

Publishing partners



MEDIA MOMENTS 2023

Researched & written by

Media Voices

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INTRODUCTION



Cobus Heyl

2023 can be summed up in one word:
Disruption

Whether it's the flashing red economic indicators and inflationary pressures, further geopolitical tensions and wars, or washout summers, it's been a testing year.

Overlaid onto this backdrop, like a brush fire spinning out of control, has been the emergence of artificial intelligence following ChatGPT's launch at the tail end of last year.

In the meantime, media are squarely moving into a post-social media era, while in many markets there was intense pressure on advertising, subscriptions started to plateau and companies (media and tech) had to downsize to adjust to market pressures.



Jez Walters

Yet just like some wild plants that will only germinate in the cauldron of an intense forest fire, opportunities abound for those media companies willing to be agile, take risks and pioneer innovative solutions.

We've seen this innovation first hand at our events and with the launch of both our Specialist Media Innovators B2B and Consumer Reports. This research, and our findings, are conclusive proof that for those media companies willing to 'think out of the box', new revenue opportunities and business models are there for the taking.

Indeed, whether it's Zetland launching their AI transcription service Good Tape, Mondadori opening a talent agency for social media food creators Zenzero, or Blick placing special QR codes across 26 Swiss alpine summits for avid hikers to collect points and vouchers, there is no shortage of innovation – it's a question of being brave enough to take the risk.

No advances in science were ever made by following the established consensus. The same can be said of media and publishing.

Finally, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank the report's authors, and our partners, Media Voices, for writing such an in depth and powerful year review. Long may our collaboration continue.

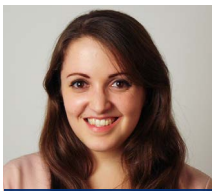
Cobus & Jez

Media Makers Meet - Mx3



MEDIA MAKERS MEET

EDITORIAL



Esther Kezia
Thorpe



Chris Sutcliffe



Peter Houston

On Wednesday 30th November 2022, we launched Media Moments 2022. One of the many themes we discussed was the crash in expectations around emerging technologies like the metaverse and NFTs. AI, we acknowledged in the closing paragraphs, was quietly humming along as part of publisher's newsrooms, and the tech would continue to advance over the coming years.

On the same day, OpenAI unveiled ChatGPT to the world. Never before have we felt our annual report date so quickly!

Every day since has seen a slew of stories about the impact of AI, from the 'threat' it poses to humanity, to the publishers trying to sneak AI-generated stories under the radar. It's been a tough job filtering through the hype to bring readers of our daily newsletter the AI stories which actually matter to them.

ChatGPT and efforts like Bard from competitors have unquestionably permeated the public consciousness in a way that no other AI tool has done so far. But we think it's important to keep some perspective in putting this report together. For many of us, life has gone on as normal, and we've reached the end of 2023 a little shaken and stirred, but still doing our day jobs.

In fact, many of the biggest challenges and opportunities publishers have faced this year have been iterations of

what we've covered in previous years: a print 'revival', platform struggles, a focus on reducing churn and proving value, and building trust as we head into a fractious year ahead for politics. AI touches each of these areas, as we found when writing the chapters. But it doesn't matter how good the tools get; they can only rehash existing knowledge. Publishers are still very necessary, and no doubt we will see people increasingly seek out and value human-created content as the AI tide rises.

We hope this year's report release goes ahead without any further seismic industry shifts - goodness knows we're all in need of a breather!

As always, we at Media Voices will be working hard to bring you the most useful and relevant industry news in our daily newsletter, The Media Roundup, and our weekly podcast. We also have a new media-focused Community Forum which is free to join, with some great discussions and questions already from fellow industry professionals. All that over on our website, [voices.media](https://www.voices.media).

Thanks to the team at Mx3 for being our report partners again, and to Nic at Calico Creative for giving Media Moments a much-needed refresh.

Esther Kezia Thorpe, Chris Sutcliffe and Peter Houston
Media Voices

PRINT



Inflation increases pressure on newsprint, but magazine publishers are still finding niches

Economic turmoil has accelerated the print decline in mass market and regional newspapers, but magazine publishers are eyeing shorter runs and reduced frequency as an opportunity to cash in on high-end scarcity.

We decided not to cover print in last year's Media Moments report. It's back this year because the long slow decline of newspapers in print has suddenly picked up speed while magazines are seeing something of a print resurgence, at least with regard to titles leaning into lower print runs and higher production values.

Cost pressures bite

I spoke to Delayed Gratification's Rob Orchard recently and he reminded me that almost 10 years ago, at [TedX Madrid](#), he predicted that there wouldn't be a single printed newspaper left in the developed world by 2024. He acknowledged that he was a bit premature, but it may just be a question of timing.

Since 2005, the US has lost almost [3,000 newspapers](#), an average of about two a week; but that average jumps to 2.5 if you look only at 2023. The spike seems to be driven by the closure of papers owned by a handful of large chains and smaller regional companies that are shuttering multiple papers in one fell swoop.

There are new entrants in the US - about three dozen papers have set up shop over the past five years. A growing number of independent, locally-owned newspapers are expanding community news coverage using a mix of commercial and philanthropic funding. But overall the number of 'news deserts' is rising.

Closures are driven by the increased cost of newspaper production that has made marginally profitable local titles

suddenly unprofitable. Rising production costs have been compounded by [cratering social media referral traffic](#) and [stalled programmatic ad yields](#), slowing the transition to digital revenues.

For newspaper publishers in an industry where global print revenues are still estimated to [average 80%](#), the challenge lies in bringing in new digital revenues to backfill print losses.

In the UK, stalling or falling digital revenues are having a clear impact on operations. According to 2023's half-year results, Reach, the country's largest commercial publisher, [gets 78%](#) of its revenue from print sales. Although print revenues are fairly flat, a decline in digital advertising revenues triggered another 450 redundancies at the company and a merging of digital and print news teams.

What kind of idiots still make magazines?

The Grub Street Journal is a B2B title made by and for people who love print magazines. Its co-founders and editors Joanna Cummings and Peter Houston joined the podcast to take us through the project from inception to monetisation, and discuss whether a flurry of print magazine stories is a sign of a wider resurgence, or a blip. Listen via the QR code, or by searching 'Media Voices' on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

PRINT

Although print closures have levelled off in the UK, with [paper prices rising 65%](#) at the beginning of the year, further closures are almost inevitable.

Print cuts through

The story in mass market magazines is similar. In the UK's reasonably robust news and current affairs sector, just two magazines [posted print circulation growth](#) last year: satirical fortnightly Private Eye and politics monthly Prospect. Other leading titles shed print readers, from The Economist dropping 15% to Investors Chronicle losing 11%.

The picture is a little different in niche titles. The independent magazine sector is vibrant and larger commercial publishers are starting to see an opportunity in exploiting the low-volume high-value ethos long espoused by smaller scale publishers.

Against that backdrop, several well known titles announced plans to return to print in 2023, most notably fashion title Elle Australia and [music magazine NME](#).

Elle Australia is coming back after a four-year print hiatus with two issues in 2024 tied to the March and September fashion seasons. The publisher says the return to print is a response to a 'deluge of digital content'. Publisher Are Media's Jane Huxley [told the Sydney Morning Herald](#) people are overwhelmed by a 'flood of content'. She said people just want someone to do the work in helping them understand what is 'relevant, contextual and real.'

NME's print resurrection will be very different from the iconic music weekly known and loved by generations of older rock fans. The new £10 bi-monthly incarnation will not be available on the newsstands: "Rather than print thousands upon thousands of copies and try to shift them at the newsstand in bulk, we've changed that model up and have taken inspiration from industries like fashion, where you see the value in scarcity," Holly Bishop, of NME Networks [told New Statesman](#).

"Rather than print thousands upon thousands of copies and try to shift them at the news stand in bulk, we've changed that model up and have taken inspiration from industries like fashion, where you see the value in scarcity."

Holly Bishop, NME Networks

The year also brought some high-profile launches, with The Blend from Future attracting attention. The magazine will be distributed to subscribers of The Week and in business lounges, hotels, offices and private members clubs. With launch advertisers including Chanel, Dior, Hermes and Rolex, Editor-in-Chief Bill Prince [told Press Gazette](#), "The Blend offers readers a digestible take on modern luxury, presented in a perfect bound, premium stock print product."

Comeback comparisons with vinyl [are largely erroneous](#) - vinyl has seen 15 straight years of growth from a zero base whereas magazine sales are declining year-on-year, but on a significant volume. However, publishers can learn from music companies who have leaned into consumer demand for high-value collectible releases that tap into a desire to own physical objects and enjoy a moment of digital disconnect.

Since 2005, the US has lost almost

3,000

newspapers. In 2023, there are about 6,000 remaining.



Local News Initiative, Medill Journalism School

CASE STUDY

Saveur magazine comes back to print

Gourmet food title Saveur was a victim of the pandemic, going online-only in February 2021. The publication has since been bought by long-time editor Kat Craddock and she has announced that a print version will appear again in March 2024.

Craddock has been careful to manage the expectations of readers desperate to see the title return to their coffee - or maybe kitchen - tables. In her pre-order announcement she said they will not be returning to a monthly schedule.

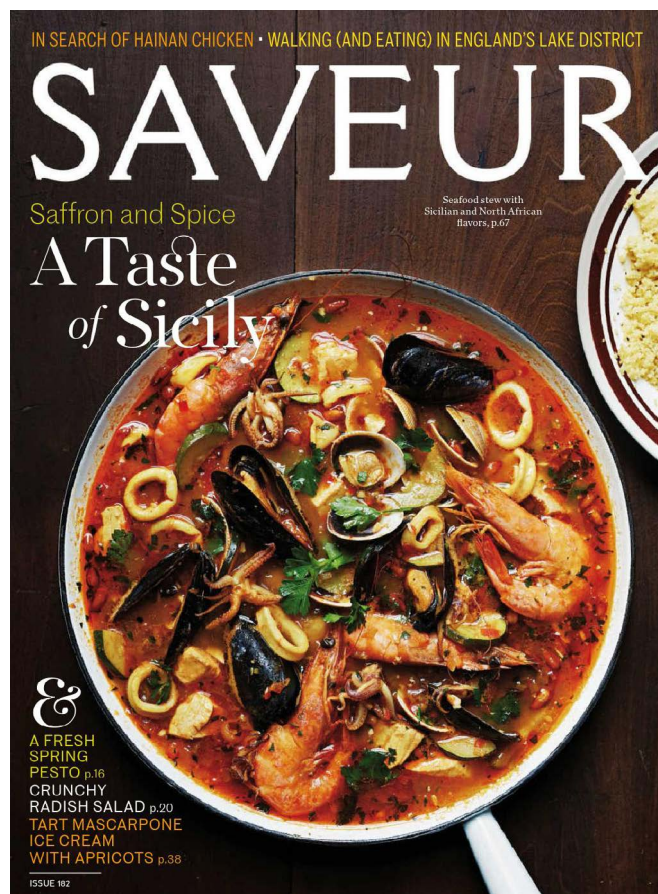
"In starting from scratch, we had the opportunity to reconsider the old print model," she explained. "Frankly, the old-school, high-volume print model isn't sustainable - at least not for Saveur."

That means she is leaving behind the 'stack them high, sell them cheap' subscription models used to build huge circulation lists. She doesn't believe chasing high subscriber numbers for dwindling ad revenues makes commercial sense any more. Instead she's promising a less frequent, better quality product at a fair price.

"This means the print issues will cost a little more than they used to, but I guarantee it will be worth it. We'll publish only two issues next year, and both will receive the care and effort that previously went into a half-dozen slimmer issues."

Craddock is clearly positioning her revitalised print offering as a premium product; an 'affordable luxury' that she says will be more sustainable than ever, "environmentally, socially, and financially".

Alongside pre-orders, Saveur is introducing a range of supporter-tier subscriptions, which include a one-time bundle of Saveur swag and 'pantry goodies' from partner brands. The message is clear: sign up and support the publisher in meeting the costs associated with the relaunch.

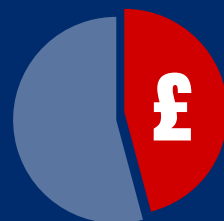


For UK publishing companies,
print accounts for an average of

46%

of total revenues.

mediafutures



AI



Chris Sutcliffe

Media companies grapple with practical and ethical questions amidst the generative AI boom

Generative AI has gone populist this year, with consumer-grade GenAI tools now widely available. While it offers new opportunities – editorial and commercial – its widespread adoption has also led to ethical and practical dilemmas.

Generative AI went truly mainstream this year. While media companies have been using artificial intelligence to varying degrees for years, the widespread availability of generative AI tools has opened new avenues of opportunity for publishers. Whether it's rewriting copy for social, using it for research, or even generating entire articles, publishers now have a wider variety of use-cases for AI than ever before.

But new concerns – legal and ethical – have arisen with those new opportunities. For one thing, the large language models (LLMs) that underpin a number of GenAI tools have been [are being trained](#) on publishers' and the public's content – [often without permission](#). That has led to some publishers being in the uncomfortable position of having to [block scraping of their sites](#) for training data while also seeking to use LLM-trained tools themselves.

On November 9th, for example, News Corp and IAC called out GenAI companies for scraping their content for training and commercial purposes in [their earnings call](#), making that contention official. In an echo of [publishers' relationship with search and social platforms](#), however, it seems that relationship is [less contentious](#) when money changes hands: The AP [negotiated a deal with OpenAI in July](#), under the terms of which OpenAI is paying to licence part of AP's text archive to train its models.

Some publishers are mitigating that issue by using AI tools that have been purely trained on their own data.

In some cases that is being used to [develop chatbots and search tools](#) that help navigation, while in other cases it is evolving publishers' existing use of AI to [personalise recommendations](#) and flexible paywalls.

Beyond training, media companies are having to reckon with the extent to which they can use AI in their consumer-facing products. It's one thing to use it behind the scenes, but quite another to use it as a reporting tool. Issues of accuracy, trust, and differentiation have all reared their heads in the rush to use GenAI in reporting this year.

G/O Media, for example, was called out for its use of entirely AI-generated ads in July. The company [published four stories](#) across its portfolio of titles that contained inaccuracies and, crucially, were wholly AI-generated. Despite opprobrium from editors and criticism for

Optimism about AI and journalism

In this podcast, we're joined by Jacqui Merrington, who has her own Substack *The Happy Journalist* focused on showcasing how new tech can be used positively in journalism. Jacqui takes us through the reasons she's optimistic about journalists using AI, and what best (and worst) practice looks like in 2023. Listen via the QR code, or by searching 'Media Voices' on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

the lack of transparency related to the articles Merrill Brown, G/O's editorial director, told Vox "it is absolutely a thing we want to do more of." That was widely – [and accurately](#) – seen as a euphemism for cutting more journalists.

"At a simple level, this means that the use of GenAI requires human oversight. We will seek to use GenAI tools editorially only where it contributes to the creation and distribution of original journalism"

Katharine Viner, editor-in-chief, The Guardian & Anna Bateson, CEO, The Guardian

Many publishers have attempted to get out ahead of issues related to accuracy and transparency by publishing ethics codes around how they will use GenAI in reporting, which London School of Economics' professor Charlie Beckett has [stated is vital](#) for the long-term sustainability of its use.

The Guardian [published a statement in June](#) on what it would and would not use GenAI for. It noted that, in addition to only using it where appropriate, it would do so in a transparent way that notifies the reader that GenAI was used. In November The Telegraph [issued an internal memo](#) in which it stated that it aimed to be "permissive" for the use of AI for efficiency purposes, but that "the paper has forbidden staff from incorporating AI-generated text into copy except in limited circumstances".

Beyond news publishing, other media companies are looking to use AI to grow their audiences. In September Spotify announced it would be using an OpenAI tool to [translate its suite of podcasts](#) into other languages, with the promise that the personalities and intonations of its hosts would be maintained.

Given the relative speed with which the tech has been developed and deployed, copyright law regarding GenAI outputs is still being determined. In August a judge in the US ruled that creative content made using GenerativeAI [does not enjoy copyright protection](#), though there will undoubtedly be further developments in that space.

For news publishers, perhaps the biggest unsettled issue is the extent to which it will add more noise to the online ecosystem. As mis- and disinformation continue to run riot online, the increasing sophistication of GenAI images and video will [exacerbate the scale](#) of that problem. That will require internal changes and the development of new skills to counter that disinformation.

However, it will also provide legitimate news publishers with a big opportunity. There is a chance here for publishers to reveal [how the sausage is made](#) when it comes to its journalism, [providing provenance](#) of how its content was created and reaping the associated trust. That could in turn lead to [a marketing opportunity](#), in which 'human-made journalism' is a mark of quality worthy of paying for.



100m+

the number of weekly active users of ChatGPT as of 2023.

CASE STUDY

The New York Times and GenAI

If you want to see the scale of the problem around news publishers using GenAI effectively and ethically, look no further than the NYT. The New York Times is a bellwether for the news industry in many ways, and it is likely that other publications will be looking to it for direction.

In a memo to employees on 9th May this year, its CEO Meredith Levien stated that GenAI has the potential to evolve the media landscape into “further, rapid ecosystem change”.

As a result she stated that the paper had assigned its Chief Product Officer Alex Hardiman to “lead a cross-company effort to ensure that we think expansively and collectively about how we might put GenAI to use to support our journalists, grow audience and engagement with our products, and scale our business, while working to ensure we protect our intellectual property.”

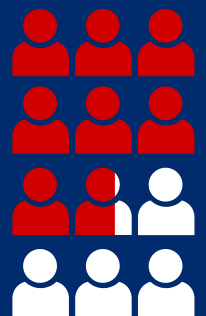
That latter point bore fruit in August, in which it was reported that the company was taking preemptive measures to prevent scraping of its content by AI companies. Its terms of service were updated to state that, without written permission, no company can scrape its content from being used in the development of “any software program, including, but not limited to, training a machine learning or artificial intelligence (AI) system.”

Those offensive and defensive moves around GenAI illustrate how publishers are having to react to the rapid development of AI tools: they cannot ignore the potential it has to revolutionise their business, but at the same time they are seeking to monetise their content without empowering a new set of competitors.

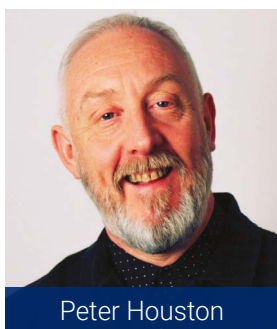
The New York Times

65%

the proportion of
GenAI users
who are Millennials.



NEWSLETTERS



Peter Houston

Newsletter portfolios shrinking as publishers look to consolidate reader engagement

The social media traffic collapse has made newsletters more important than ever to publishers looking for real reader relationships, but less is looking like more in the fight for engagement

Newsletters have become an interesting niche for Media Voices. We publish our own [daily news roundup](#) and this year we launched [The Publisher Newsletter Awards](#) to sit alongside our existing Podcast Awards.

Our focus on the segment isn't just idle interest: two of Media Voice's top three most downloaded podcast episodes this year* featured guests talking about newsletters, underlining the fact that media people really care about the format.

The newsletter moment

Social media has never provided a secure foundation for publishers, but as platforms pass over publisher content or simply implode, newsletters have claimed their place as a much safer bet for audience development.

Following the Audiencer's Festival in London, [Editor in Chief Madeleine White wrote](#): "Newsletters are having a serious (and very lengthy) moment in the limelight for digital publishers, not only as a valuable engagement tool but also for monetising audiences."

The newsletter moment is probably four or five years old now, but the interest in email as a distribution channel for publisher content hasn't let up. I hosted a panel at The Audiencer's event featuring two very different newsletter

publishers; well-known news brand The Telegraph, and solo start-up The Edinburgh Minute.

The Telegraph has 34 newsletters, but the portfolio is under constant review. Head of Newsletters at the newspaper, Maire Bonheim, told me that despite the urge to 'fill every niche' there is a danger of spreading your newsletter efforts too thin. "You also don't want to double up on the same content," she explained. "We merged a few fashion and beauty newsletters into a single, daily lifestyle newsletter."

The New Statesman has followed a similar path. Rather than launch additional newsletters [it has cut its output to two](#); a daily and a weekend edition. According to the weekly's Head of Newsletters Harry Lambert, its previous lineup was simply too much. "Instead of having a whole buffet of different newsletters and cutting the brilliance up into little segments, we just decided to give

Transforming a portfolio of newsletters

Jillian MacMath, Audience Editor at WalesOnline joined us on the podcast to talk about the opportunities she saw to get more strategic about the newsletter portfolio when she joined WalesOnline, what metrics should matter to anyone with a newsletter, and what dedicated newsletters like football and food look like with a local focus. Listen via the QR code, or by searching 'Media Voices' on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

Substack UK Head of Writer Partnerships Farrah Storr; Financial Times' Head of Newsletters Sarah Ebner.

NEWSLETTERS



(the audience) one that we thought they'd like on Saturday and have the power of a big audience through one newsletter," [he said](#).

Platform plays

The New Statesman is also one of the first major publishers to shift its newsletter platform to Substack. The magazine is using its free newsletters to drive subscriptions and Lambert highlighted Substack's audience-focused back-office tools as a key reason for the switch.

Since it launched in May, The New Statesman's weekly Saturday Read has grown to have almost 180,000 subscribers. Growth is due in no small part to the auto-enrolment of anyone who registers to access content through the free tier of The New Statesman website. On Saturdays, around 10% of the New Statesman website's traffic is driven by the weekly newsletter.

Mill Media, another high-profile Substack play, has seen strong growth in 2023, following a [£1.75 million investment](#) from a group that includes former New York Times boss Mark Thompson. Paid subscriptions cost up to £8 a month or £80 a year and the group now has 5,500 paying subscribers across its first three titles - the Manchester Mill, Liverpool Post and Sheffield Tribune - with 75,000 people receiving its free emails.

In October, Mill Media [expanded into Birmingham](#), adding the Birmingham Dispatch to its existing lineup. Founder Joshi Herrmann has made no secret of the fact that his newsletters are targeting local news audiences 'alienated' by the output of the UK's biggest regional news publisher Reach.

He told Press Gazette: "One of the things that makes Birmingham attractive to launch a new title in is that the main newspaper is owned by Reach. Because we know – from Manchester, from Liverpool – that loads of people really hate having a local newspaper that's Reach."

For its part, Reach has responded to the threat of local startups with its own local newsletter strategy,

"Newsletters are having a serious (and very lengthy) moment in the limelight for digital publishers, not only as a valuable engagement tool but also for monetizing audiences."

[Madeleine White, Editor-in-Chief, The Audiencers](#)

[taking nine regional news sites 'newsletter first'](#). Brands within the group are now putting out newsletters from individual local journalists; WalesOnline's Jillian MacMath [told us](#) that after they started to see success, reporters are now running newsletters for their own patches.

Real relationships

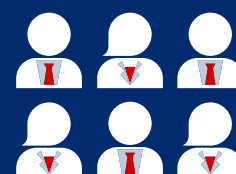
The relationship-building aspect of newsletter publishing is driving a lot of investment in the space. Mill Media's Herrmann has said previously that he moved into newsletters because it was '[cheap and easy](#)'. But he also talks about the format's potential for audience development. "It's been an eye-opener how powerful they are for interaction and how close they get you to an audience."

The Telegraph says readers that subscribe from a newsletter are

50%

more likely to still be a subscriber after 12 months.

Maire Bonheim, The Telegraph



NEWSLETTERS



At The Telegraph, the newsletter team knows that readers who subscribe to their premium product from a newsletter are 50% more likely to still be a subscriber after 12 months.

And in a time of automated content, creating human connections is a positive differentiator. Most obviously, email allows recipients to reply directly. The Edinburgh Guardian founder Michael MacLeod takes advantage of Substack's tools to reply to subscriber comments and send thank you messages for content contributions, which now account for 50% of his output.

And even where scale makes it impossible to reply to every subscriber email, there are ways to use reader interactions to build engagement and focus newsletter output. The Telegraph's subscriber-only 'Your Royal Appointment' newsletter answers a reader question every week, even recommending the best spot to watch the King's coronation procession.

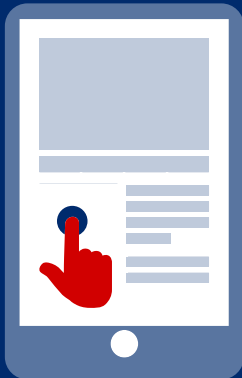


Mill Media has

5,500

paying subscribers across its original three titles - The Manchester Mill, Liverpool Post and Sheffield Tribune.

The Guardian



NEWSLETTERS



CASE STUDY

Launching the FT's Fashion Matters

The Financial Times' newsletter portfolio is, as you would expect, dominated by business and finance. But the pink paper's lifestyle newsletters also do well and, noting high open and click-through rates, Head of Newsletters Sarah Ebner wondered if there was space for another.

"I'm always keen to fit newsletters into spaces that are not really being served elsewhere and a "business of fashion" newsletter seemed as if it might really suit us," she wrote in [InPublishing](#).

Ebner approached the FT's Fashion Editor, the Press Awards' Fashion Journalist of the Year Lauren Indvik, about launching such a newsletter. She loved the idea of writing about the £2.5 trillion fashion industry in a 'more informal, open way' and filled in the FT's Newsletter Pitch document.

After a pause for Covid and a newsletter redesign, Fashion Matters was launched in November 2022. Fitting in perfectly with the FT's women reader's engagement strategy, Fashion Matters has the highest percentage of female readers of any of the FT's newsletters. But it also has the highest open rate of the whole newsletter portfolio, never falling below 50 percent.

Ebner points out that creating a newsletter is not a one-and-done project. "It is not only about the launch," she writes, "but about writing something every day or week, and keeping it in people's minds by promoting it again and again."

From choosing the right name and tagline for the publication's newsletter sign-up page, to press releases and house ads, the FT's newsletter team actively promoted the Fashion Matters launch. Cross-promotion with other FT newsletters also featured in the launch campaign alongside social media posts across the FT's Instagram and Twitter accounts.

The result was not just a 'Best Hobbies and Special Interest' category win at The Publisher Newsletter Awards, but 'Newsletter of the Year' across all fourteen award's categories.



FINANCIAL TIMES

There are now over

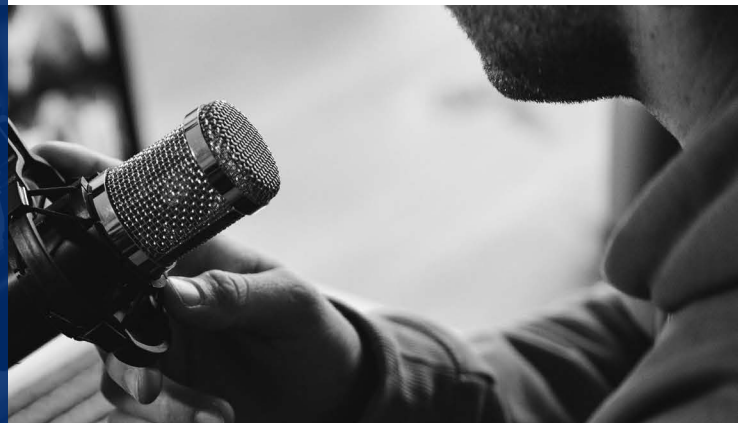
4.3 billion

email users in the world,
a figure predicted to
reach 4.7 billion by 2026.

Statista



PODCASTS



Chris Sutcliffe

Podcast strategy bifurcates as media companies explore new ways to make podcasts pay

2023 has seen podcast strategies diverge like never before. Some major publishers have put the majority of their podcasts behind paywalls while others have cut back to the shows that perform best.

Last year the tech that powers podcasts was at the top of the agenda. Platforms including Spotify and Acast [invested in technology](#) that proved the effectiveness of podcast advertising and allowed for ads to be bought more easily. It was a vital step in the commercial maturation of the medium – and in 2023 we have seen publishers build upon that movement.

One major upheaval over the course of the year was Spotify loosening its grip upon its exclusives. [Amid reports](#) that the vast sums the audio streaming platform paid for its exclusive shows had not contributed to its bottom line as it had anticipated, the company announced some of its owned and operated shows would [no longer be limited](#) to its own platform. It was seen as an early move from Spotify to shift away from bringing listeners into its own ecosystem, and more about broadening distribution in service of ad revenue.

While the news was interesting on its own for what it said about Spotify – long a dominant player in the podcasting space – it was especially relevant to moves from publishers later in the year.

Paywalls come to podcasts

In September, [Axios reported](#) that The Economist was to place all but one of its podcasts behind a paywall. Every show save for its flagship daily show “The Intelligence,” is now only accessible to subscribers – including to those of its newly-launched Economist Podcasts+ dedicated

subscription tier. For The Economist it was an offensive move to take control of its audio distribution, based on [the recognition](#) that audio had become the title’s fastest-growing platform for audience growth.

So while Spotify moved to broaden its distribution in service of ad revenue, The Economist tightened its grip on podcasts in service of subscription revenue.

In addition to that change in strategy 2023 has also seen some publishers cut back on the number of shows they publish. In October, for example, The Athletic announced it was [cancelling a number of local sports-related podcasts](#), as part of a wider strategy of reducing its focus on individual teams. In March NPR also stated it was [cancelling four podcasts](#) as part of a wider cost-cutting drive. That coincided with a shocking 80% drop in the number of newly launched podcasts, [according to research](#) from analysts Chart.

Podcast and platform experiments

Chris Stone, Executive Producer at the New Statesman joins us on the podcast to take us through some of his boldest experiments with podcasts at the New Statesman, from consolidating them into one feed to publishing audio and video versions to YouTube. Listen via the QR code, or by searching ‘Media Voices’ on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

PODCASTS



That isn't to say that media businesses are cutting back in podcast launches across the board. In November [the BBC announced](#) that its global news platform BBC World Service had partnered with BBC Studios to launch a new daily news podcast which deep dives into one story per episode, with input from the BBC's global journalists and experts around the world." Crucially, this and [other audio moves](#) at the BBC in favour of BBC Studios, allow the commercial wing of the corporation to monetise its podcasts as it has not been able to before.

"I don't think we could have predicted that (migrating podcast audiences to YouTube) would work so linearly. But we're happy that it did."

Mike Foss, Vice President of Digital Production, ESPN

News podcasts still in demand

There is also a demonstrable hunger for news podcasts. In addition to the example set by The Economist, [research from Ofcom](#) found that news podcasts are especially 'sticky', with the majority (68%) of listeners to news podcasts tuning in once a week at least.

However, in November Nic Newman, Senior Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, [told PodPod](#) that there is still significant headroom for growth in that area. "You could argue that if only 10% or so are consuming news podcasts today, there's a huge room for growth, and I do think it will grow over time, as more talent [and] more interest from advertisers comes into the market as well."

Interestingly, podcasts are becoming a larger part of the media mix for children. Research from UTA [found that](#) around 48% of children in the US consume podcasts

weekly, with two-thirds (67%) listening at least monthly. That is fertile ground for habits that should continue into adult life as well, suggesting podcasts as a medium aren't going anywhere.

As we predicted in last year's Media Moments report, the rise of video podcasts has [continued apace](#) for publishers. While we don't have time to get into the weeds of what actually counts as a 'podcast' in this report, it's clear that publishers at least still consider these regular shows under the same umbrella. That growth in terms of video podcasts – particularly on YouTube – is predicated upon [audiences' favourable responses](#) to the format.

Heading into next year, it is fair to say that the early frenzy for podcast launches has ended. In light of the trends above and continued investment in technology, we will instead see more experimentation in how podcasts can contribute to business outcomes rather than simply audience growth.

65%

the proportion of people who watch a podcast on YouTube who are consuming it for the first time.



PODCASTS



CASE STUDY

A winning commercial strategy

The New Statesman provided a relatively early look at what a sophisticated podcast production model could look like at a publisher. The quality of its output and its consistently experimental approach to new trends like video podcasting codified how a media company should approach podcast production.

Over the course of 2023 that approach has bled into its commercial strategy. Off the back of winning Best Commercial Strategy for two years' running at the Publisher Podcast Awards, the news magazine has rethought its distribution strategy.

Its executive producer of audio and video Chris Stone [told Media Makers Meet](#) that, while condensing its three extant podcast feeds into one was a risk, it has paid off in terms of audience growth. It has also experimented with putting those podcasts on YouTube, of which he says: "In the last 28 days the New Statesman podcast has received more views on YouTube than downloads via podcast apps. Publishing video podcasts on YouTube has more than doubled our monthly audience."

Because of that experimentation and audience growth, the podcast side of the business has proved its contribution to the business' bottom line. That in turn has allowed New Statesman's podcasts to be more fully integrated with the wider commercial strategy.

Stone says: "One of the most successful things that we have done is to break down the silos between the different departments, and bring all of those into multi-format packages that our sales team can easily say to a client, [if] you want to hit this audience, here's the solution."

The NS Podcast



THE NEW STATESMAN

25.5%

the proportion of
the UK public that listens
to podcasts weekly.



SUBSCRIPTIONS



Peter Houston

As the paid reader base grows more slowly, reducing churn is the focus for publishers

Few publishers expected subscriptions would magically solve all of their revenue woes, but any that did will be increasingly disappointed as acquisition and retention challenges grow in a maturing market.

The rush to reader revenue has proven more successful than some media trends, primarily because it has been founded on the tried-and-tested principles of serving audience needs rather than a shiny new tech trend. Toolkits' Jack Marshall [wrote recently](#) about how publishers with subscription revenue in the mix are doing better than those that rely solely on advertising.

However, the industry's propensity to pivot notwithstanding, there are no silver bullets in modern publishing and the fight for subscriber revenues is getting harder.

Acquisition and churn

News fatigue and cost of living pressures are playing their part in slowing growth in the subscription space. New subscribers are harder to convert and consumers are still cancelling unused or unloved subscriptions. Although [research from Toolkits](#) shows that fewer users have cancelled subscriptions this year than in 2022, 56% of survey respondents still reported ending a digital subscription.

There is also increasing competition for subscriber spend, both among publishers and from broader subscription offers, especially in entertainment. Once exclusively a hardware supplier, Apple now has more than [1 billion paying subscribers](#). The company generated \$21 billion in subscriptions or 26% of its total revenue in the second quarter of this year.

From a publisher perspective, the 3% growth in subscription volumes reported by FIPP in its [September Global Digital Subscriptions Snapshot](#) could point to a stagnating market. However, as outgoing CEO James Hewes says in the report, in the context of the biggest economic slowdown since the 70s, 3% growth is respectable, especially when compared with some other publisher revenue lines.

The twin challenges of acquisition and churn are focusing attention on Average Revenue Per User (ARPU). Brian Morrissey believes we are 'at the ARPU stage of the subscriptions business', when acquisitions are flagging or becoming more expensive and publishers are focussing on 'squeezing' as much revenue as they can from existing subscribers.

Morrissey [wrote](#): "Subscriptions are a forever business... after early wins, subscriptions become a grind, with

Making subscriptions work

In this podcast episode, Zamir Walimohamed, Head of Digital, Marketing & Subscriptions at Motor Sport Magazine tells us about how the magazine has managed bringing print subscribers into its digital ecosystem, and why a growing propensity to pay for digital subscriptions is benefitting magazines across the industry. Listen via the QR code, or by searching 'Media Voices' on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

SUBSCRIPTIONS

optimisation tactics coming to the forefront...” He spotlights Defector, listing in their [third annual report](#) a subscription revenue increase in 2023 of just 4% compared with 20% a year earlier. But, says Morrissey, “The big win was a 90% retention rate when half of Defector’s subscribers came up for renewal.”

Perceived value

Publishers are finding retention solutions in improved onboarding and customer service routines that provide strong customer communication around a limited number of sign-up steps. B2B site The Audiencers [looked at](#) the Economist, The Times and The Telegraph to try to find the ‘aha moments’ that separate loyal customers from lost customers.

Newsletter registration is seen as a key channel for communicating subscriber benefits and surfacing relevant content to help cement the perceived value of a subscription. Other indicators include app downloads, frequency of visits to the website, and activation of key ‘subscriber-only’ features.

“Not only is this journey about welcoming your new subscriber and making them feel valued, but about driving customer value, making sure they understand and make use of the potential value offered by your product,” wrote The Audiencers’ Editor in Chief Madeleine White.

A tighter focus on customer value may be paying off for publishers. In a study of 1,000 digital subscribers in the US by [Toolkits and NRG](#), 85% reported being “completely” or “mostly” satisfied with the value for money they receive from their subscriptions, up from 75% in August 2022. The study shows engagement with subscription products is also growing; 68% of respondents reported using their subscriptions daily compared with 58% the previous year.

The improvements could be the result of better communications to encourage engagement and boost satisfaction. It may also be that subscribers have already ditched the subscriptions that they no longer value. “As the market for publishers’ subscription products matures,

“The name of the game now is a back-to-basics focus on ARPU instead of the sugar high of growth hacks.”

[Brian Morrissey, The Rebooting](#)

consumers will increasingly allocate their subscription dollars based on the strength of the underlying content and features on offer,” wrote Toolkits’ Jack Marshall.

Members vs subscribers

In the drive to be seen to be delivering value, publishers are drawing a distinction between subscribers and members. “You have a subscription; you are a member”, [said a speaker at the ESCO Connect event](#) and the more participative membership model has been picked up by several smaller publishers in 2023.

Publisher and creative agency Boom Saloon has the stated aim of ‘democratising creativity for good’ and has launched a [founding members scheme](#) to help fund its work, but also to bring members directly into the evolution of the business. Membership brings access to a network of creative practitioners, a digital content archive plus exclusive discounts for products and events as well as the opportunity to help shape future projects.

Independent magazine Huck introduced the [‘Club Huck’ membership scheme](#) with a call for help: “The climate for journalism has never been more difficult. As costs rise and revenues sink, it’s harder and harder to keep producing vital and urgent storytelling. That’s where you come in.”

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has followed a similar approach in launching its [Bureau Insider program](#). Its launch statement laid its cards firmly on the table, saying TBIJ will struggle to keep going in 2024 without new funding. “That’s why we’re launching Bureau Insiders, a membership community that believes investigative journalism is vital to keep democracy alive.”

SUBSCRIPTIONS

CASE STUDY

Facebook subscriptions for local news

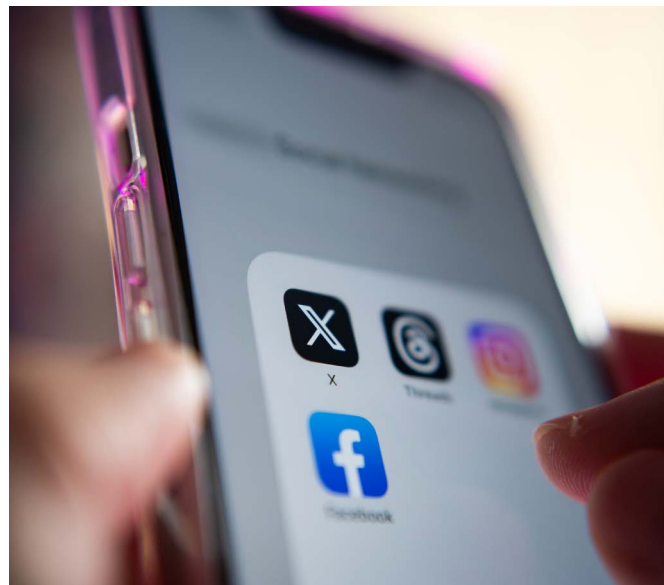
Platform plays are notoriously problematic for publishers. What starts with so much promise almost inevitably ends in disappointment as bigger, shinier things come along to distract the networks. Except, maybe for local news subscriptions.

In just four weeks Pulman's Weekly News, a small local news site based in Devon, has managed to convert almost a third of its 1,700 Facebook followers into subscribers paying £3.49 a month. Subscribers get access to a closed discussion group, exclusive posts, videos including live broadcasts, photos and polls, a subscriber badge next to comments, and five highlighted featured comments a month on live videos.

Owner Duncan Williams [told Press Gazette](#) that, rather than expecting readers to create separate paywall accounts, it made sense to leverage the Facebook audience and payment tech. He has run the local news site since the title, founded in 1857, stopped printing in 2018. He now sees Facebook groups maintained by people active in their communities as the place many people now turn to for their local news. For him, his Facebook page is of more value than a standalone website and he posts directly to the Pulman's page, no doubt boosting his credibility with Facebook.

Facebook introduced subscriptions in 2018, but they have never taken off among news publishers. To be eligible, a Facebook page must have either 10,000 followers or at least 250 return views. It must also have reached either 50,000 post engagements or 180,000 watch minutes in the previous 60 days, and be in compliance with Facebook's monetisation policies.

Direct reader relationships built on first party data have to be the future for mainstream publishers. However, where smaller, locally focussed organisations can tap into existing Facebook audiences and monetise them through Facebook's subscription tools, that is a platform play that makes sense.



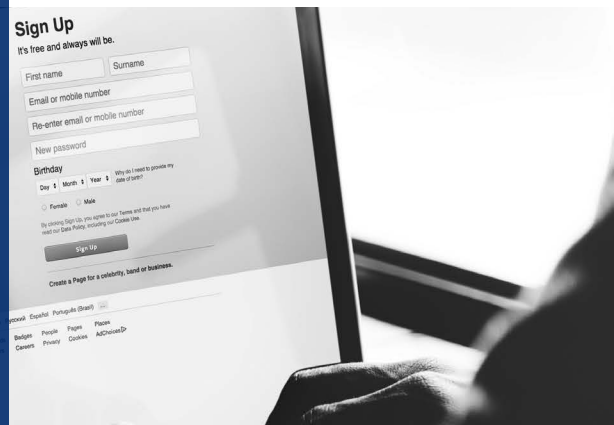
81%

of subscribers currently own subscriptions to more than one digital publication, up from 71% in 2022.

Toolkits



PLATFORMS



Esther Kezia Thorpe

Publishers blink as Meta cuts off money and traffic

The already-strained relationship publishers had with the tech giants soured further this year as attempts to force payments in Canada saw Meta block news from its platforms completely.

For years, publishers have been saying that the platforms need their content. Platforms have pushed back, saying that's not why users come to them. This year, publishers called their bluff, and it's not going well.

All eyes on Canada

The Canadian Online News Act was passed by the Senate in June this year. Like a similar law in Australia, it requires tech giants to make fair commercial deals with publishers for the news shared on their platforms. Deals were struck in Australia last year after amendments to the legislation were offered. But with the Canadian law, Meta and Google [have argued](#) that it is broader and puts a price on news story links. Consequently, both tech firms said they would block news content from appearing on their products if amendments were not considered.

Come August, Meta followed through on its threat and began stopping users on Facebook and Instagram from accessing news content. Traffic and engagement [plummeted overnight](#), with small publishers being particularly hard-hit. The timing was particularly unfortunate in creating a [local media vacuum](#) for evacuees of the Yellowknife wildfires in early August.

Who Meta defines as a 'news outlet' has been a [point of contention](#), but essentially, any organisation which had the right under the legislation to be at the negotiating table are the ones Meta removed. What was left behind was just as important as what was blocked: news stories from disreputable outlets, blogs, and one-person operations.

Google said it would follow suit and remove links to Canadian news from search, news pages and Google Discover before the law came into force at the end of the year. But the search giant reached a [last-minute deal](#) at the end of November. Google will keep links to news stories in search results, and will pay \$73.6 million (C\$100 million) annually to news publishers in Canada [via a single collective](#) which will distribute the funds to eligible news agencies "based on the number of full-time equivalent journalists engaged by those businesses". The Canadian government has committed to addressing Google's core issues with the bill.

At the time of writing, Google's deal with Canada doesn't change Meta's position, and news continues to be unavailable to Canadians on Instagram and Facebook. Google continues to strike deals with other countries, most recently in Germany where [in October it agreed](#) to pay German publishers 3.2 million euros a year for its publication of news content.

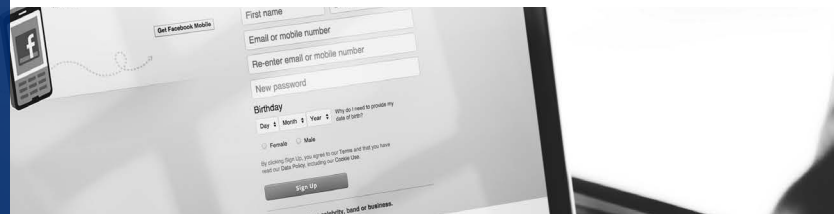
The best use of social platforms

LADbible Group's Operations Lead Jake Strong-Jones joins us on the podcast to discuss how the group's verticals make best use of social platforms. He takes us through how they go about making discerning use of platforms to find new audiences, and how its use of TikTok allows it to reach two-thirds of adults in the UK. Listen via the QR code, or by searching 'Media Voices' on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

PLATFORMS



Meta has also [wound down its Facebook News tab](#) and has stopped funding initiatives it was running alongside the industry such as the Community News Project.

"We can't afford to keep waiting around for someone else to invent a solution for us to gather audiences. I feel like we've used these platforms as a crutch and I'm trying to focus on what the opportunity is here, because I don't think we have any other choice."

[Amanda Zamora, publisher and co-founder of The 19th](#)

There have been studies published arguing both sides of the coin on whether the tech giants should be paying anything at all. [Research from NERA Economic Consulting](#) - commissioned by Meta - found that news content from traditional publishers is of low value to Meta and declining. It argued that the news industry reaps considerable economic benefit from Facebook. Yet a [recent working paper](#) from a team at Columbia University calculated that in the US alone, Google and Meta owe news publishers between \$11 billion and \$14 billion a year. The methodology is based on recent agreements between news outlets and the tech giants, as well as a database of licensing agreements for similar content-based products.

Perhaps in light of the latter study, the \$100 million Google has paid Canada's news industry is worth it to avoid harsher regulation.

Looking to alternatives

There's simply not space to chronicle Elon Musk's complete running of X - formerly known as Twitter - into the ground in the fourteen months since he was forced to buy the platform. But there have been a couple of points which have affected publishers, in particular his decision to strip article headlines out of tweets in August. At the end of November [he announced](#) that titles would

be coming back to URL cards, but what this looks like remains to be seen. Referral traffic from X has [declined sharply this year](#), with falls ranging from 20% to 48%.

Increasingly, publishers cannot depend on social media platforms for traffic. Referrals to the top global news sites from Facebook and X [have collapsed over the past year](#), and no newer platforms are looking likely to replace traffic lost elsewhere. Major Google algorithm changes in the UK, US and elsewhere in the autumn only added to the pressure, with some publishers [reporting](#) a "drastic decrease in page views and traffic".

Some are [looking at Reddit](#), while others have jumped early onto Threads. TikTok announced a new [contextual ad programme](#) over the summer, courting publishers like Condé Nast and BuzzFeed with promises of a 50% ad revenue share.

So far, news publishers have expressed caution when it comes to committing more resources to Threads. Despite engagement growing on the six month old platform, limited data availability "makes it difficult to determine whether investing more into the platform is worth it," [noted Digiday's Sara Guaglione](#).

Snapchat continues to generate revenue for some publishers. Of its 406 million daily users, [it says](#) 70 million watch news content on the platform each month. But the generous 50/50 ad revenue split on offer for publishers has meant some brands like the Daily Mail and Pink News are making good money from the platform.

The broken trust in platforms and the promises they once offered publishers has been a bitter pill to swallow, and we're likely to see many more casualties in 2024. But the renewed focus on loyal audiences and building communities can only mean stronger business models in the long run.

An average of
70 MILLION
people watch news
content on Snapchat
each month.

[Press Gazette](#)



PLATFORMS



Case Study

LinkedIn newsletters

LinkedIn's newsletter tool has been widely available for around 18 months, and as users have fled X, the professional networking platform has had a boost from those looking to re-create their communities. There are now more than 143,000 newsletters on the platform, with over 500 million subscribers, according to Nieman Lab.

When a person or page launches a newsletter, LinkedIn sends an alert to all followers, which can help build a subscriber base very quickly. But a note of caution: these 'newsletters' are essentially nothing more than alerts, and crucially publishers can't access subscriber emails and don't own the lists.

Nonetheless, some are experimenting with the feature as a way of reaching new audiences. MIT Technology Review has 1 million followers on LinkedIn, and 470,000 subscribers to its LinkedIn newsletter What's Next in Tech.

"I think of the LinkedIn newsletter as a precursor to an owned and operated newsletter in someone's engagement/awareness journey," explained Engagement Editor Juliet Beauchamp. "These subscribers are aware of who we are, but not so dedicated that they're entrenched in the MIT Technology Review [TR] universe. So I want to expose them to as much variety as possible, and if they're really into one beat, they can subscribe to one of our owned and operated beat newsletters.

90% of the time, blurbs and stories for the weekly LinkedIn newsletter are repurposed from the publishers' own daily newsletter. But Beauchamp does sometimes create something a "little more custom" for LinkedIn. She acknowledges that social media traffic is fleeting, so she's using the newsletter as an opportunity to bring as many of their social followers into the TR ecosystem as she can. So far, the LinkedIn newsletter has accounted for 15% of sign-ups to their own owned newsletters.



29%

of Canadians used
Facebook for news
before the block

Reuters Institute



LOCAL NEWS



Esther Kezia Thorpe

The local news revival gathers pace, but there are bumps along the road for even the most promising initiatives

In a growing number of spots, local news isn't just surviving: it's thriving. But the picture isn't so pretty for legacy publishers

“The global decline of local news is one of journalism’s greatest challenges,” Axios’ Nicholas Johnston [said](#). “It’s not going to be solved by a single idea, but by many entrepreneurial visions.”

Johnston was [talking about](#) his investment in The Mill, which is expanding across the UK after [being valued at](#) £1.75 million. Founder Joshi Herrmann started the Manchester Mill on Substack in 2020, before launching editions in Liverpool and Sheffield. The three titles have attracted more than 5,500 paid subscribers between them, and now have at least two reporters each on staff. With the fresh investment, The Mill’s fourth title, The Birmingham Dispatch, [launched on 1st November](#).

Even legacy publishers aren’t immune from the newsletter craze. A number of regional titles at Reach, the UK’s largest commercial news publisher, [have adopted](#) ‘newsletter-led’ strategies.

Jacqui Merrington provided a [round-up](#) of some other start-ups to watch. The Edinburgh Minute publishes a daily 60-second long read on what’s going on in the city, and is sustainable through paying subscribers. The Bristol Cable “pioneered an investigative local media co-op in 2014” and is undergoing a [new membership drive](#) with the aim of being entirely member funded.

Even paywalls are having a moment. Highland News and Media in Scotland launched a digital paywall in September 2021, and now has over 3,000 paid online subscribers, Publishing Director Steve Barron [told Press Gazette](#). Similarly, The Belfast Telegraph in Northern Ireland has 8,500 paid digital subscribers since launching

its own digital paywall in May 2020. While its ‘more neutral’ stance on political reporting has helped, Director of Publishing Edward McCann [also credited](#) a conscious decision to invest in its journalism as key to its success.

Advance Local has been experimenting with day passes as a way to build a paying relationship with those unwilling to commit to subscriptions. “Of the 1,826 day pass purchases, 12.3% have subscribed,” Debbie Tolman [wrote](#).

Nearly 300 new digital local news organisations have launched since 2016 in the US alone. A study from Project Oasis [noted that](#) “one in five publishers believe their organisation has reached sustainability and another two in five say they are heading in that direction.”

The models and methods may vary, and there is no easy money. But enough people are giving it a go for the sector to have found a new energy.

Platforms for sustainable local news

This episode we’re joined by Daniel Ionescu, founder of The Lincolnite and new local news platform MyLocal. Daniel talks us through why he got into local news in 2010 and the opportunity he spotted to make local news more up-to-date when compared to the digital efforts of local news organisations still tied to the print cycle. Listen via the QR code, or by searching ‘Media Voices’ on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

LOCAL NEWS



Bumps (and craters) in the road

Nowhere have the harsh realities of the business been highlighted so starkly this year as at Reach. In January, they [announced plans](#) to make 200 redundancies because of the “double whammy” of decreasing consumer spend and rising costs. A further 192 editorial jobs were put on the line in March.

But that wasn't the end of the cuts. In early November, they announced a further round of 450 jobs. The National Union of Journalists [called the cuts](#) “the single worst” mass culling in the UK publishing sector for decades.

Bosses have blamed the “[online attention recession](#)” and “economic headwinds”. While the market has its challenges, the state of the UX at Reach - and indeed many other legacy local news publications in the UK - renders them [both unreadable and unnavigable](#). The cuts seen this year are a predictable part of the decline we see when pageviews are the north star for local news.

National World also came under fire. They announced a restructuring that placed over 50 journalists at risk of redundancy, as well as a below-inflation 4.5% pay rise, while paying £1.36 million to shareholders. 300 journalists took part in National World's [first company-wide strike](#) in August.

In the US, Gannett has been cutting “[substantially deeper](#)” than the rate of newspaper revenue decline. Nieman Lab's Joshua Benton [pointed out](#): “Some of that decline is Gannett selling a few newspapers to local buyers, but a lot of it is straight-up closures.”

Struggles with legacy publishers are nothing new. But 2023 has seen some of the most promising initiatives stumble. Axios Local, which saw [rapid growth in 2022](#), slowed their planned expansion after launching in their 30th new market in San Diego in July. The decision came after it fell 10% short of its 2022 revenue goals. Instead, Axios Local [would focus](#) on growing its existing readership and monetisation capabilities before launching anything further.

“ You cannot point to any digital news startup of scale that's trying to replace a daily newspaper that is profitable today. I can't find any”.

[Ken Doctor, CEO/Founder, Lookout Santa Cruz](#)

The Athletic, under new owners The New York Times, has been quietly [cutting back](#) on local podcasts. The publisher has stressed that reporters with cancelled podcasts will continue writing in-depth local coverage. But they have also pulled back from dedicated coverage of many pro teams, with management clear that continued coverage is dependent on reader interest.

Perhaps most difficult for some smaller outlets has been the growing hostility between Meta and publishers. The Meta Journalism Project's team were [laid off](#) at the end of 2022, and the tech giant [confirmed in September](#) that it would stop funding the Community News Project when the current contracts end. The project currently places more than 100 reporters in under-served communities around the UK.

Getting to grips with AI

Some organisations have been using AI and automation successfully for some years. We covered five publishers using these technologies in a special report and podcast published earlier this year: [Practical AI for Local Media](#). But the effect of generative AI on the sector remains to be seen.

News Corp Australia is producing 3,000 articles a week using generative AI. A team of four staff on the Data Local unit use the tech to generate the stories on weather, fuel prices and traffic conditions. But Executive Chair Michael Miller was [keen to stress](#) that “all such information and decisions are overseen by working journalists from the Data Local team.”

LOCAL NEWS



In July, OpenAI, the parent company of ChatGPT, [reached a two-year deal](#) with the American Journalism Project to put \$5 million towards efforts by local outlets to experiment with AI technology. In addition to the grant funding, there are up to \$5 million worth of credits that can be used by AJP's portfolio companies to access its tech products.

Sustainability in local news is achievable. But even the brightest start-ups have shown that audiences are small, content needs to be highly focused, and margins are thin. "It's a notoriously shitty business," Scott Brodbeck, Founder of Local News Now [told Press Gazette](#). "I probably would be a lot wealthier if I just owned a series of Airbnbs or something."



News Corp Australia
is producing

3,000

articles a week using
generative AI.

The Guardian



LOCAL NEWS



CASE STUDY

Local print title boasts best year for advertising

Round & About, a community magazine brand which publishes 31 localised editions - 605,000 free copies a month - across the South and South West of England, had its best year for advertising revenues of its three decades in operation.

Five of Round & About's local editions were launched in the first few months of 2023. The content is submitted from community members in the 31 areas it's distributed in, then edited by the publication's journalists. There is crossover content, but each edition has a core focus on local activities - sent in by readers - within that area.

Round & About publishes the content submitted free of charge, as long as it's not promoting a for-profit service. This means the magazines are usually filled with community driven content, promoting "fundraising, sports and societies, flower clubs, [retiree education charity] u3a, educational stuff, and so on," the magazine's Managing Director Chris Savage told Press Gazette.

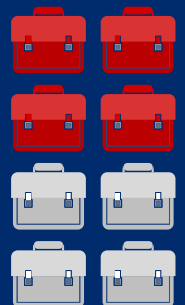
The magazine's revenue mainly comes from advertising, with their repeat business rate at 92%. Savage attributed some of the success to 'old-fashioned' direct sales. "We're still big believers in the phone," he said. "So the sales team will all make sure they make their calls, rather than maybe [being] reliant on emails or different media these days."

The publisher is making slow inroads into digital publishing, and earlier in the year, launched a dedicated app. But if they're doing this well in print in a year where everyone else has struggled, they're clearly doing something right.

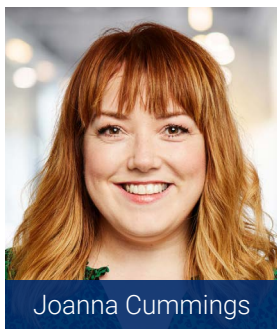


Gannett has eliminated
MORE THAN HALF
of its jobs in the United States
in four years.

(Nieman Lab)



DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION



Joanna Cummings

Is diversity, equity and inclusion at risk of becoming just another ‘trend’?

While the industry is seeing some progress in terms of gender pay gaps and representation, commitment to DEI in some quarters is waning, with too little focus on systemic change

2023 has been a mixed bag on the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) front. It was the year Vogue published its [first ever Braille issue](#), and featured 19 disabled people on its cover, but is also the year when Edward Enninful, having [challenged certain advertisers](#) on the inclusivity of their campaigns, was removed from his position at the title and [promoted](#) to the much more amorphous ‘Editorial Advisor’.

Coincidence? It’s hard to say, though as Media Voices’ Peter Houston [pointed out](#), “If seeing a Black, gay man heading up one of the most iconic publishing brands gave just one magazine journalist the belief to push ahead with their career, then that’s a win”.

DEI: just another trend?

There have been mutterings that the industry is treating DEI as another ‘trend’, rather than as a fundamental problem, and Mother Jones’ Maria Jones-Newman posited that three years after George Floyd’s murder, interest in DEI is waning. [She stated that](#), “Diversity is only as important as the most recent unrest”, and said that as budgets shrink, DEI initiatives are often the first part of business strategy to be put on the chopping block.

One [Atlantic piece](#) suggested that current DEI efforts are ineffective because too many C-suite executives believe

that paying for diversity training sessions is sufficient to change the industry. And D&I Innovation Consultant and journalist [Shirish Kulkarni said](#) that media companies’ actions in the DEI space are “largely superficial and/or performative, [and] fail to understand either the real problems or the systemic solutions that are required”.

Slow progress

That’s not to say there haven’t been positive developments. [A Digiday report](#) found that many media businesses, including Hearst and Condé Nast, had reached or exceeded gender parity, and many had

Creating DE&I programmes in media

Elaine dela Cruz, co-founder of DE&I consultancy firm Project 23, came on the podcast to talk about what is creating positive change for diversity and inclusion in the industry. She discusses how the DE&I landscape has changed over the past five years, and why ‘resilience’ is such a dangerous word. Listen via the QR code, or by searching ‘Media Voices’ on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

About Jo

Joanna is a freelance writer and editor, writing for companies such as FIPP, Mensa and a variety of scientific publications. She is Editorial

Director of [The Grub Street Journal](#), “the magazine for magazine people”, and was shortlisted for Editors’ Editor at this year’s BSME Awards.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION



more Black, Hispanic/Latino and Asian employees in editorial and managerial positions. [Press Gazette also reported](#) that the gender pay gap at UK media companies had narrowed from 15.7% in 2017 to 12%, and women at Newsquest and CNN International were paid more than men.

“Common issues that prevent publishers seizing the diversity opportunity include: A lack of clarity about how it fits into overall business objectives; limited internal representation and empowerment of women and younger staff; blind spots in understanding target audiences’ needs and behaviours...and capability gaps that mean diversity initiatives have limited impact.”

[Seizing the Opportunity, Enabling Growth in the News Business, a report by FT Strategies](#)

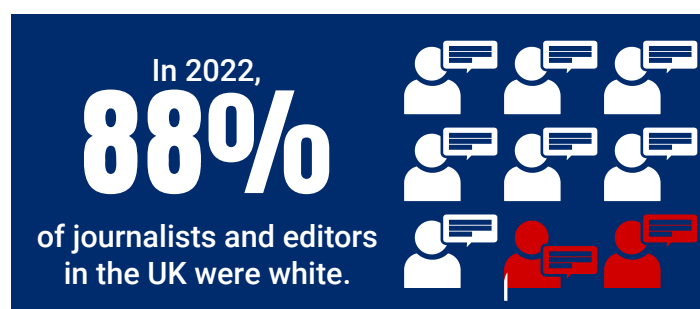
Multiple barriers

While the focus of DEI has – understandably – been on increasing racial diversity, [there have been reminders](#) for companies to consider barriers related to age, socioeconomic status, neurodiversity and sexual orientation. Isabel Berwick at the FT [highlighted](#) that class is still a huge barrier to many and Belinda Basil-Jones, Chief of Staff at 55/Redefined, [told MediaWeek Australia](#) that the industry is “failing to acknowledge one of the most significant social transformations of the 21st century” – namely, that the over-60 population is set to grow by 40% by 2050.

At a time when [some brands are withdrawing support](#) for LGBTQIA+ communities for fear of a backlash, New Digital Age [launched Media Pride](#), an initiative that, amongst other things, aims to combat disinformation around the trans community, and The Independent [launched the Pride Hub](#) as the exclusive news partner of Pride in London.

Time to reassess

While there are numerous stats to suggest things are on the up, there is certainly a long way to go. [The Harvard Business Review highlighted](#) that for true DEI progress, organisations need to consider attrition, performance, promotions, the leadership pipeline, pay equity and inclusion, as well as hiring, which, [Paolo Gaudiano said in Forbes](#), may tick a box but could force minoritised people into unwelcome and problematic environments. Gaudiano also believes that the waning of DEI action provides an opportunity for media companies to rethink their (ineffective) strategies. Quartz’s [Zach Seward said](#) that racial justice is “a life’s work” – a statement that, while particularly pressing for racial diversity, is the case for removing all barriers of access within the publishing industry.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION



CASE STUDY

Quartz's ongoing commitment to diversity progress

In July, co-founder Zach Seward [shared](#) some of the strategies employed by Quartz to diversify their newsroom. He prefaced it by stipulating that theirs is "not a success story", as although they can claim to have one of the most globally diverse teams in the industry, and women have always been a majority in the business, they have struggled to hire and retain African-American and Hispanic employees. He also said that his narrative should be fact-checked with his employees, and as the "white guy running management" he was not the best person to tell the company's story.

Quartz's tactics included:

- Adopting a formal affirmative action plan to correct for the historic underrepresentation of certain groups within the media industry;
- Accepting applications from anywhere, which includes moving to remote working to increase access to job roles;
- Requiring genuinely diverse finalist pools which now have to include at least two people of colour and two people who identify as women or non-binary;
- Standardising their interview process and using a hiring committee to develop common and objective criteria;
- Reading memos with story ideas from finalists blind, by simply removing names before reading them to ensure they focused on the best ideas;
- Working with the union and staff member to craft their policies, to ensure that all initiatives were not solely dictated by management.

Despite Seward's claims about lack of success, Quartz has actually made significant progress in the last couple of years. Employees of colour now comprise half of the company's newsroom, and over 40% of the company as a whole. Seward said, that although they are likely to have "failed in lots of ways", in light of the "whole lot of nothing" done by businesses across the USA, he is proud that they have "found a path to incremental progress".



People from lower socio-economic backgrounds take

19%

longer to progress in their careers.



BROADCAST



Charlotte Henry

Streaming services have cemented their dominant position, but sport still supports linear

Amidst growing financial pressure and Hollywood strikes, media and entertainment have had a turbulent year, but streaming services still lead the broadcasting landscape.

Streaming continues to dominate the broadcasting landscape, apart from in a couple of key areas. However, things are not entirely straightforward for the service providers. Take Netflix, for instance. In its July 2023 results, the streamer announced it had added 6 million subscribers in the preceding quarter, above market expectations. Its stock price fell by 8% the following day as revenue was down below what Wall Street had expected.

This encapsulated two key trends. Firstly, Wall Street now cares about streamers actually making some money; Netflix still has billions of dollars-worth of debt on its books. It's not simply about having loads of subscribers and great shows anymore. Secondly, in a highly competitive market, streaming services are determined to find as many new (paying) subscribers as possible. In Netflix's case, it has been [particularly keen to clamp down on password sharing](#), using additional fees and continuing to push its cheaper, ad-supported tier.

The fruits of this are starting to be seen. In Q3 2023 Netflix added 8.76 million subscribers, bringing its total to 247.15 million. Significantly, in a letter to investors, [the company said](#) that the number of subscribers to its ad-supported planned was up "70% quarter-over-quarter".

Price rises test customer loyalty

Across the board, streamers are raising their prices, testing exactly how much a consumer is willing to spend each month or year. We may be reaching the limit. Indeed, in its Media Nations 2023 report, [Ofcom found](#) that 66% of UK households used a SVoD service in the first three months of 2023. That was down from 68% for the same period in 2022.

Disney celebrated its centenary in 2023, but things are not smooth sailing for its digital operation either. Disney+, of course, remains wildly popular, with plenty

Changing TV consumption habits

Charlotte Henry joined us on the podcast to discuss the role of exclusive content, the doldrums of advertising sales across linear broadcasts, the need to differentiate a streaming service from its competitors, and the longer term impact of the Hollywood actors' strike. Listen via the QR code, or by searching 'Media Voices' on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

About Charlotte

Charlotte is an author, journalist and broadcaster who creates and runs [The Addition](#) newsletter and podcast; an award-winning

publication looking at the crossover between media and technology.

BROADCAST



of high-profile content. However, there is growing concern about how much further the returning Bob Iger can push the Marvel and Star Wars franchises. Furthermore, there are growing questions about the future of ESPN. [A hunt is on](#) for strategic minority partners in the iconic US sports broadcasting brand. Both these issues have been rumbling over the last year and will come to a head in the months to come. Watch out for what happens when the NBA does its next TV rights deal in 2024.

Talking of sport, Netflix has finally dipped its toe, very gingerly, into broadcasting live sporting events. On November 14th it presented the world with a pro-am golf tournament named... The Netflix Cup. It featured golfers and Formula 1 drivers from its shows "Full Swing" and "Drive to Survive" competing against each other. It was a smart use of IP, but hardly a breakthrough success.

Live sport saves linear

It is sport that is really keeping linear television relevant, especially in the UK. Sky still leads as it is the main Premier League football rights holder, but it also benefited from a thrilling Ashes cricket series over the summer. ITV was helped by a good England run at the Rugby World Cup too.

However, the BBC came out on top when it came to live sport, as millions tuned in to watch the Lionesses lose the Women's World Cup final to Spain. While pure streaming services can, of course, broadcast sport, technical delivery - nobody wants a delay - and getting and getting the audience remain challenges that the likes of the BBC and ITV simply do not face.

The same is true in news, the second area in which linear continues to beat streamers. Again, the BBC dominated when it came to coverage of King Charles III's coronation, with BBC One seeing a peak of 13.4 million viewers. Bingeable series are drawing consumers into streaming services, but major live events will always pull in the numbers.

"Tough for those in production and the film industry, the strikes have probably been net positive for the streamers - leading to lower content spend without much major impact on subscription numbers and revenue."

Tom Harrington, Head of Television, Enders Analysis

Despite these standout events, the BBC remains under enormous political pressure. It had to introduce new social media rules for stars and even as this report was being finalised Michael Grade, head of regulator Ofcom, [blasted the licence fee](#) as a "regressive tax" given that it is a flat fee for everyone. The scrutiny on and criticism of the national broadcaster for its coverage of the Israel-Hamas war was intense, and this will only increase as the UK hurtles towards a General Election sometime in 2024.

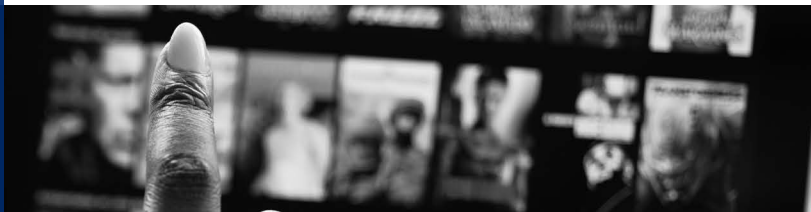
Broadcast media was massively disrupted by the strikes in Hollywood, although it hit the US far more than it did the UK. Key late-night shows were unable to broadcast, with the shooting of new drama series and blockbuster movies delayed too. We will see the ongoing ripple effects of this for months to come, as release dates had to be pulled back. The details of the agreement may be settled for the next few years, but issues such as transparency from streaming services and the growing use of AI are going nowhere anytime soon.

12 million

– peak BBC One audience for the Women's World Cup Final.



BROADCAST



CASE STUDY

Paramount+ battles for relevance

Paramount+ is one of the smaller streamers, battling it out with the likes of Apple TV+ to stay relevant as the bigger names continue to dominate. It originally launched in March 2021, arriving in the UK in June 2022.

The service certainly offers a decent content catalogue. The entirety of Star Trek, including the new iterations, is there, as are the likes of “Yellowstone”, its prequel “1883” and “Ray Donovan”. It is also the streaming home of the mega-hit movie “Top Gun: Maverick” and has family-facing content from Nickelodeon.

Furthermore, Paramount+ offers live sport. Amongst other things, it has the rights to shows Champions League football and, via CBS, some NFL games in the US. The pricing is competitive too. Plans in the US start from \$5.99 per month/\$59.99 per year and £6.99 per month/£69.99 for a year in the UK.

All the components for a successful service would then seem to be in place.

However, Paramount+ has never had huge take up. It now has around 60 million subscribers, far behind the likes of Netflix and Disney+.

This is surely down to the lack of a true breakout hit. The service has never had its equivalent of “House of Cards” or “Orange is the New Black”. It came close with “1883” and has tried again with the “The Curse”, but at the time of writing Paramount+ had not provided that must-watch moment.

Paramount is not giving up though. It has done a deal with T-Mobile to provide eligible customers a year of streaming for free. It also announced that in 2024 it was going to spend over \$6 billion on direct-to-consumer content. It is unclear whether or not this will be anywhere near enough to challenge the big players in the streaming game. However, it is certainly a signal of intent.



Sky currently pays
**£3.75
BILLION**

for the right to show 128
Premier League games
a season.



TRUST



Chris Sutcliffe

A year of culture wars demonstrates the public's trust cannot be taken for granted

2023 has seen a number of ongoing trends around the public's trust in media run their course – but individual incidents at the BBC, Fox and more demonstrate the scale of the risk for getting trust wrong.

In the last few Media Moments reports we have bemoaned the lack of progress news publishers have made in regaining the public's trust. While a lack of belief in an outlet's mission to protect the public has a negative impact on its ability to generate revenue, it also limits its ability to hold power to account. Although growing that trust has [been on the agenda](#) of the news industry for years, 2023 has demonstrated there is still considerable work to be done.

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's Digital News Report has found that trust in the news has fallen, again. This time the figure [has fallen](#) by a further 2 percentage points over the course of the year. Worse, the report states that fall has reversed "the gains made at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic" in many places.

Geographic differences in trust

There is, as expected, significant variance by country. Some of the statistics are, frankly, scary. The Reuters Institute study found that only 19% trust most news "most of the time" in Greece, the lowest figure in the study. In the UK, meanwhile, the overall trust score stands at 33%.

The UK also has wide variance in trust in its individual news outlets. The Sun, for instance, is [far and away](#) the least trusted general news source, while the BBC ranked among the highest at the point of the research being undertaken by YouGov.

The year has been categorised by some flashpoints around mistrust in individual news outlets, however, which demonstrate the extent to which trust cannot be taken for granted. After the twin incidents of the BBC censoring presenter Gary Lineker for his views and the revelation of chairman Richard Sharp's ties to the ruling Tory government, the BBC [lost its most-trusted crown](#) to rival broadcaster ITV.

Similarly, in the US, 21% of Fox viewers [trusted the network less](#) after the revelations in the Dominion lawsuit, during which it was found its presenters and owners were knowingly misleading the public.

How to measure trust

To help us dissect the year in trust, we were joined on the podcast by Dr Amy Ross Arguedas, a Postdoctoral Researcher Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Amy tells us about the work of the Trust in News Project, and how to go about measuring trust in a way which is useful. Listen via the QR code, or by searching 'Media Voices' on your podcast app of choice.



Listen here

TRUST



It speaks to a landscape in which trust, even in venerable brands, can be lost far more easily than it can be recouped or even maintained. That is [especially true](#) when the commercial considerations of a newsbrand are perceived to overtake the need to keep the public informed.

“When we were doing some of our qualitative data collection early on, particularly with British participants... people would bring up the phone hacking scandal. That was a long time ago, but it was surprising how it really stuck with a lot of people.”

Dr Amy Ross Arguedas, Postdoctoral Researcher Fellow, The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

Opportunities to grow trust

There is some potential light at the end of the tunnel. Per the Ofcom ‘News consumption in the UK 2023’ report, younger audiences trust established sources more highly than more mature readers. Despite largely seeking out online sources for news, teens “tend to rate traditional sources better than their online counterparts”. The flagship BBC One/Two stations are considered to ‘provide trustworthy news stories’ ‘all’ or ‘most’ of the time by over four-fifths (82%) of its teenage users.

That finding is not universally accepted, however. Dr Amy Ross Arguedas, a Postdoctoral Researcher Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, worked on the wide-ranging Trust In News report. [She says](#) that there are a variety of results on the subject of young people’s trust in news – with much of the difference predicated on their use of social media for news consumption.

[Ofcom found](#) that in the UK social media accounted for 63% of all news consumption by 16 to 24 year olds, compared with 39% across the UK. That was primarily driven by trust in individual creators, raising the spectre

of disinformation given that these news sources are not subject to the same level of scrutiny as traditional outlets.

However, that is not just a social media phenomenon. In May [Gallup found](#) that audiences in general were also more likely to turn to one or more public figures for their news, suggesting that for a growing proportion of people personality is a better signal of trustworthiness than parent organisation.

Transparency is also cited by some trust researchers as being an important foundation for rebuilding trust in public sources of news. Speaking at the launch of the Trust In News report in March, Deborah Turness, CEO for BBC News and Current Affairs said: “If you know how it’s made, you can trust what it says. Trust is earned.” That is in part disputed by Ross Arguedas, who notes that while transparency might be a [signal of quality for some](#), it is not universal.

As discussed in our AI chapter, the rapid rise of generative AI has the potential to add [far more noise](#) to the digital information ecosystem. While the extent to which it is a brave new world of misinformation versus simply a new tool for creating it is unclear, there is a huge opportunity for news publishers to [take advantage](#) of the public perception of AI. ‘Human-made’ might be as much a differentiator in terms of trust as it is a commercial proposition.

28%

the proportion of 12-15 year olds who cite TikTok as their most used single source of news.



TRUST



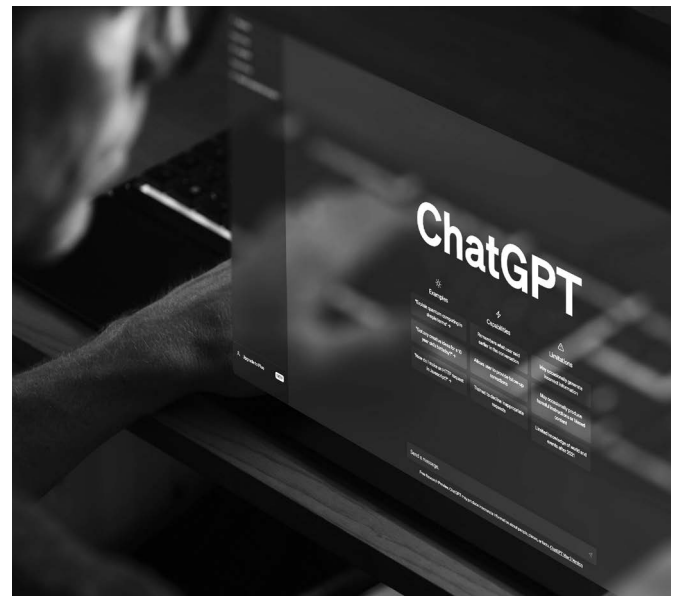
CASE STUDY

Gannett, AI, and Trust

While responding to AI can potentially be a generator of trust for publishers, it can also impact their own trustworthiness if they use it poorly. The paranoia around GenAI use at publications came to a head in October this year, when [critics of Gannett argued](#) that some of its product reviews had, in fact, been written by artificial intelligence. The critics – members of the NewsGuild of New York – cited the fact the articles appeared without bylines, in product categories that the site Reviewed did not typically cover. Moreover, they claimed the articles were written with a “mechanical tone and repetitive phrases”.

Gannett later stated that the articles had, in fact, been written by freelancers and simply had not been correctly tagged as affiliate content. It was a) a slam on the writing ability of those alleged freelancers, and b) still seen as evidence of a publisher seeking to phase out human journalists in favour of AI. For product reviews, where human oversight and hands-on reviews are critical for maintaining trust, even the suggestion that AI might have been involved was seen as undermining trust.

It followed similar GenAI articles from G/O Media, potentially explaining where that paranoia arose. As GenAI develops further, we expect to see [far more media companies](#) disclosing how and when they use AI, to stave off any related loss of trust.



56%

proportion of people surveyed by the Digital News Report who said they are concerned by the state of online misinformation.



Publishing partners



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