränkischer Tag is a local newspaper, founded in 1946 and situated in Bamberg, a town in Upper Franconia, Germany. It is part of the media company Mediengruppe Oberfranken (mgo), which also owns four other local daily newspapers. Taken together, the newspapers have an editorial team of more than 150 people spread across 7 locations.

Fränkischer Tag has a circulation of more than 82,000 (plus 11,000 e-paper subscribers). Its website, fraenkischertag.de, which was launched in 2021 as an addition to the successful news site infranken.de, uses a freemium model (60–80% of the content is behind a paywall), and has 1,250 digital-only subscribers, along with more than 6,000 print subscribers who also have access to the paywalled content.



Andrea Pauly
Head of Content and Audience Development, Digitalhaus Franken

and active fan base: the team has 53,000 followers on Facebook alone.

The sports desk quickly set out to cover the Brose Bamberg team, creating content specifically for the newspaper's website and distributing it on Instagram and Facebook.

As Pauly puts it: "Before we even knew the word, we had set up a mini-publishing team."

Decisions: Finding new, successful article types

As the pandemic permitted games to start again, the sports team – which includes die-hard basketball enthusiasts – decided to double down on its match reports.

"They watch the games anyway so they decided, we could just as well write about them," Pauly said.

This means that two journalists cover every Brose Bamberg game, whether the team plays home or away. If possible, the journalists follow the game live at the arena, where they can also interact with the players and fans to enhance their reporting.

Almost all stories about Brose Bamberg are placed behind the website's paywall. During their Table Stakes Europe journey, the sports team has written almost an article per day about the team.

The newspaper has promoted its newly launched newsletter for Brose Bamberg fans on Facebook and Instagram.



As mentioned before, the coverage goes well beyond match reports, and looking into the readership data, Fränkischer Tag has seen that articles that consistently perform well include stories about Brose Bamberg's ex-players and ex-trainers – articles such as "where they are now," or news about a competition they won recently.

Pauly says the team is also used to thinking about the role each story type has in the broader funnel strategy: "They are always asking themselves: Is this an awareness story, is this an engagement story, or is this a conversion story?"

Outcome: Fans and the basketball league sharing the stories

Another type of article that tends to generate high pageviews and conversions are stories about young talents. What also performs well are – perhaps surprisingly – simply reports from matches.

Brose-Newsletter
Jeden Freitag in deinem Postfach: der Brose-Newsletter

Udo Schilling
War selbst aktiver Basketballer (bis Regionalliga) und schilling nach einer Verletzung die Trainerkarriere ein. Das Frauenteam der DJK Bamberg coachte er in den 1980er Jahren unter anderem drei Spielzeiten in der Bundesliga. Über den Bamberger Basketball schreibt er wie über die deutsche Nationalmannschaft bis hin dazu sieben Europameisterschaften seit seinem Eintritt in die FT Sportredaktion 1996.



Die kämpferische Einstellung der Bamberger passt, wie hier Solomon Young gegen den Hamburger Kendall McCullum zeigt. Doch spielerisch liegt noch vieles im Argen. Foto: Daniel Leß

Geduld, Durchhaltevermögen und der Geist von Freak City

Nach dem Fehlstart robbt sich die Bamberger Basketball-Mannschaft in die Nationalmannschafts-Saisonpause. Wird es danach besser?
Liebe Basketball-Fans,

Geduld lautet das Zauberwort derzeit im Lager von Brose Bamberg. Geduld, bis man den ersten Sieg in der Bundesliga feiern kann. Am Sonntag beim Überraschungsaufsteiger Rostock gelten die Oberfranken als Außenseiter. Die Hoffnung auf eine Wende ist derzeit gering. Neuzugänge sind – laut gut informierten Kreisen – schon in der Pipeline. Ob nach der folgenden zweiwöchigen Länderspiel-Saisonpause schon eine funktionierende Mannschaft im Schlüsselspiel gegen Frankfurt auf dem Parkett der Brose-Arena steht? Oder wird der Fehlstart in die Saison gar Trainer Oren Amiel zum Verhängnis?

Im vergangenen Jahr musste zu diesem Zeitpunkt der Saison Johan Rokjakkers gehen – mit einer Bundesliga-Bilanz von fünf Siegen bei vier Niederlagen. Ob die Neuzugänge jährlich einschlagen wie Aki Mitchell oder Chris Dowie in der vergangenen Spielzeit? Über die Nachverpflichtungen der vergangenen zehn Jahre lest ihr in diesem Newsletter eine Kritik unseres Sportredakteurs Max Glas – von Alex Renfroie (2012/13) bis Tomas Kyziak (2021/22). Apropos Geduld: Das Fanlager ist ob der Darbietungen der Mannschaft gespalten.

Ronni Arendt vom Fanclub „Faszination Basketball“ hat im letzten Halbjahr einen Beitrag zur Situation geschrieben – absolut lesenswert! Sie lässt sich die Freude am Basketball nicht verderben, auch wenn sie natürlich viel lieber Siegen sehen würde. Sie meint: „Machen wir auch mit 2000 Zuschauern richtig Stimmung. Zeigen wir unseren Nachbarn, Freunden, Fernsehzuschauern – Mensch, trotz schlechter Saison ist bei denen aber eine geile Stimmung.“ Arendt ist mit ihrem Fanclub auf einer Drei-Tages-Fahrt nach Rostock. Sie lebt Freak City.

Eine Geduldprobe der anderen Art erlebte Ronni Arendt und ihre Fanclubmitglieder übrigens am Mittwochabend am Rande. Der Fanclub diskutierte wie nach jedem Heimspiel am Container hinter der Halle über das Spiel gegen Chemnitz im Fiba-Europe-Cup, während wenige Meter weiter zwei der drei Schiedsrichter und der Kommissar Jörg Rüter auf ihr Taxi Richtung Hotel warteten. Aber das Taxi kam nicht. Geduldig standen sie in der Kälte, bis eine Kampfrichterin vorbeikam und das durchgefrorene Trio in ihren VW-Bus verfrachtete und zum Hotel in die Sandstraße fuhr.

In diesem Sinne – bleibt geduldig
Udo Schilling

Fragen und Anregungen könnt ihr jederzeit mailen an: brose-newsletter@frankischertag.de

- Aufsteiger schreibt schon Bundesliga-Geschichte**
Die Rostock Seawolves haben ihre ersten vier Bild-Spiele gewonnen. So gut ist noch kein Neuzugang. Der Bamberger Komplex ist im Gegner-Check.
- Brose Bamberg agiert verunsichert und ratlos**
Die Ergebnisliste bei Brose Bamberg weht sich nun auch auf dem Fiba Europe Cup aus. In der Länderspielphase steht daher ein Kaderumbau an.
- Brose-Nachverpflichtungen: Von Tops und Flops**
Brose Bamberg steht erneut vor einem Kaderumbau. Wo sinnvoll waren die Nachverpflichtungen der vergangenen Jahre? Teil 1: Der Rückblick von 2012 bis 2017.
- Brose-Nachverpflichtungen: Voltzreifer und Fehlentscheidungen**
Die kriselnden Bamberger benötigen neues Personal. Ein Rückblick: welche Nachverpflichtungen haben von 2017 bis 2022 etwas bewegt, welche nicht?
- Noch kein Nachfolger für „JWP“ in Sicht**
Die Trennung von Justin Wright-Forrester stößt in Fanskreisen sowohl auf Zustimmung als auch auf Unverständnis. Gründe lassen sich für beides finden.
- Brose Bamberg in der Krise: Das sagen die Fans**
Die sportliche Talflut von Brose Bamberg hält an. Wo liegen die Schwachstellen, was muss verändert werden? Eine Umfrage unter acht treuen Anhängern.

“We’re not the only ones reporting on the games, but people still pay for it because our experts don’t just write what happens, but also why it happens, what happened before and what happens next,” Pauly says.

The new approach is indeed having an impact: traffic to sports content generally has grown, and articles about sports also tend to get a higher active time on page than most other stories. Interviews perform particularly well in this regard, with an active time always somewhere between 2.5 and 3 minutes.

“We have also seen that fans share our content on their social media,” Pauly says. “What’s even better is that the Basketball Bundesliga [the highest-level league for basketball in Germany] is sharing some of our stories on social media, even though they are behind the paywall, which is fantastic.”

To expand its offering to basketball Bamberg fans, the sports desk launched a newsletter in September 2022 that is sent out every Friday at midday. This new product has been promoted on Facebook and Instagram, and in a couple of weeks 120 local basketball-enthusiasts had subscribed to it.

The sales team is on board, too: The newsletter will be subject to creating more revenue by advertising or sponsorship models for a business partner that matches the audience.

Achievements during TSE:

In addition to the Brose Bamberg mini-publisher team, **the company started focusing on two other target audiences**, one for beer and food connoisseurs in the region and the other looking at housing and lifestyle, as well as planning to **involve more reporters generally in mini-publishing teams**. The publisher is also **rethinking its approach to advertising** to target more ads to specific audiences.

Key learning from TSE:

“We have had several key learnings from TSE. Implemented in our work is shifting our focus away from what we write about towards whom we are writing for in every single story. Another big one was how working together as a team from editorial, audience development, product and sales helped us to work with output and outcomes in mind that expand beyond each team’s specific goals.”

– Andrea Pauly

Case Study 7: Gruppo Editoriale Athesis, Italy

Building a home for Vicenza football fans

In September 2022, toward the end of their Table Stakes Europe participation, the team from Italian newspaper *Il Giornale de Vicenza* launched a Design/Do sprint exploring a new offer aimed at the fans of their local football team, L.R. Vicenza. They wanted to create a space that would bring people together around a club to which they have remained incredibly loyal, even if its history has not spared their emotions.

L.R. Vicenza football team currently plays in the Italian Serie C, having been relegated from the B series at the end of the 2022 season. However, L.R. Vicenza isn't just any club. It spent most of the 1960s and 1970s and much of the 1990s in Serie A. Vicenza won the 1996-97 Coppa Italia and reached the semi-finals of the Winners' Cup the following season, losing to eventual winners Chelsea. In Italy, as in many countries where football is strong, media coverage is focused on the top divisions. But for many fans, local clubs are also a strong interest and there was a coverage gap to be filled according to the journalists of *Il Giornale di Vicenza*.

Gruppo Editoriale
ATHESIS

Gruppo Editoriale Athesis is based in northern Italy. The group owns daily newspapers, magazines, websites, TV channels and radio stations, and is also a major event organiser. Athesis's integrated offer reaches a total of 7 million people living between Verona, Vicenza, Brescia and Mantova, one of the richest regions in Italy. They participated in Table Stakes Europe with two of their daily newspapers, *L'Arena* (based in Verona) and *Il Giornale di Vicenza* (based in Vicenza).

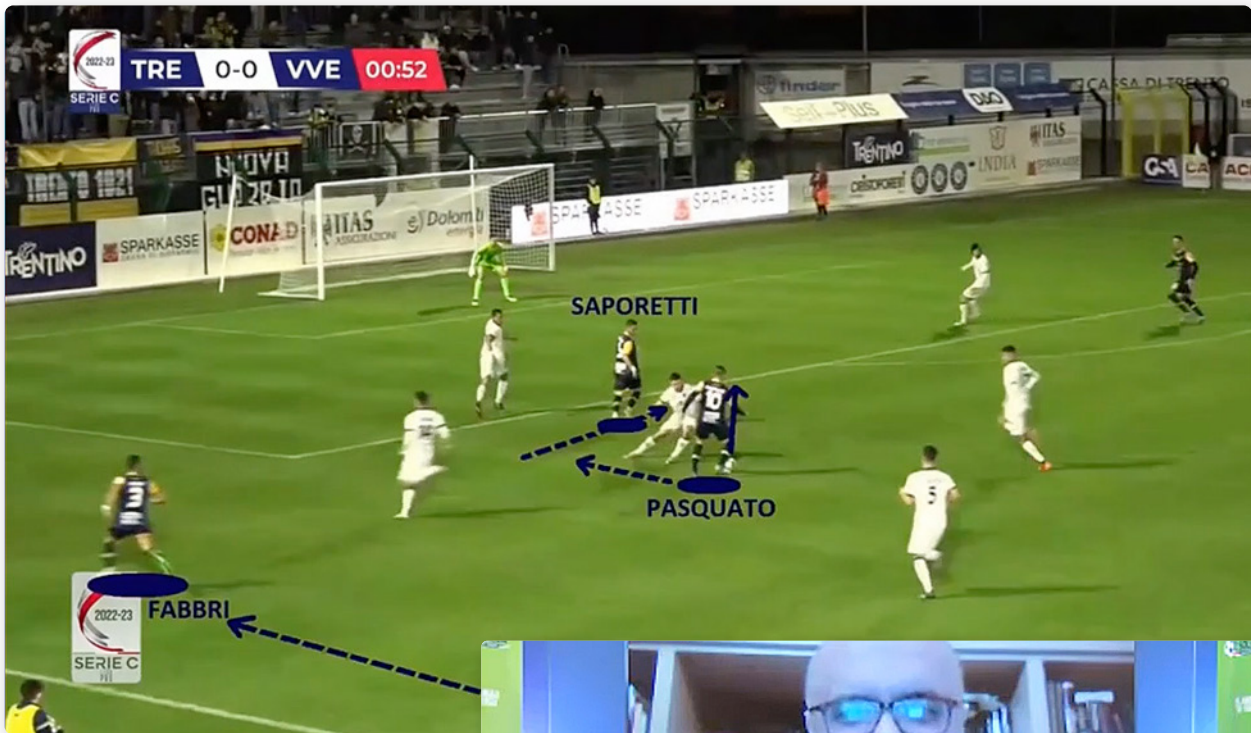
Challenge: Convert Vicenza fans into regulars users of their digital platform

Digital Editor Nicola Negrin and his deputy Nicola Gobbo witnessed the atmosphere in the packed stadium (sold out with 12,000 spectators) on that terrible day when their team lost the match that sent them to the third series of the Italian championship. As Nicola Negrin puts it: "Vicenza Calcio fans are passionate, not to say 'sick', audience. Even after this defeat, 5,300 people paid a subscription of 180 euros to secure their seats for the next season at the stadium."

Their first assumption was that these fans could become regular users and register to *Il Giornale de Vicenza*. Eventually, some of them might become subscribers if the newsroom was able to offer them great content and drive them to become heavy users. Their second assumption was that to reach this special audience and become their favourite gathering point, they needed to think beyond writing reports on the games. They needed to propose a variety of formats, including video and audio, a mix of information, entertainment, and interactivity and reach out to the fans on all possible platforms in order to bring them back to their own media.

Decisions: 'È Solo Calcio,' the house of the 'Tifosi'

"We decided that this project should not be a single action, but a series of operations that would allow us to create a large, complete package," explains Negrin. "From the point of view of subscriptions or advertising, we had to promote a complete offer. But for that we needed to bring order to all the contents we already did and create a cohesive offer."



In two weeks they created and launched this new offer:

- A live video show that airs on Mondays at 6 pm (on the website and on Facebook) and remains available for users to replay whenever they want. The live broadcast is a discussion between Luca Ancetti, the historical face and voice of Vicenza's affairs, and football experts.
- A live broadcast of the coach's conference, visible on the website and Facebook.
- A weekly podcast (every Thursday) with a lighter tone than the video show. It's entertaining, with a place for humour, debates, and guests ...the podcast is available on their digital platforms but also on other audio platforms such as Spotify.
- A weekly newsletter is published every Friday with a selection of articles, a reminder of the audio and video products ... The aim is to form a habit and remind the audience of all the content around their passion.
- New content on the history of the club and more stories on the Serie C division.
- A Whatsapp number where readers can send in their questions, which will be reviewed/answered by the sports journalists.
- Best players' cards (from the fans): Alongside the editorial staff's players' cards will be those of the fans. Voting on digital is easy but in order to include the print readers the teams thought about adding QR codes to the print paper.



Nicola Negrin
Digital Editor,
Il Giornale di Vicenza



Nicola Gobbo
Deputy Digital Editor,
Il Giornale di Vicenza

Outcome: Early wins and expectations

This new initiative was two months old at the time of writing so it is still too early to have results. However, a big win for the editors was the speed between the design and deployment of the new offering (design/do in Table Stakes terminology).

This new coverage was set up in two weeks, during which Negrin and Gobbo were responsible for producing these new formats, finding technical solutions and persuading several journalists from the sports desk to join them in the adventure.

The initiators of “È Solo Calcio” have set themselves the goal of obtaining 2,000 subscribers to their newsletter by the end of the season in 2023 and converting 600 regular users to a paying subscription. They also wanted to obtain at least two advertising partnerships around their video and podcast shows. One is already secured!

The screenshot shows a website interface for GdV (Gruppo Editoriale Athesis). The main article is titled "È solo calcio, l'approfondimento sulla Serie C. «Al Menti finalmente ci si è divertiti»". The article text mentions Ronaldo and Parigi as guests on the site. Below the text is a video player showing a panel discussion with four men around a table. To the right, there are promotional banners for "We are Lane" featuring a quote by Eugenio Marzotto, and "IL PODCAST DI È SOLO CALCIO" with a play button icon. A sidebar on the left contains a vertical banner for "GRATIS FINO A 26 ANNI" and a BVR Banca logo.

Law, order and investigations

It is well known in newsrooms across Europe that stories about crime can be considered as sure-fire content in terms of digital reach. Another question is how to make readers who enjoy these stories become loyal users and how to gain digital revenue from them. Doing that requires more than just articles on criminal cases and court hearings. This chapter features a small publisher from Germany that compiled the capacity in its newsroom and found an audience for its new podcast series. You'll also learn that there are different formats of crime content that suit these audiences by the experiences of a former Table Stakes Europe participant from Scotland, who also shows the tremendous impact crime stories can have on subscriptions.

Case Study 8: Schwäbisches Tagblatt, Germany

Reaching young and female audiences with a new crime podcast

In the beginning of 2022, the newspaper based in Tübingen in southwest Germany launched its first audio product, a podcast called “Am Gericht” (“At the courthouse”). The show looks at issues related to crime and justice, and it has been particularly successful among women, young audiences, and current and future legal professionals in the region.

Challenge: Creating an audio product to reach legal professionals and young audiences

Like many local newspapers, Schwäbisches Tagblatt (ST) aims to accelerate its digital transformation and wants to reach audience types that have been less likely to read the newspaper in the past. The publisher’s first podcast, launched in the beginning of 2022, has an important role in these efforts.



Established in 1945, Schwäbisches Tagblatt is a daily newspaper based in the city of Tübingen with four additional offices across the Baden-Württemberg state in southwest Germany.

For its national coverage, the newspaper uses content from Südwest Presse, an Ulm-based daily newspaper and Schwäbisches Tagblatt’s minority owner.

In 2022, the newspaper had about 100 employees, and had 31,600 subscribers for its print edition and 3,800 subscribers for its e-paper and website.

Called “Am Gericht” (“At the courthouse”), the monthly podcast discusses recent crime and law related stories from the region, while also exploring their broader societal implications.

The decision to focus the podcast on issues related to crime, justice and law came naturally from the interests of the newspaper’s audience: “We’ve always seen that this kind of coverage is of high interest to people,” says Jonas Bleeser, court reporter at ST and one of the two hosts of the podcast.

According to Bleeser, articles about crime cases in the region draw high levels of traffic consistently. Perhaps more importantly, many crime-related stories also drive at least one new subscription.

Moreover, many people in the region are interested in legal issues because of their current or future professional situation. Every year, 2,500 students study in the University of Tübingen’s faculty of law, and the regional high court is also based in the city. Meanwhile, the neighbouring town of Reutlingen has a large police headquarters.

“If you take the number of police officers working in this headquarters, and all the court prosecutors, law school students, lawyers and other people professionally involved in law in some way, there are several thousands of people,” Bleeser says. He also points out that these professionals are likely to have a level of income that makes them a promising target audience for newspaper subscriptions.



Lorenzo Zimmer (left) and Jonas Bleeser recording an episode of Schwäbisches Tagblatt's crime podcast. Photo: Ulrich Metz.

As for the choice to create a podcast, this seemed like a good opportunity to reach a different, younger audience than ST's existing readership. Even if those younger listeners do not subscribe now, they might do so later in life: "If they have connected with our brand in the past, we hope of course that they will trust us in the future. And the podcast is a good way to have positive brand related contact."

The podcast episodes also aim to drive interest in crime-related stories on ST's website, and since most of those are behind the paywall, this will hopefully encourage these new audiences to consider taking a subscription.

Decisions: Refining the concept and workflow, and looking for sponsors

Although Bleeser had been a guest on another crime podcast "Akte Südwest" (Southwest File), "Am Gericht" was ST's first in-house audio project, so the first step for creating it was getting the right equipment. This was handled by the publisher's Head of IT, who still provides technical support for the podcast.

Bleeser, who describes the podcast as his "passion project," handles the editing. He specifically highlights a post-production tool called Auphonic, which automatically optimises a recording's audio quality. This actually was a tip from the audience after a few episodes. "One of our listeners told us, 'Your audio quality is really bad. Why don't you use Auphonic?' So I replied, 'Great, of course we will use it. Thank you very much!'"

In terms of a typical workflow behind each episode, Bleeser starts by choosing a topic and related articles he has written, and shares those with Lorenzo Zimmer,

Editor at ST and co-host of the podcast. Together they come up with different talking points and a broader theme they want to address through the specific cases.

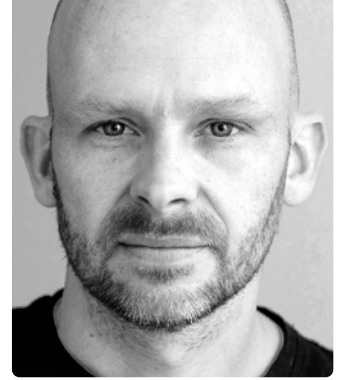
"Every criminal case we cover is also about some 'meta' theme," Bleeser explains. "So if we look at criminal cases between car drivers and cyclists, we would also talk about the conflict between these groups generally, why it is important that we talk about whether cars take too much space on our streets, actions and behaviours against climate change, and so on."

The two hosts recorded the first episodes unscripted, but they have also experimented with writing a detailed script before the recording. For the most recent episodes, they have used an approach that is somewhere in between, allowing the conversation to have a spontaneous feel while still following a plan.

"Now we try to do it with mind-maps, where we decide before recording what we want to talk about, how we tell the case, and when to get to the aspects that are beside the case," Bleeser says.

"Our Head of IT always says, 'I want you to sound as if you're sitting in the back of my car and talking about this case.' Of course, we're not only trying to entertain, we are also trying to explain how the legal system works, what the rules are, why they are important, and so on."

As for audience feedback, Bleeser says that comments and ratings have been positive from the start. Moreover, the first two episodes were featured on Spotify's much-coveted top 50 chart, and the first episode alone reached more than 1,800 listeners. "That of course was highly motivating. We would have been happy with three or four hundred!"



Jonas Bleeser
Court Reporter,
Schwäbisches Tagblatt

What has been more challenging than expected is finding sponsors. The team has explored some concrete ideas (for example an insurance company that could promote a law insurance product), but Bleeser says it takes time to convince big companies to advertise in a newly established podcast.

For now, the podcast has had one sponsor, a local theatre that promoted a play about how impostors fool their surroundings by pretending success and wealth. The theatre will also return as a sponsor in some later episodes, and the team has also found a health insurance company as sponsor for the next three episodes.

Outcome: Reaching an audience beyond the newspaper's usual readership

In terms of audience figures, the podcast has more than 2,600 regular listeners across Spotify and Apple. Added to that are the people listening directly on ST's website (over 4,500 plays during the past three months), but Bleeser says the data doesn't specify how many of them follow the podcast regularly.

Digging deeper into statistics, Bleeser notes that according to Spotify's detailed listener data, two thirds of the podcast's listeners are women. Moreover, two thirds are younger than 45 years old. The contrast to the newspaper's usual readers – who are “mostly older than 65,” according to Bleeser – is significant.

“So that's really a younger audience than our newspaper's audience is, and of course that's why we're doing this. We want to reach people who are not even close to the newspaper yet.”

Bleeser also points out that the podcast has had a positive impact on his everyday work as a court reporter. It turns out that many legal professionals in Tübingen are regular listeners, and they now recognise him from the podcast.

“I talk a lot with lawyers and prosecutors and judges when I'm at court. Sometimes when I go to a young lawyer I don't know yet, they say, ‘Ah, you're the guy with the podcast!’” he says. “So sometimes it's a door-opener, that people know the podcast and they know my voice.”

“I always ask them if they like the podcast. And most of them say they like it because all the law related stuff is accurate. We're trying to be very accurate, so that the professionals acknowledge that we're doing good jour-

nalistic work with a high accuracy. And they really appreciate that.”

Beyond its immediate target audience, “Am Gericht” is also gaining another type of recognition: the podcast was a finalist in the Audio category of WAN-IFRA's European Digital Media Awards 2022.

As for the next steps, the crime audience team will launch a newsletter in the autumn of 2022, which will promote the podcast as well as featuring ST's articles related to law and order. “We're of course hoping that people reading the newsletter will find a lot of interesting content on our website and are more likely to take a subscription.”

Achievements during TSE:

In addition to the law & order audience, Schwäbisches Tagblatt **launched two other mini-publisher teams targeting foodies and under 25-year-olds**. They also created a team for **a pop-up audience around local mayoral elections**. The publisher is committed to the Table Stakes methodology, and **TSE is now a household name in the company**.

Key learning from TSE:

“I really appreciate the “good enough to get going” approach. And I'm convinced that this is an important learning for us, that we don't have to over-analyse everything, to over-plan everything before you start. Just do it – and learn by doing. That is for me a great learning.”

Case Study 9: DC Thomson, United Kingdom

Investigative documentaries help engage audiences, drive subscriptions

During its participation in the first edition of Table Stakes Europe in 2019, the Scottish group took a big step forward with the transformation of their newsroom from being print-focused to digital. They also began using the mini-publisher perspective, which has helped the company build a strong investigations unit.

Challenge: Internalising the mini-publisher team concept to push their journalism forward

Fast-forward to late 2022, and Table Stakes' mini-publisher team concept has become internalised in the company's newsrooms. Here, Richard Prest, Head of Content Development at DC Thomson Media, discusses some of the amazing pieces of content they have to show for it, and how this work is helping them to engage their audiences, retain subscribers and bring in new ones.

Overall, Prest says, the team's formation and development is directly related to their participation in Table Stakes Europe.

"We can trace this right back to our digital transformation two years ago and after we'd been with Table Stakes," he says. "We changed the newsroom around to follow the mini-publisher team approach. As part of that transformation, we created a content development team, which I lead."

The team has seven journalists, which includes an investigations team, a data team and a special projects editor.

Prest describes their goal this way: "to try to expand our content into new formats, reach different audiences and to challenge our journalism. We keep pushing it forward really."

In doing this, his team has created a number of different types of projects from data visualisation pieces to long-form investigations as well as three major investigative video documentaries.

Decisions: Story format, planning and development

A key starting point for each major investigation is deciding on the right format for the story they are trying to tell.

"If we felt a story best lent itself to data visualisation, then that would be how we present our story," he says. "If a story was best told in a visual way, then we'd do that. And in certain cases, there are just some types of stories where you think, 'This is a video documentary. It's going to have the biggest resonance with our audience if you tell it this way. It's the best way to tell this story.'"



Based in Dundee, Scotland, DC Thomson is a news publisher that owns four daily newspapers: The Press and Journal, Evening Express, The Courier and The Evening Telegraph as well as magazines and radio stations.

DC Thomson has released three feature-length investigative documentaries in the past year. All have required extensive working with the company’s AV and graphics teams.

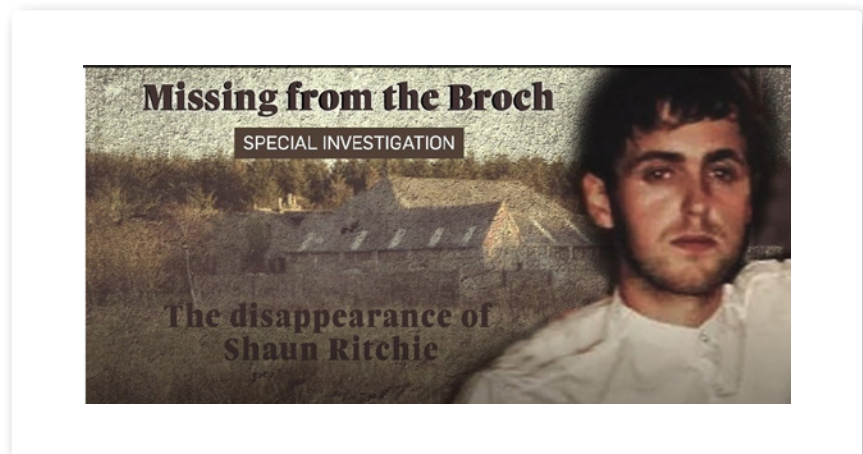
The first of these was “Missing from the Broch: The disappearance of Shaun Ritchie,” about a 20-year-old man who went missing after going to a remote farmhouse with a group of friends for a Halloween party in 2014.

Shortly after its release, DC Thomson announced the 40-minute documentary film broke engagement records for them with nearly 1,000 people signing up to The Press and Journal, their regional daily covering northern Scotland, to watch it in its first 10 days.

“Missing from the Broch” has been only available to subscribers, but people could also watch it by signing up for a 30-day free trial.

About six months later, in May 2022, DC Thomson released a second major investigative documentary, “A Short Walk Home,” which focused on the disappearance of Allan Bryant Jr., 23, who vanished in the early morning hours of 3 November 2013, after leaving a nightclub less than a mile from his home. This documentary was made for The Courier, DC Thomson’s regional daily based in Dundee.

For each documentary, Prest’s team spent a great deal of time talking with the men’s families and police investigators to try to get a better understanding of what happened to them, and what more could be done to try to help bring closure to their loved ones.



“It was important with these documentaries that firstly, we worked closely with the families involved,” he says. “And in both our circulation areas, our readership areas, we are the local media, so we have to be trusted to produce quality journalism and that means not just going in and working on a documentary and then disappearing.”

In addition to the interviews, an enormous amount of work goes into the planning and development of these kinds of documentaries.

“We’re a local paper, so long-running investigations are not something that you often have the resources and time to do,” Prest says. “But as we transform the newsroom, we’ve real-

ly wanted to de-couple some of those resources to take a small number of reporters away from day-to-day activities to ensure they have the time to carry out these investigations.”

This can be challenging, especially for newsrooms that don’t have the resources of major national dailies.

When each of the documentaries was finished, DC Thomson had extensive marketing campaigns to promote them across their properties along with email and social media. After all, a 40-minute investigative documentary is not a normal piece of content for most legacy news publishers, and they crafted these campaigns to ensure the audience knew what to expect before they clicked “play.”





Richard Prest
Head of Content Development,
DC Thomson

In addition, both “Missing from the Broch,” and “A Short Walk Home,” were released at 8 pm on Sunday nights. A third documentary, “The Hunt for Mr. X,” which looks into the escape and disappearance of the mastermind behind a 100 million pound Highland cocaine plot that took place in 1991, was released in mid-November 2022, just as we were finalising this report. Because of the timing, we have focused here on the learnings from the first two documentaries.

Outcome: Strong audience engagement, long-term subscription driver

The investigative team’s efforts are showing impressive results, and they are long-lived as well.

“Missing from the Broch,” has had particularly strong results.

“We saw that 60 percent of those people who viewed it watched 90 percent of it, and it was 40 minutes long,” Prest says. “So the engagement was really high.”

Even more importantly, he says that these projects need to have a long lifespan as they are a big investment in time.

“One thing that’s pleased us the most, even more than the huge number of subscriptions we got with the first one, was that we can still see on both of those pieces, people subscribing to watch a year on.”

He said this has also been true for previous investigations they have done in recent years that weren’t video, but long-form. He noted one of these were published more than two and a half years ago.

“It’s still got subscriptions coming through now. And that’s the important thing for us: We’re creating ever-green content that’s still attractive to an audience some-time down the line, and again, it provides value for the subscriptions.

Most of these pieces are hard-paywalled, and that’s the intention, to say ‘Look, for your subscription this is the quality and depth of content that we can give you on our sites.’”

A few weeks after our conversation with Prest, DC Thomson announced that the digital subscriptions for their daily news brands had surpassed 25,000 paid subscribers, 18 months after they had begun an ambitious drive to build a new, sustainable model for local journalism. The announcement also noted that in September’s Scottish Press Awards, The Courier was awarded Website of the Year and The Press and Journal was named Daily Newspaper of the Year.

While doing feature length investigative documentaries might not be a possibility for some publishers, DC Thomson has certainly hit on something that nearly every publisher can make use of and that’s re-examining those major stories from your archive that people in your market remember and still talk about from time to time.

As Prest puts it: “There’s absolutely no shame in going back to these stories that we did 30 years ago, if that’s a fantastic story. ... we can re-tell that old story in new ways.”

“The ones we’re doing are very much about retention, making sure those subscribers retain and see value in the subscription, but also brand builders to show potential subscribers we actually create journalism that’s a bit different.”

Prest also notes investigative content pieces can be effective in helping to recruit staff, offering the possibility of working on something deep and meaningful versus working somewhere where they might be expected to write 15 stories a day.

In summing up DC Thomson’s experiences with its investigative documentaries, Prest cites a key learning from Table Stakes: “It’s OK for stuff to go wrong as long as you look at it and ask ‘Why, and how you would change it, how you can fix it, and how can we make it better next time?’ And I think the newsroom has become really used to that process now. We just keep honing all the time.”

Creating a playbook helps transfer learnings to the next project

The DC Thomson team learned numerous lessons from making “Missing from the Broch,” which they were able to apply to their process while creating “A Short Walk Home,” and Prest says having a playbook from doing “Missing,” helped enormously.

“One of the great things about Table Stakes was we were always encouraged to keep playbooks and templates about how we did things so we could constantly iterate and change things and processes,” he says.

Video documentaries being a heavy investment in time and resources, the team had to make sure that the process is effective.

“What we’ve learned is trying to do as much as we can upfront in that process,” Prest says. “So you’re trying to plan it, work out how that’s going to come together. What the key elements of the story are. What the interviews are likely to be, and when they’re taking place. Everything is designed to try to make the filming and editing process as effective as possible.”

Among the many moving parts that need to be taken into consideration to help ensure effectiveness are:

- Creating a story arc for the documentary to follow with a clear beginning, middle and end
- Interviews with families, friends, witnesses and investigators
- Locational visits so the audience can see where the events took place
- Lots of editing

After making “Missing from the Broch,” Prest and his team sat down and evaluated what they had done, what worked well, and what they could do to make it even better the next time. This became their playbook.

Using an outlining technique common to film production, called storyboarding, Prest’s team along with DC Thomson’s AV specialists plotted out as much of the documentary as they could in advance, especially around the beginning, middle and end.

“One part we found quite challenging was how do we storyboard out the actual flow of the investigation,” he says. “How is the investigation going to be presented so that we can set up all these things in advance knowing what the outcome is going to be?”

As various pieces were filmed, the team would continue to refine the documentary’s timeline.

“We would then start to see the gaps and the continuity and what else was to be done,” Prest says. “That gave us a really early indication for our graphics team and our data team, to say ‘We need a map here. We need data visualisation here.’”

Throughout the process, he adds, they have found that “we need a specific person in there who is the conduit, who is able to keep everything just bouncing along to make sure that it when it comes time, six months down the line, and you’re launching, nobody says ‘Oh, I haven’t done that.’ Because it’s difficult. It can be really complicated to get all those things to come seamlessly together.”

Families

Many of our Table Stakes Europe teams have come up with the idea of addressing families as a specific audience. But what does it really mean to address “families” – a term so big and full of varieties? Who is it exactly that news publishers can reach with special content? And what is the topic that best engages families? Teams from Germany and the UK describe in this chapter how they found answers to these questions. Both teams succeeded in finding new audiences and making them loyal users. At this point we can already reveal that the key to success went beyond just delivering journalistic content.

Case Study 10: Rheinische Post, Germany

Baby steps helped a giant to stride ahead

Rheinische Post is a large and influential media group in the Rhineland, in the west of Germany, a regional giant. Their flagship title started its Table Stakes Europe, audience-centric journey with “Willkommen, Baby!”, a cluster of digital content targeted at parents-to-be. It was a game-changer, and nudged the publisher forward in its digital transformation. Here is how.

Challenge: Truly moving from editor-centric to user-centric quality journalism

From the start of their Table Stakes Europe challenge, the team was clear that whereas RP is a huge, regional player in print, their digital brand needs strengthening.

RHEINISCHE POST

Rheinische Post Media Group is a large regional media group, which includes four newspapers in the west of Germany. Other activities include interests in radio stations, classified advertising, printing services, call centres, transport and logistics.

The group’s flagship newspaper, the Rheinische Post itself was established in 1946. It covers a region that includes four large cities including Düsseldorf. RP has 260 journalists and is printing 19 local editions. It has the largest circulation in the Rhineland, enjoys 225,000 subscribers, including 50,000 digital subscribers. Roughly, half of these subscribe to the e-paper version, rather than its digital web content, RP+. Overall, the 25-year-old website gets 10 million unique users a month.

The crux of the journey was to transfer the impact, trust and loyalty they have been enjoying so far from print to digital. The team also originally admitted that not everyone in the company is sure that most of their current readers would be ready to change their habits and pay for digital news.

The seven-person strong team comprised a mix of skills, including editorial, data, product and marketing. They were confident that RP’s journalism had real relevance locally and regionally. Some online tests had already shown the potential for improving online revenue generation, and a newly launched paid offer had been working quite well. However, although their journalists were working for both print and online, most workflows were clearly print focused.

The lack of targeted content for targeted audiences was an obvious gap, and a lot of questions remained around what content should be placed behind the paywall. On the User Experience (UX) side, RP also knew the journey to subscription had to be dramatically improved.

The RP team was clear: they wanted to move “From product centric To audience centric journalism” and “From success by chance To success by knowing and addressing their readers needs,” as well as their problems, interests and passions.

RP was also ready to adopt clear quantitative goals. Among others, they wanted to reach 2.7 out of 3 million inhabitants in their coverage area (90% penetration) and serve 250,000 total subscribers.

Decisions: You can start with a small audience, even a very small one

The RP team had several specific audiences in mind and ran a few different tests, for example with the Runners community and with participants to certain local festivals. One became vital though: “Willkommen, Baby!” (Welcome Baby!) was aimed at young families or parents expecting a new child.

Across all 19 local editions roughly 100 articles were published between February and March 2022. The primary focus was set on service content (“How to find the right birth clinic”), enriched with a small amount of more emotional pieces, e.g. parent reports on their first 100 days of parenthood.

As Henning Bulka, Head of Digital Desk, remembers: “We have always been experts on reporting and analysing hard news. However, making a dedicated effort to touch the hearts and souls of our readers regarding a certain topic was new to us. The success of these kinds of stories now results in them being standard repertoire for all audience coverage.”

The team published digital content across 3 weeks. It attracted 25,000 engaged users and generated 200,000 page impressions. 75% of the traffic came from women, well above the site’s average; more than half of the readers were aged between 20 and 40, when RP content usually attracts only a third of its audience from this age



group. Not only was the content effective with the target audience, it was also helping to redress the overall imbalance of the readership.

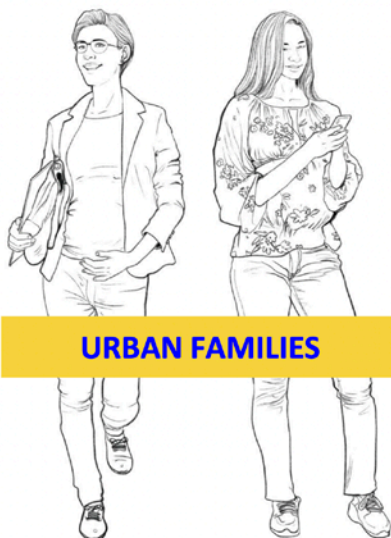
Importantly it proved the impact and potential of properly targeting users’ specific needs and created a new community of engaged users. On the revenue side, the project yielded 220 ePaper subscriptions, 26 RP+ conversions and 20,000 Euros of advertising.

It also inspired the team to publish one of their “White Papers”, a digital e-book including their highest performing content over the run of the experiment that continues to have a long shelf-life well after the official end of the project.

AUDIENCE UNDERSTAND THE YOUNGER AUDIENCE



RHEINISCHE POST



NEW: AUDIENCE OFFICIALLY DEFINED

- 30-50 years
- 860.000 potential inhabitants; 20% in contact
- become more **female**
- higher income
- **performance-oriented**
- **family-minded**, relationship-oriented
- importance of free time / **active leisure**
- high importance of **lifestyle** (living, fashion, health, food)
- news seeker and **always on**



Outcomes: Building on the success to widen the audience

The success of “Welcome Baby!” confirmed the potential and power of audience-centric quality journalism. The team started a new iteration and defined a wider audience to target, Urban Families (see the image on the previous page for details).

They divided targeted content using three sub-types of stories:

- Stories that are absolutely Core (including issues like Housing for example) and that really fitted RP’s current image within the target
- Stories that present the most obvious next Opportunities (for example Relationships and Family)
- Stories that will provide Digital Expansion on the target (for example Self-Growth or Entertainment).

Targeted content has provided clear results. For example, every time the RP team has chosen a so-called “focus-topic”, they report a 20% increase in conversion rate and a larger share of younger readers, the extreme being “Welcome, Baby”.

One of the key remaining challenges around acquisition had been the users’ practical path to conversion. Although this does not directly relate to editorial needs, the user journey had to be drastically improved. RP’s marketing team was able to shorten the checkout process, with the user’s email address becoming the only mandatory field to fill in.

The subscriptions offer itself was made clearer, without a fast ending trial period, and all subscription offers are presented in the now typical three-column view on the paywall landing page. With the favoured one in the middle... of course! All measures led to a conversation rate that has more than doubled. (Read more about the evolution of the paywall landing page on page 62.)

As the RP team is looking ahead to their next challenge, they insist they will keep building and creating new mini-publishing teams around key audiences, including short-term, so-called “pop-up” audiences, such as holiday-makers experiencing chaos at Düsseldorf airport.

To move more quickly towards a digital-first approach, they also intend to further “de-couple” the layout of print newspaper pages away from the gathering and writing of stories and freeing up more resources for digital publishing. Finally, they are considering whether RP needs to rethink its options on metering in addition to the premium paywall.

Achievements during TSE:

A growing number of journalists at Rheinische Post is involved in the TSE method and **several mini-publishing teams have been launched**, targeting audiences such as runners, housing and families, with more to come. The audience-focused content is **driving +50% traffic from both female and younger audiences**, while **a streamlined journey to subscription** has improved the conversion rate greatly (see p. 62).

Key learning from TSE:

“The number one learning point has been the need to go out there, and meet and understand the audiences. You also shouldn’t be afraid to set quantitative goals and use data to drive change. Finally, celebrate success – and duplicate it!”

Case Study 11: Birmingham Live, United Kingdom

Creating a community for local families



Zoe Chamberlain
Parenting Editor,
Birmingham Live



Started as an online community for mothers (and fathers!) living in the Birmingham area, the Brummie Mummies network engages local families through a newsletter, a podcast and on social media.

Birmingham Live first started its online network for parents in the UK's Midlands region in 2015. Called "Brummie Mummies" – "Brummie" being a term for someone from Birmingham – the initiative aims to bring together local families and help them keep up to date with family-friendly activities in the region.

In addition to a section on the Birmingham Live website, Brummie Mummies features a weekly newsletter and a podcast, with new episodes released every two weeks. It also has active social media profiles on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

The Brummie Mummies audience initiative is run by Zoe Chamberlain, Parenting Editor at Birmingham Live. Her role is entrepreneurial in the sense that it includes both content and commercial aspects: she has, for example, sold sponsorships to the podcast.

Pre-Covid, Brummie Mummies also organised social events, allowing parents and families to meet up in real life. Live events have been on pause since the start of the pandemic, but the team hopes to bring them back in 2023 through a partnership approach.

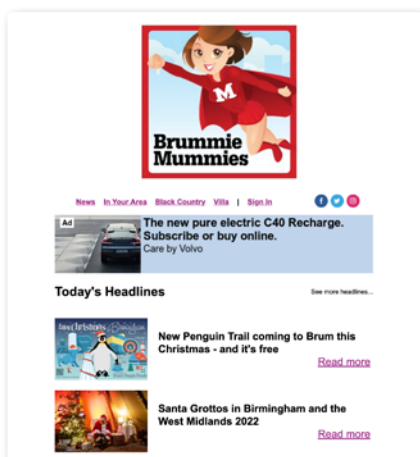
Taking the parenting community to the next level

When Birmingham Live joined Table Stakes Europe, the team soon decided that the publisher's existing parenting community was an excellent test case for learning more about audience-specific content and how to build a two-way relationship with a community.

"Using Brummie Mummies as a case study in Table Stakes enabled us to really focus on what our audience wants from us. We concentrated on ways to increase subscribers to the list and also how to re-engage customers who had become inactive for various reasons," says Christina Savvas, Customer Editor.

"It was an ideal time to experiment with engagement on social and newsletters and also focus on our open rates and click-to-open rates," she says. "We tracked where subscribers came from and also tried various tools to look at how adding value for our customers through competitions and discount codes drives more interest."

These experiments provided a significant boost in audiences: in February 2022, there were 4,700 subscribers to the newsletter. By September of the same year, the figure had grown to 7,500 – an increase of almost 60%. Meanwhile, Brummie Mummies has become Reach's top performing non-sport regional podcast.



Niche audiences

As we have seen, the concept of addressing audiences is a basic principle for gaining digital revenue. Naturally, each publisher may have different types of audiences. Some of them may even be unique. In this chapter we present some special approaches that our teams took. We hear about a Christian community, about an unusual kind of commuter, about an attempt to reach Muslims in a large city and about the community built around Legionarios, a Spanish military unit using YouTube. You might not have the same exact audiences in your area, but this chapter will inspire you to think about your own niche audiences. So read on and consider who they might be!

Case Study 12: Nederlands Dagblad, The Netherlands

How a Christian newspaper is reaching out to the Netherland's evangelical community

Nederlands Dagblad is a national news outlet with Christian roots in the Netherlands, writing about Protestant and Catholic news. But in the Netherlands, there is also an evangelical group of Christians – about 200,000 of them – with no media outlet focusing on this group. ND saw an opportunity, and jumped right in: in the fall of 2021 it started to create content about and for Dutch evangelicals.

nederlandsdagblad

CHRISTELIJK BETROKKEN

Publisher bio: Founded in 1944, Nederlands Dagblad is a national newspaper. It has a Reformed Protestant background but today, ND is a broad Christian newspaper. Located in Amersfoort, it is one of three independent newspapers in the country, owned by a Dutch company.

ND focuses on general news (domestic and international) and analyses current affairs from a Christian point of view. It also writes about politics, economics, art, culture, human rights and climate change. In 1996 it became the first Dutch newspaper with a website, and in 2011 it was the first daily newspaper in the Netherlands to implement a paywall.

The newspaper has about 45 reporters and a number of freelancers, who write stories for 25,000 subscribers: 14,000 for the printed newspaper, 4,000 digital only and 7,000 hybrids. ND's daily newsletter has more than 50,000 readers, and 85,000 people receive its weekly newsletter.

By Robin van Deutekom, Ambassador for the Online Team, and Marina de Haan, Journalist

Challenge: Increasing the subscriber base by targeting evangelicals

Dutch evangelicals are not the same as American evangelicals. Our evangelicals are mainly leftist when it comes to politics. They are regular churchgoers, believe in a personal God, and they are big fans of prayer. They are also open to miracles, the supernatural and apply their beliefs in their daily lives. And although our newspaper is aimed at Christian audiences, we realised that many of the 200,000 Dutch evangelicals aren't reading us yet.

The challenge we address through Table Stakes Europe (TSE) is to accelerate the number of new Dutch evangelical subscribers by at least 50 percent. They are a new audience to us: we are getting to know them, and we are working passionately to create content that fits their lifestyle.

More broadly, TSE helped improve the way we organise digital work in the whole newsroom. Not just for our target audience, but for additional target audiences we will launch in the (near) future. Hopefully TSE will give every editor a strong yet gentle push towards digital transformation. Paper is expensive, and to survive as a newspaper (or better, a "journalistic entity") our digital subscriptions need to increase.

Our TSE team consists of five colleagues, who work closely together in different departments: Dick Schinkelshoek (Team Leader, Religion Desk), Robin van Deutekom (Ambassador for the Online Team), Johan Wondergem (Marketing Manager), Rinder Sekeris (Director-Publisher) and Marina de Haan (Journalist).

Decisions: Introducing new content types, data-sharing in the newsroom

We started by hiring a reporter to write specifically about evangelicals in the Netherlands. Marina is part of a well-known evangelical church in the country, she understands the community, and has a large network. One story at a time we made our current readers familiar with evangelicals.

Since the fall of 2021 we have been consistently writing all kinds of (news) articles, interviews and analysis for this audience segment, as well as starting a dedicated newsletter. That’s an early win. Just like a new series of stories: in February we started a new weekly interview series, called “Out of the depth,” where people share their struggles with (mental) health and their faith.

The series is recognisable, almost all articles pop up in the most-read lists, and are made premium (only available to subscribers). The articles generate new readers for our newsletter, but not many new paying subscribers.

Another early win is that our online editor Robin had one-on-ones with every journalist to talk about the use of data. All journalists and editors receive a regular report of their articles’ CPIs (an index measuring a story’s performance, consisting of Exposure, Engagement and Loyalty). We are conducting detailed surveys to find out how they use these reports and – more importantly – what they think of them. We are absolutely confident that editors will use the reports more frequently when the data get a “human-like” translation – which means that we are experimenting with the framing of the numbers.

But the most important questions concern the psychological side of data: What are your thoughts and concerns about using data on a daily basis? Are you willing to let the numbers influence your decision making processes?

All of this has received a huge boost since the ending of pandemic restrictions. More people work in the office now. The online team is always there, and it is purposely positioned in the middle of our newsroom. This team has made it a habit to discuss headline writing out loud, which means that everybody in the newsroom is getting familiar with (at least snippets) of the attention and thought processes that go into thinking “digital first.”

Until August 2022 our digital team didn’t have an editor. Now that we do, the voice of the online team will be of equal importance in editorial meetings, which is an important win.



The team of Nederlands Dagblad recording a live podcast episode at a Christian conference.

All of these steps contribute to a newsroom-wide understanding of why we use TSE for our evangelical audience. During the TSE-year, this has led to a steady growth of curiosity and enthusiasm among team leaders and editors – and a lot of them can't wait to use the approach themselves.

What was challenging – But to be frank, during this process, we didn't stop doing... well... anything, as we have so far focused on other aspects of the TSE process. But as of October 2022 we will have a small team specifically dedicated to digital transformation, consisting of two innovation managers and a data analyst.

We also found out that the “fear of blank pages” – the fear that there will not be enough content in the print paper – is very real and, above all, has a paralysing effect on any journalist who wants to work digital first. The print editors have the power, because they've always had the power. Currently, most of our articles are still written for print first.

Outcome: Audience-focused stories performing well online

Our TSE-goal is to increase the influx of new evangelical readers (500 new subscribers from this group in 2021, and the goal for 2022 is 750). In the second quarter of the year, our evangelical subscriptions were up by 63 percent.

One action that helped with this was the stand we had during the Pentecost weekend at the largest Christian conference in the Netherlands. This was a four-day festival with approximately 60,000 visitors a day.

At the stand, we had our own programme with interviews with special guests, workshops and a live podcast recording.

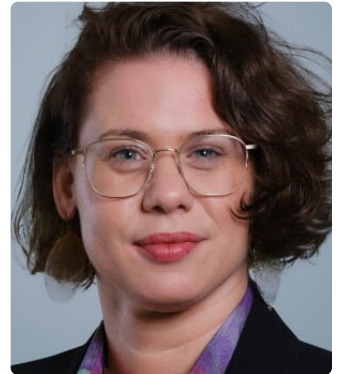
We tried to get email addresses for our recently launched evangelical newsletter, but that didn't go as expected. Not at all. So we changed to selling subscriptions. That resulted in 250 new subscribers (33 percent of our goal for the year) at the conference. Our total number of evangelical subscribers is now at 700. We are positive we'll reach our goal of 750 by the end of the year.

Our evangelical newsletter started with a dozen readers, and we are now at 372. This is far from our goal of 1,000 readers at the end of 2022. But this is also due to a delay in the development of a new newsletter tool, which we expect to have a big effect on the influx.

Loyal and new readers respond very well to the evangelical stories on our website. They have the highest CPI of all the different sections, and also the “most article reads” of all the sections.



Robin van Deutekom
Ambassador for the Online Team, Nederlands Dagblad



Marina de Haan
Journalist, Nederlands Dagblad

Achievements during TSE:

During their TSE participation, Nederlands Dagblad aimed to engage the Netherlands' evangelical community, **and the publisher is on target to increase subscriptions from this audience by 750** by the end of 2022. **30% of their new subscribers are now Evangelicals.** Moreover, the newsroom **has switched to writing online-first**, and the publisher has started **a new mini-publishing team** focusing on Christian students, with other mini-publishing teams to follow.

Key learning from TSE:

“What we learned and loved most without a doubt is the collaboration between the writers in the newsroom, the marketing department and the online colleagues. It has been a great learning experience to work closely together, and to improve our stories online and in the paper.”

Case Study 13: Tribune de Genève, Switzerland

Getting cross-border commuters on board

During its participation in the Table Stakes Europe programme, the Tribune de Genève team identified several audiences they could better target. One of these is very specific to its geographical area, namely cross-border commuters, a large group of Swiss and French people who live and work between Geneva and neighbouring France.

Challenge: Winning over 120,000 cross-border commuters

In the region, it's called being a "saute-frontière": living in France but working in Geneva. "At the end of 2021, we estimated the cross-border audience at around 120,000 people, including more than 100,000 commuters who



Tribune de Genève is published in French-speaking Switzerland. It is one of the news brands of the Tamedia group, a division of the TX Group. Tamedia employs 1,800 people in French and German-speaking Switzerland and also publishes 24 heures, Bilan, Le Matin Dimanche, Tages-Anzeiger, Basler Zeitung, Der Bund and SonntagsZeitung.

Tribune de Genève is dedicated to the news and themes essential to the daily lives of the 500,000 inhabitants of the Canton of Geneva. The brand serves this local audience from Monday to Saturday via its daily newspaper (paid circulation of around 30,700 copies) and continuously on tdg.ch and its mobile applications (around 250,000 daily digital users and almost 17,000 paid digital subscribers). The brand is also popular on social networks with almost 400,000 followers on the main platforms.

cross the 100 or so kilometres of border between Switzerland and France almost every day," explains Karim Mahjoub, Commercial Manager. "Around 10,000 cross-border readers connect to tdg.ch every month. We, therefore, have a lot of room for improvement."

A quarter of the jobs in the canton of Geneva, particularly in the fields of health, services, commerce and catering, are held by these cross-border workers. They mainly live in the departments of Haute-Savoie and Ain. They are Swiss or French, and during their leisure time or for shopping, navigate between the two countries.

Frédéric Julliard, Editor-in-Chief of TdG, and his deputies Sophie Davaris and Olivier Bot, as well as Karim Mahjoub had long had the intuition that this population had a need for information corresponding to this way of life, very different from other Geneva audiences. The team decided it should be one of the audiences to focus on during their Table Stakes Europe year, entrusting their digital manager, Aymeric Dejardin-Verkinder, with the responsibility of building a mini-publisher team on this subject.

Decisions: Specific content and partnerships

"Cross-border commuters give their views": Tribune de Genève's editorial projects often start with a survey, and their audience survey specialist, Caroline Meyer, is not afraid to get to the bottom of things and ask respondents dozens of questions. Launched in mid-March via their website and a panel of readers, the survey obtained very encouraging results: "In the space of 24 hours, we received nearly 1,200 completed questionnaires, half of which came from the core target group of cross-border



commuters, which is huge! This showed us this audience exists and that it is very responsive and in demand of information specifically dedicated to it,” says Dejardin-Verkinder.

What emerged from the survey was this audience’s need for more information on subjects that concern them as daily commuters, but also information related to their particular status (legislation, taxation, tax issues, etc.)

and more generally on future projects they should know about. The responses also showed they are interested in other topics (e.g. housing, employment, culture, shopping, etc.).

The project team began by monitoring the topics already covered by the editorial team and likely to be of interest to the audience and systematically tagging them. Dejardin-Verkinder built a data dashboard to monitor content and audience performance for the cross-border target and also set up a dedicated slack channel to coordinate efforts with the project team and other journalists in the newsroom who could support the work on this new audience.

In parallel, the project team started discussions with a powerful local association called Groupement transfrontalier européen (GTE) and approached other specialists who could help them provide regular and relevant content on specific aspects (legal issues, mobility, tax system, insurance...). This led to regular contributions in exchange for the visibility of these organisations on the Tribune de Genève platforms.



Aymeric Dejardin-Verkinder, Digital Manager (left), and Karim Mahjoub, Commercial Manager, presenting Tribune de Genève’s progress during a Table Stakes Europe session.

To strengthen the links with this community, the team launched a newsletter called “Saute-Frontière.” “On 1 June 2022, we launched the first issue,” remembers Desjardin-Verkinder. The newsletter was to be sent out twice a month, on Wednesdays at 11 am. “Following the first mailing, within 48 hours we had over 500 new subscribers. The numbers continued to climb even during the summer, as by the end of August we had already exceeded 1,800. The ‘cross-border’ articles were very popular with our readership and regularly appeared in the Top 10 most-read articles on the Tribune de Genève website,” adds Dejardin-Verkinder.

Outcome: Expectations exceeded in all areas!

In early September, the monthly newsletter began going out every week. The team had started cautiously, not quite sure if they could meet the expectations of their audience and keep up the pace. But this is one of those cases where the enthusiasm of the readers pushes the editorial team to take the plunge and go the extra mile.

By the end of their Table Stakes Europe challenge in mid-November, the newsletter had surpassed 3,000 subscribers, a target they had originally set for the end of the year, and the figure was steadily increasing week by week (in fact, the three audiences they had chosen to work on for their challenge were all ahead of target). Their open rate was excellent (76%) and the click-through rate (11.4%) was above the group’s average.

Another piece of good news was that two-thirds of the +3,000 subscribers to “Saute-Frontière” were not yet paid subscribers to Tribune de Genève, so the top of the funnel was well filled with potential new digital subscribers.

The team decided to start thinking about new formats (podcast and video) for next year and to test billing the digital subscription in euros rather than Swiss francs.

Achievements during TSE:

Tribune de Genève’s Table Stakes Europe challenge aimed to increase paid digital subscribers by better serving the high-potential audiences they had identified. At the start of November, they measured that **47 paid articles produced specifically for their cross-border audience generated a cumulative total of 2,706 conversions** on their sites. **That is an average of 57.7 conversions per article.**

Registrations to the cross-border newsletter are still going strong and likely to pass the 3,500 mark in December.

Key learning from TSE:

One of the smart things Commercial Manager Karim Mahjoub and Chief Editor Frédéric Julliard did (using all the data collected by their audiences teams and their Digital Manager Aymeric Dejardin-Verkinder) was to keep their advertising team informed of the progress they were making with the three audiences they had chosen in the programme (families, food lovers and cross-borders). Here are some quotes from the sales team that they shared at the end of the programme:

“The work of building audiences pays off. It is not only about developing a significant critical mass but also about gathering all the useful qualitative information that this audience represents.”

“We started to monetise the newsletters with advertisers, by communicating not only the number of registrations, but above all qualitative data: click rate, time spent on the pages, conversions, and all the other information collected during the surveys. We are also working on setting up competitions to animate the community and partnerships allowing us to create paying events in affinity with our audiences.”

Case Study 14: Reach, United Kingdom

Reaching out to the local Muslim community

The UK publisher's newsletter "Brummie Muslims" features a mix of content from lifestyle to food tips and political news aimed at the diverse Muslim community living in the West Midlands region. Its success has generated numerous learnings about audience engagement, and has opened the door for other possible newsletters for different communities.

Challenge: Engaging the vibrant local Muslim communities

Reach plc. is definitely not your typical Table Stakes Europe team. While most groups in the programme pursue a revenue strategy that relies heavily on paid content –

Reach

The Birmingham Live website belongs to the British publishing group Reach plc., the largest commercial publisher in the UK and Ireland with 130 news brands.

Birmingham Live is the leading digital publisher covering the Birmingham market, a region with around 1.2 million inhabitants, 2.2 million in the greater metropolitan area.

It reaches up to 18.5 million people a month, including half of Birmingham, with routinely more than 60m page impressions. The team has grown in the past year and there are now more than 50 people in the newsroom.

Reach's business model is based on the belief that digital news should be free. Therefore monetisation happens primarily through advertising.

subscriptions or membership models – the UK's largest local news publisher follows the belief that news should be free online.

This poses a particular challenge for the Birmingham Live team, which is one of the largest at Reach: They are bound by their publisher's philosophy that rules out paywalls, but still aspire to monetise audiences in ways beyond advertising. While the latter has proven to be quite difficult, the Birmingham team would be a serious contender for a gold medal in the discipline of building audiences quickly.

The team exudes confidence, having built up one of the fastest growing digital sites in the Reach universe since the group underwent a digital revolution in the 2010s. Much earlier than many others, the publisher – formerly Trinity Mirror – had decided that there would only be a digital future and has pursued it vigorously since. "We do what we know very, very well", Chief Audience Editor David Higginson said at the beginning of the coaching process, "but we also know our limitations".

This "very, very well" can be expressed in numbers: it accounts for eight of the UK's top 25 websites by page impressions in the latest data. While headquarters sets strict KPIs for the entire publisher, the local teams are free to experiment in order to grow a variety of audiences.

Brummie Mummies has been one such example in Birmingham. The effort that was launched in 2015 targets young parents – as the name demonstrates mostly mothers – with a newsletter, podcast, and on several social media platforms (see p. 48 to learn more about Brummie Mummies.).



Christina Savvas
Customer Editor,
Reach plc.

Building on this success story, the team – while participating in the Table Stakes Europe programme – was ready for yet another challenge. They decided to tap into the potential of Birmingham’s vibrant Muslim communities. The opportunity arose when trainee reporter Anisah Vasta gladly took on the challenge to engage with them on a deeper and more consistent level. Customer Editor Christina Savvas, who drives the audience efforts, supported her, along with Birmingham Live Editor Graeme Brown and Audience and Content Director Anna Jeys, who together formed the TSE core team.

Decisions: Creating a communication channel for the community

In April 2022 **Brummie Muslims** was born, a newsletter launched at the beginning of Ramadan. It was created to offer a mix of content from lifestyle, for example street food must-haves and the best clothes shops to get Eid outfits, to fly-tipping (illegal dumping of waste) being a blight on communities, and the lasting impact of the “Trojan Horse affair”, a controversy involving an alleged conspiracy to “Islamise” the local school system.


“Brummie Muslims is a product we’re really proud of”, Christina Savvas says. “We hope it substantiates our commitment to representing and writing for the diverse Muslim community in our region.”

Since the launch with a bit of a slow start, hundreds and hundreds of people have signed up and Brummie Muslims has been the fastest growing newsletter across Birmingham Live’s offerings. In September 2022, Brummie Muslims had more than 4,000 subscribers, with an average open rate of 37%. It was the feedback from members of the community that had galvanised the team to continue the great work and seek more collaborations, Savvas says.

In the autumn of 2022, Birmingham Live sported 22 newsletters, among others one for the fans of the TV series “Peaky Blinders” and one for people eager to save money in times of inflation. While the TSE team hasn’t found an overall valid recipe for success, they distilled some lessons to be of particular value.

First, there needs to be a committed individual driving the effort, ideally belonging to the potential audience as in the case of Brummie Muslims. Second, a more personal style of writing proved to be more engaging than automatically generated newsletters.

Calls for 'abandoned' city baths to be reopened Read in browser



Brummie Muslims


BirminghamLive

[Ramadan](#) [Muslim Communities](#) [Eid](#) | [Sign In](#)

Good evening,

BirminghamLive will be giving you the latest news on what's happening in Muslim communities across Birmingham and the West Midlands.

Community members from Bordesley Green and Small Heath have called for the Small Heath Leisure Centre swimming baths to be reopened. Read more below about their views and the council's response.



Youtuber Shahrukh tried plenty of food at Rockaburger, a popular spot on Ladypool Road.

Our reporter Robson went on a food tour with popular Brummie Youtuber Halal Munchie Reviews Shahrukh Farrakh. He joined Sharukh on a medley of food around the city. Read more below!

Third, the audience needs to be given careful thought. It makes a difference whether the product targets younger or older groups, for example, even when dealing with the same topic.

With the Brummie Muslims audience, Christina Savvas found one thing to be particularly important. “We always encourage readers to get in touch with our writers directly. Rather than being a one-way newsletter, Brummie Muslims offers a communication channel for Muslims across the West Midlands to connect and tell us about the incredible things they are doing in their communities.”

Outcome: Newsroom inspired to connect with other communities

According to Savvas, the team regularly receives very positive feedback with regard to how the newsletter helps to tackle inequality. A particularly encouraging comment came from one local politician, she recalls.

Councillor Waseem Zaffar said: “I think it was one of the best media projects I’ve come across. The Muslim community is under attack, and through this initiative, the wider community has been able to get a better understanding of Muslims and their practices through excellent journalism.”

Birmingham Live aims to further grow Brummie Muslims, to seek more collaborations, and to invite members of the community to contribute. There has also been another positive effect: The project has inspired young journalists in the newsroom to bring forward other ideas for newsletters, including a newsletter targeted at the Sikh community.

Savvas is very excited about this: “It would be great if we could create newsletters for different communities and create an event where people are brought together to celebrate different foods and cultures,” she says.

Building diverse audiences and then connecting them – there is not much more that a programme aimed at strengthening local journalism could ask for, except for one thing: economic sustainability.

Achievements during TSE:

In addition to the success with the Brummie Muslims newsletter, Reach **spread the entrepreneurial spirit within the company**, adopting a test-and-learn approach with new initiatives. They successfully **expanded their Brummie Mummies audience** (read more on page 48), as well as **starting newsletters about the TV show Peaky Blinders and money saving**, and **launching the brand “Couriously” for young audiences**.

Key learning from TSE:

“Table Stakes offered us an opportunity to step back and think. We are obsessed with audience and growth, but constantly in the moment. It was great to be able to incubate a project, focusing on things we need to get better at, in an environment where we could share thoughts with others.”

Case Study 15: La Voz de Almería, Spain

Spanish Legion, foodies content help drive progress towards digital subscriptions

The Spanish newspaper used the Table Stakes methodology to identify a new focus audience, the Spanish Legion and the broader community around the military unit. La Voz de Almería has since launched a dedicated website section, newsletter and a YouTube channel to serve this target audience.

Challenge: A method for identifying new audiences

While taking part in the third session of Table Stake Europe (TSE), the team from La Voz de Almería has undergone a far-reaching change. This is due, among other factors, to the fact that it has been able to target its audience while focusing on specific interest groups instead of its general audience; for example, on the followers of the (Foreign) Legion, an elite unit in the Spanish Army that is popular for its uniform and style of marching, as well as targeting foodies.

Through a multidisciplinary team that has incorporated data analysis, the newspaper has managed to identify new themes aimed at very specific audiences in the region, with some surprising results.

La Voz de Almería

La Voz de Almería is a Spanish newspaper that has been published since 1939 in the province of Almería (southern Spain), from which it takes its name. The newspaper currently has around 1,100 subscribers to its print edition, and it is aiming – if all goes to plan – to launch a digital subscription offering in the future.

Before La Voz de Almería began the TSE project in October 2021, its approach had basically been a traditional one: maintaining the usual content of the newspaper while looking for new themes, although in a rather random way.

This approach did not yield the desired results, however, possibly because the intuition and experience of the newsroom staff was not able to identify readers' new interests. In this context, any doubts around the launch of a subscription model were understandable.

The idea of exploring the creation of content on the Legion was one of the first audience-driven trials, and it emerged from the methodology of the Table Stakes programme.

An analysis of a number of criteria – if an audience is attractive in terms of scope, if there is potential income, the time dedicated to a particular interest by the audience, if we are or can be the best to cover it and if it is sufficiently interesting – led the La Voz de Almería team to realise that it was one of the options with the greatest potential. The methodology proved to be much more efficient than the intuition and experience of the newsroom staff.

Decisions: Creating dashboards and bringing about a mindset change

The Spanish Legion is an elite military unit set up in 1920. It is very popular for some features when compared to more conventional armies. The Legion's relationship with Almería goes back a long way. The first barracks were set up in 1924, and the corps now has more than 2,000 members in the region, in a community not only made up of soldiers but also their families and supporters.



Laura Martínez
Digital Strategy Director,
La Voz de Almería

One of its characteristics is that its members march at 160 steps per minute, much faster than any other unit. Indeed, this is the name of the first newsletter specifically aimed at this audience.

As Digital Strategy Director Laura Martínez says: “This choice has meant that we had to set up a new action with a whole series of elements in a faster and less planned way than usual, i.e. without being fully aware of what we were doing while also carrying out the technique of the design/do programme.”

Some of the resistance to change within the newsroom was also put to the test, although this has gradually been overcome. “It helped us to see that not everything you put on the table is easy to achieve. We are still looking for collaborators, for example, to help us push the content a bit more and focus it on the audience better.”

The work done in recent months has also had two major effects for the team and the way it works. First, being able to create a dashboard quickly, with data that help to analyse, plan and implement change. However, as Laura Martínez points out, the newsroom editors are still assimilating this change.

Second, and no less important, it has brought about a change of mentality on the part of the editors to help them become “mini-publishers.” Such has been the transformation and commitment of the newsroom staff that they have even proposed new marketing techniques. Laura Martínez describes it as “an initiative that is being fully implemented, and we hope it will become a reality in the near future.”

Outcome: First step towards an extensive culture change in the newsroom

Based on the experience acquired with the project on the Legion, the team of La Voz de Almería has again applied the “audience approach,” managing to identify a new group – foodies – that they have called Foodineta, with a play on words between food y furgoneta (the vans used to sell food in the streets).



In addition to the 2,000 members the Spanish Legion has in Almería, there is a wider community of soldiers’ families and supporters in the region. Photo: La Voz de Almería.

This audience-driven orientation is helping to visualise the effects of the programme in the newsroom in a practical way, making it more real and tangible, says Laura Martínez, who led the TSE project last year.

Although they are still trying out the methodology and are waiting to see the long-term results, it is clear the groundwork has been laid – not without some difficulties – to bring about a far-reaching change in the culture of the newsroom.

As for the results, Martínez points out that “they were less positive than we would have liked but are considered good as a start, bearing in mind that the summer clearly hampered the implementation process.”

By November 2022, La Voz de Almería had 272 subscribers to its weekly newsletter “A 160 pasos” and 750 followers on the corresponding YouTube channel. Moreover, 1138 users from that audience have registered on the website. The Foodineta newsletter has 644 subscribers, registered web users coming from an audience of 3076 web users.

Nevertheless, this learning process based on the audience-focused approach has helped them to devise a subscription model that will surely help to improve the newspaper’s economic sustainability.

Achievements during TSE:

In addition to “A 160 pasos”, La Voz de Almería has launched **the Foodineta newsletter aimed at foodies in the region**. During their TSE year the publisher reached **60,000 registered users** and **almost 1,000 subscribers for the new newsletters** aimed at specific audiences. This has helped the company to build a strong foundation for the future and allows them to **explore a new reader revenue strategy** that includes subscriptions.

Key learning from TSE:

“Two things, mainly: teamwork in multidisciplinary teams generates brainstorming and helps the workflow to improve and produce real changes, and perseverance in efforts to change people’s mentality, with a lot of trial-and-error and specific approaches for each group.”

07 NOVIEMBRE 2022
Ver en el navegador

La Voz de Almería

160 PASOS

Toda la actualidad de Defensa en la provincia de Almería a paso legionario - JAVIER PAJARÓN

La Legión regresa primera línea

La Legión regresó este domingo a zona de operaciones con el desembarco del primer grupo de militares del contingente BRLIB XXXVIII, esto es, el trigésimo octavo relevo de la misión Libre Hidalgo de los cascos azules españoles en Líbano.

A la misma hora que se envían estas líneas, los legionarios despliegan en la base Miguel de Cervantes de Marjayoun, que LA VOZ DE ALMERÍA visitó en 2016.

La tarde del domingo las familias y los compañeros despidieron en el Aeropuerto de Almería a los componentes de **la primera rotación hacia Líbano**. La previsión es que pudieran iniciar el traslado de Beirut a Marjayoun (sureste de Líbano) a partir de medianoche, en acto nocturno y con importantes medidas de seguridad.

Mandos legionarios, con el general Melchor Marín Elvira a la cabeza, **viajaron a principios de septiembre a la zona para reconocer el terreno y preparar el futuro despliegue**.



Una segunda oportunidad en Mali

La Unión Europea anunció a principios de este año el fin de la misión de apoyo a las tropas malienses. La operación estaba tocada de muerte tras el golpe de estado de 2020 y, más recientemente, la entrada de los mercenarios rusos del **Grupo Wagner**. En julio el último militar francés cruzó la frontera hacia Níger, en el norte, y la UE quedó en una posición muy comprometida.

Sin embargo, esta semana la UE ha dado un giro en sus declaraciones sobre el conflicto y ha asegurado que **“el compromiso sigue intacto hasta 2024”**. Esto significa que las tropas europeas continuarán de momento con el adiestramiento y apoyo a los soldados de Mali, como medida de apoyo al avance yihadista en el Sahel, y, en consecuencia, que **la Legión volverá el año que viene a esta zona de operaciones**.

Si no hay cambios de programación, la misión será asumida por la Brigada Rey Alfonso XIII, al menos con una compañía reforzada. El grupo táctico estará liderado por **la VIII Bandera Colón del teniente coronel Francisco Olivares**. No obstante, aún quedan decisiones por tomar y los legionarios están apurando fechas para empezar el llamado 4-2 (meses de formación teórica y práctica).



Oferta para reservistas

El Ministerio de Defensa ha publicado la convocatoria del proceso de selección para la el acceso a la condición de reservista voluntario de las Fuerzas Armadas, con 250 plazas ofertadas, de las cuales se han publicado en la provincia de Almería, uno de oficial para el Grupo Logístico II de la Legión con cometido de mantenimiento mecánico y uno de Oficial para la Unidad de Servicios de la Base Álvarez de Sotomayor con cometido de administración.

Additional learnings from TSE participants

Finally, we couldn't resist sharing these further experiments that helped the TSE teams create new audiences and engage their existing ones more deeply.

Pop-up audiences

Many TSE teams experimented with engaging “pop-up audiences” – communities that are formed thanks to a shared interest but only for a short period of time. The most active team in this area was Reach, whose publication Birmingham Live created The Shelby Times, a newsletter dedicated to the TV series Peaky Blinders (which takes place in Birmingham) to coincide with the show's final season. Remarkably, the newsletter kept growing even after the series finale, reaching 5,400 subscribers in September 2022.



Reach also built pop-up audiences around Commonwealth Games, and to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Another example of engaging a short-term audience came from the German publisher Schwäbisches Tagblatt, which set up a small mini-publishing team to cover local mayoral elections.

The TSE Lead Coach Douglas K. Smith encourages anyone thinking about creating (or stopping) a pop-up audience to pay attention to criteria: “The best illustration recently is the pandemic. All news publishers around the globe began special coverage of the pandemic. Those who thought of the pandemic in terms of real people (audience) having to deal with the issues and challenges did best. And, over much of 2022, many, many news groups realised that things had changed somewhat. Many chose to de-emphasize pandemic coverage. Many continued.”

“The best approach to pop up audiences – whether Peaky Blinders TV related or the pandemic or the summer 2021 floods in Germany or any other audience/topic – is to have criteria for when to start, and once started, how long to continue (that is, when to stop or keep going),” Smith says.

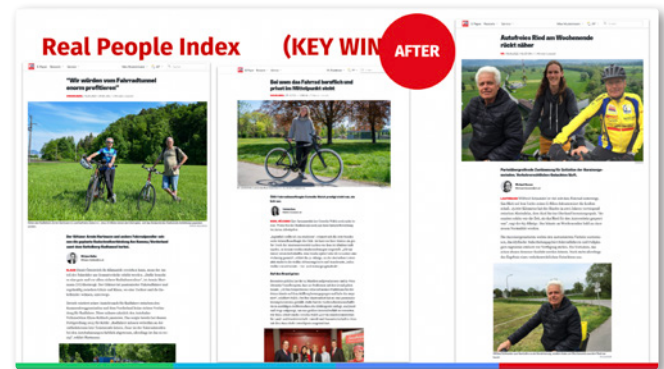
Rescheduling and relaunching a newsletter

A daily newsletter with a summary of the biggest news of the day – this is perhaps the most common type of newsletter among news publishers, including the TSE participant Il Giornale di Vicenza (GDV).

During their TSE participation, GDV realised however that the timing when the newsletter was sent out (every day at 3 pm) didn't match the news consumption habits of their readers. This led them to reorganise the newsletter production workflow: now the newsletter goes out at 7.30 am, allowing the readers to catch up on the latest news in the morning.

GDV combined the rescheduled sending time with a broader relaunch campaign, which included a rebranding of the newsletter. They also featured a QR code in a Sunday edition of the newspaper to make it easy for print readers to subscribe to the newsletter, and in a few hours gained 200 new subscribers. Taken together, the rescheduling and the relaunch campaign brought about a big boost in subscribers and engagement.





Real People Index

Who are the people featured in our articles? This question motivated the Austrian media company Russmedia and its brand Vorarlberger Nachrichten (VN) to create the Real People Index, a systematic tracking of people included in their stories.

The company tracks every day the percentage of stories that include what they call “real people” – regular citizens who are impacted by the reported events or are otherwise central to the covered topics.

During their TSE participation, VN started tracking how many articles coming from its local and economy desks include such “real people”. It set an initial goal of 40 percent, but over many months the publisher ended up exceeding that goal, averaging at 65 percent. They also set a broader objective of featuring 100,000 “real people” by the end of the year.

And who does not count as “real people”? “Politicians and lobbyists. For us they are not ‘real people’, because they have to talk to us and they are paid for that,” says Hanna Reiner, Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Economy at VN.

The aim is also to feature the full spectrum of the local community, as the team challenged itself to be fully representative of the Vorarlberg state in all its diversity, in terms of gender, age, race, social class...

The Real People Index has also had a big visual impact: previously, stories often carried images of streets, buildings and locations, but now the people included in the stories are also featured in the photos.

Digital user panel

As part of its efforts to target local families, the German newspaper Zeitungsverlag Waiblingen (ZVW) set up a reader panel with 45 parents from the region. The panel tool they chose for this is called “100 eyes” (refer-

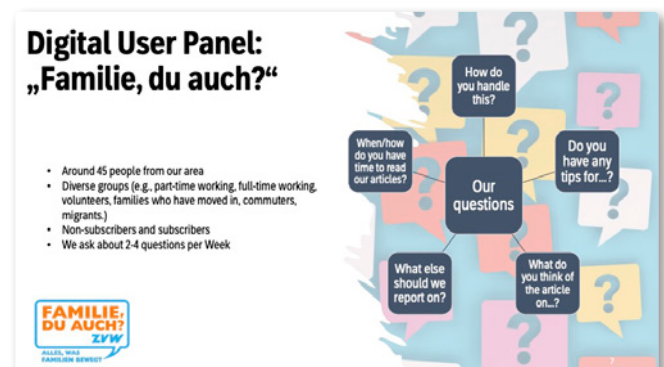
ring to the idea that about 50 people is an ideal size for a panel) which was developed by the German company tactile.news.

The tool makes it very easy for the panellists to respond: they receive the questions on their mobile phone through a messaging app (for example Telegram or Signal) and can respond through text or audio messages or by sending a photo or a video. Journalists can also exchange further with the people who respond.

ZVW’s family team has asked the panel questions on a variety of topics, such as how they combine working from home and parenting, or if they have any tips on a specific topic, or just general feedback on recent articles.

When, for example, they asked about how the panel participants feel about giving smartwatches to their children, many parents wrote back. One of them was a mother who shared a letter from her child’s school that she had received that day, informing parents that smartwatches had been banned at the school.

“It’s really interesting for our journalists to get this kind of information from our area,” says Sabrina Ghazali, ZVW’s Head of Audience Development. “The answers are very long and very detailed, so there’s very good insights from our readers. And it’s easier for journalists to get statements from affected people, which is very important for our audience articles.”



Appendix 2

Rheinische Post boosts conversion rate with a paywall page redesign

As you think about how to engage specific audiences, also remember to consider your offers and subscription process. This article describes how the German publisher took its paywall page through several rounds of testing and evaluation during their Table Stakes Europe participation. The systematic A/B testing helped the company to identify the best performing page designs, with the conversion rate improving every step of the way.”

When Rheinische Post realised that they needed to work on their conversion rate, they quickly understood that the problem wasn't the number of people seeing their paywall. The issue they needed to tackle was that not enough people completed the purchase.

“The reason we started working on [the paywall page] is because we saw that we lost many users during the checkout process,” says Julia Morein, Director Customer Engagement & Lifecycle at RP. This led the company to go through many rounds of testing, which resulted in an almost complete overhaul of the paywall page.

As part of this process, RP also received input and suggestions from Anntao Diaz, Head of Google's News Consumer Insights (NCI), that further supported the company along the way. “Google really encouraged us to test everything, and that really inspired us,” says Morein.

The main changes and tests that RP went through include...

Fast checkout: The checkout process of the old version of the paywall page required three steps from the user, divided on separate pages: first page to enter the email address, second to choose payment details including full address, and third page to validate the purchase and its terms and conditions.

The redesigned checkout, which was implemented using Stripe as a new payment service provider, asks for an email address, password and payment method – all on one page. On mobile, using Apple Pay or Google Pay makes the process even easier.

“We said, fine, we won't have all the data that we used to, but it's more important that people can checkout very fast,” says Patrick Schulze, Product Owner Paid Content at RP. Testing showed that this change resulted in a 45% increase in the conversion rate.

Introducing a weekly offer: The paywall page used to have two offers: monthly (0,99€ first month, then 7,99€) and yearly (39,99€). The team tested this with a new weekly offer: 1€ per week for the first year, then 2€ per week (but actually billed once a month). The new weekly offer performed better: it produced a 17% higher conversion rate.

New look: The team introduced a redesigned paywall page: using the yellow that is part of RP's brand identity, reducing the amount of text, and reformatting the offers into two side-by-side boxes. The new look improved the conversion rate by 48%.

Changed phrasing: Next, different texts on the paywall page were tested, such as “Best deal” or “Most sold”. The expression that emphasised scarcity (“Limited-time offer”) performed the best.

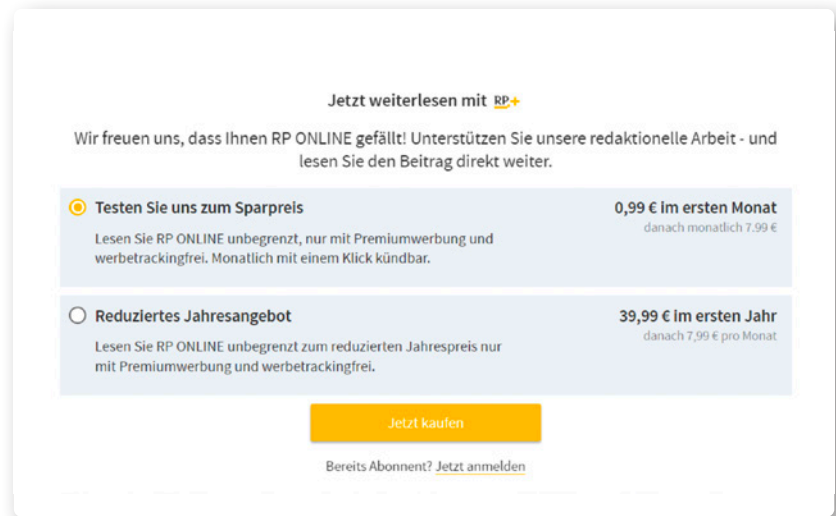
One vs. two vs. three offers: As mentioned, RP had two subscription offers (weekly and yearly), but the team wanted to test if changing the number of offers would have an impact on subscriptions. Having tested pages that included one, two and three offers, the layout with three offers performed best by far, increasing the conversion rate by 30%.

Red alert: The final test was a specific recommendation from Google’s NCI team: for the paywall you should use a highlight colour that stands out from the rest of the website. The team tested a new, red version of the paywall page alongside the old yellow one: the red page lifted the conversion rate by 24%.

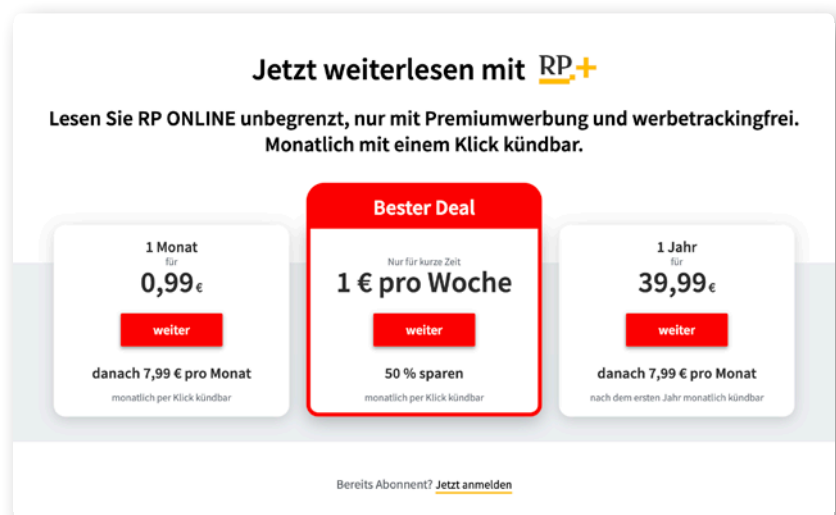
“Of course the contrast is eye-catching. So if a user was used to seeing the blurred out effect [of the paywall], he already knew he was going to see the paywall. But now that it’s red, maybe he’s reading again what we are actually offering to him,” says Schulze.

“What was surprising is that it still works so well. We were afraid that after a few weeks people would get used to the red paywall. But the new design is still performing well.”

Building on these experiments, RP continues to test different versions of their subscription offers. Indeed, in November 2022, the publisher combined the launch of their redesigned digital platforms with a new six-month offer.



BEFORE: When RP started the experimentation process, its paywall page featured two offers (monthly and weekly).



AFTER: The redesigned page features three offers (monthly, weekly, and yearly, with the most popular in the middle), less text and a red colour that stands out from the rest of the site.

Additional WAN-IFRA resources



Check out our Knowledge Base at <https://wan-ifra.org/cases> for more TSE case studies

Knowledge Base
Find the case studies that most relate to your newsroom challenges or browse by category below

search case studies...

TABLE STAKES EUROPE
Sustainability Programme
Google News Initiative

Table Stakes Europe

The Table Stakes programme is designed to accelerate the transition of journalism from print to digital, to help newsrooms change their practices, reach new audiences and better engage their communities. Since 2019, a total of 57 news publishers have participated in Table Stakes Europe, structured around **7 core principles** for digital sustainability, and above all, audiences first. Read on for the stories of some of those teams.

- #1** Serve targeted audiences with targeted content/experiences
- #2** Publish on the platforms used by your targeted audiences
- #3** Produce and publish continuously to match your audiences' lives
- #4** Funnel occasional users into habitual, valuable and paying loyalists
- #5** Diversify and grow the ways you earn revenue from the audiences you build
- #6** Partner to expand your capacity and capabilities at lower and more flexible cost
- #7** Drive audience growth and profitability from a "mini-publisher" perspective

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Next-level Newsletters

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Executive News Service Newsletter
The most important news of the news publishing industry, in collaboration with our Knowledge Partner, McKinsey & Company

Reader Revenue Newsletter
News about the digital subscription industry with the support of our Knowledge Partner, Protecmia

Strategy & Leadership Newsletter
In collaboration with our Knowledge Partner, McKinsey & Company

Table Stakes Europe
News worthy of your time.

Executive News Service Newsletter
ENGLISH
Top 50 news sites in the world in September: New York Times growth with 72% jump (by pressgazette)
The BBC at 100: The future for global news and challenges for (by niemanlab)
Semafor news platform launches (by routers)
Canada: The Globe and Mail doubles down on business, investment finance news (by rmc-mic)
Forbes' Event Revenue Rises 60% as It Embraces Hybrid For...

Strategy & Leadership Newsletter
Welcome to WAN-IFRA's Strategy & Leadership newsletter where we delve into the critical issues facing top executives at news media companies, whether that be revenue and diversification strategies, management development or innovative leadership. Our goal is to share ideas, best-practices and yes, sometimes failures from our community of top executives just like you. We welcome your feedback and also encourage you to share this newsletter with your colleagues. If you want to opt-out, you may click on "unsubscribe" at the end.

Stuff CEO Sinead Boucher reflects on two years since leading management buyout
In May of 2020, Sinead Boucher led a management buyout of Stuff from owner Nine for 1 New Zealand dollar. In this recent Q&A, we started off by asking her what she learned during that turbulent time: "I have learnt so much about myself, about my team and what..."