Innovation in Media 2026/27

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An annual survey by INNOVATION International Media Consulting Group for **WAN-IFRA** and **FIPP**



FIPP KIDS
INITIATIVE FOR TRUSTED MEDIA

PUT TRUSTED MEDIA IN FRONT OF EVERY CHILD



THE READERS OF TOMORROW NEED US TODAY.

Children have access to more content than ever before, but much of it is algorithm-driven, unverified or generated by AI.

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You don't have to be a children's publisher. This is an opportunity to introduce your existing high-quality content to a new generation.

Whether you are a publisher, brand, institution or industry partner, you can help us shape what comes next.

FIND OUT MORE AND GET INVOLVED

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Pause at a Time of AI Speed

Written at a time of extraordinary speed, this book argues for something that may feel counterintuitive: the need to pause. Not to slow progress, but to reflect—clearly and deliberately—on what we now know with certainty, and what we must do in response.

The facts are now settled. Content supply is effectively infinite. Distribution is unstable. AI is not a tool; it is infrastructure. Economics are shifting from scarcity to abundance and then back to scarcity, and from access to intelligence. In that shift, value is concentrating around trust, proprietary data, and direct relationships.

This creates a hard divide. Those who treat AI as efficiency will reduce cost and erode differentiation. Short gains leading to vanilla content and more of the same. Those who treat it as a revenue engine will build new products, new markets, and new forms of advantage. The question is no longer whether to adapt, but how quickly and how decisively.

The chapters that follow are built for action:

Chapter One sets out how to make money in the AI age. It organises the core revenue models—licensing content, subscriptions, membership, intelligence products, events, commerce and data—into a clear framework for building durable income when content itself is no longer scarce.

Chapter Two examines how to ensure journalism is paid for within the AI economy. It explores licensing, data partnerships, AI-powered products, advertising models and enterprise services, with a focus on turning content and archives into active revenue streams rather than passive assets.

Chapter Three addresses how to sell human-made journalism in a synthetic age. It positions trust, verification and accountability as premium attributes, and outlines how publishers can differentiate, price and protect their content as human-created.

Chapter Four focuses on building an AI-native newsroom. It looks at organisational design, workflow transformation, the role of AI agents, and the redefinition of editorial roles, with an emphasis on integrating technology at the core of operations rather than layering it on top. AI were tools, now they are workflows.

Chapter Five examines how to own direct audiences. It sets out strategies to reduce platform dependency, strengthen first-party relationships, and build defensible ecosystems across newsletters, apps, (v)pod casts, communities and journalist-led brands.

Chapter Six returns to Print & Offbeat, our recurring look at some of the more inventive ideas in publishing. This year, it explores the renewed value of scarcity, materiality and experimentation in an age of abundant digital content.

These lessons apply equally to members of WAN-IFRA and publishers within FIPP. The distinctions between core news journalism and consumer, specialist or hobby publishing are narrowing. In the AI age, the underlying economics, technologies and competitive pressures are converging. The same strategic questions—and increasingly the same solutions—apply across both sectors.

Each chapter is grounded in practice, not theory. The intention is not to describe change, but to enable it.

Read them selectively or as a whole. Test what is relevant. Discard what is not. But act. The cost of delay is not neutrality; it is decline. This is 1998 all over again. Ignoring or denying our AI future can be as detrimental as it was to those who ignored or denied the age of the website and its digital permutations.

To pause, then, is not to hesitate. It is to choose where to compete, what to defend, and how to win—before moving at speed.

And so the argument returns to where it began: at a time of speed, the advantage lies with those who pause—briefly, deliberately - but then only to act with precision.



Business Models in the Age of AI Abundance

	CLIENT FOCUS	INCOME POTENTIAL	PROFIT POTENTIAL	RISKS
READER REVENUE	B2C	■	▬	Subscription fatigue, plateauing growth, retention challenges
AI LICENSING	B2B	▬	▬	Limited control, low revenue share, weak user relationship
ADVERTISER (DIRECT + PARTNERSHIPS)	B2B	■	▬	Declining programmatic, reliance on first-party data, pricing pressure
PHILANTHROPY PARTNER	B2C/B2B	▬	▬	Geographic disparity, donor dependence, sustainability concerns
EDUCATOR	B2C	▬	▬	Resource-intensive, must balance education with journalistic values
CLUB/MEMBERSHIP MODEL	B2C	▬	▬	Requires emotional connection, custom benefits, high engagement needed
GAMES/PUZZLES	B2C	■	■	Need for continuous innovation, editorial integration
THINK TANK	B2B	■	■	Competition from established firms, high research quality required
AFFILIATE MARKETER	B2C	■	▬	Must maintain trust and editorial independence, platform dependency
ARCHIVIST	B2C/B2B	▬	▬	Niche offering, technological investment
IT PROVIDER	B2B	▬	▬	High development and support costs
EVENT ORGANISER	B2C/B2B	▬	▬	Need strong curation, operational complexity
MARKETPLACE	B2C	▬	▬	Brand dilution, limited repeatability, credibility trade-offs
VANITY PUBLISHING	B2C	▬	▬	High execution risk
BETTING AGENCY	B2C	■	▬	Regulatory concerns, editorial conflict of interest risks

This year, for the first time, we open the business models section with a broader framing of the choices facing publishers. It is a shift that reflects where the industry now finds itself.

The underlying challenge is no longer difficult to describe. Content is abundant. Distribution is less predictable. And increasingly, access to information is mediated by platforms and AI-driven interfaces that sit between publishers and their audiences. In many cases, users no longer need to visit a publisher's site to get what they are looking for.

↘ This does not diminish the value of journalism. But it does change where value is created, and how it is captured. The central question for publishers is no longer simply how to produce content or grow traffic. It is how to build revenue models that remain durable when content itself is no longer scarce, and when the path between publisher and audience is less direct.

↘ In this environment, no single model is sufficient. We have long argued for that proposition, and it underpins much of what follows in this section. But the need to revisit and rethink business models has rarely been more urgent, as changes in distribution – not least the growing role of AI and what it implies for the industry – begin to alter how audiences access information.

↘ Reader revenue has emerged as the foundation of many media businesses, but subscriptions alone cannot carry the full measure of success. Building on that base, publishers are developing portfolios of revenue streams, combining subscriptions with memberships, premium vertical products, events, commerce, and services.

↘ What connects these models is not the content itself, but the relationship with the user. In an environment where access to information is increasingly mediated, the ability to build direct, ongoing relationships with audiences becomes the primary source of long-term value. Publishers that understand their users, engage them across multiple touch-points, and create products that fit into their daily lives are better positioned not just to monetise, but to remain relevant.

↘ There is no universal blueprint. The mix will vary by market, brand, and audience. But the direction is clear: away from reliance on any single model, and toward more integrated, relationship-driven approaches to revenue – where long-term value is defined less by individual transactions and more by the strength of the ongoing relationship with the user.

Chapter 1

The Publisher Beyond Subscriptions

THE [SUBSCRIPTION] MODEL IS NO LONGER PRIMARILY ABOUT CONVERTING LARGE NUMBERS OF NEW USERS. IT IS ABOUT MAXIMISING VALUE FROM A SMALLER BASE OF KNOWN, ENGAGED AUDIENCES.

For more than a decade, the industry has aligned around a clear strategy: build direct relationships with audiences and convert them into paying subscribers. This shift helped stabilise revenues after the collapse of print advertising and the volatility of digital advertising markets. In many organisations, reader revenue is now the primary source of income.

That model has not broken, but it has matured. As media analyst and INMA researcher-in-residence Greg Piechota notes in his analysis of global subscription trends, reader revenue accounted for 46% of total revenue for the median news business unit in INMA's review of annual reports of 66 news companies, overtaking advertising. Over the same period, the share of consumers who paid for or used paid-for online news has nearly doubled over the past decade, approaching one in five adults across 20 markets surveyed by the Reuters Institute.

Subscriptions then remain a high-margin and predictable business, supported by relatively low churn and strong lifetime value. But growth is becoming harder to sustain. The most engaged users have largely already been converted. Acquisition is slowing, competition for attention is intensifying, and the flow of new users into subscription funnels is weakening. What has changed is not the viability of subscriptions, but the conditions under which they grow. These are the main themes we'll look into.

GROWTH WITHOUT REACH

One of the clearest signals of this shift is the growing disconnect between subscription growth and audience growth – something most publishers are already feeling as AI-driven search and platform changes quietly eat into their traffic.

Reporting from Digiday shows that major publishers such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Guardian continue to expand their subscriber bases – in some cases at an accelerating rate – even as overall traffic declines over a 12-month period.

This growth is not being driven by a significant expansion of audiences. Instead, publishers are extracting more value from existing users through higher pricing, bundling, and product extensions. Subscription prices rose by an average of 5% year over year in 2025, while publishers increasingly pushed users toward higher-value tiers and bundled offerings.

At the same time, reach is under pressure. Across hundreds of publishers tracked by INMA, median audience reach declined by double digits year over year, driven by weaker news cycles, declining platform referrals, and growing competition from content creators.

The result is a structural tension. The largest and best-resourced publishers are becoming more efficient at monetising attention, even as they lose control over how that attention is generated.

This distinction is important, because the impact is uneven across the industry. Large, well-resourced publishers are continuing to grow, supported by strong brands, diversified products, and the ability to build daily user habits. According to Digiday's analysis, top-performing publishers have significantly outpaced the rest of the market, with subscriber and revenue growth far exceeding that of median publishers.

For many others, growth is far more limited. Subscriber volumes are flat, and gains in revenue are driven primarily by price increases rather than scale. This gap may also be more pronounced globally. Much of the available data and success stories come from large Western publishers, while there is far less visibility into how subscription models are evolving in the Global South.

Nevertheless, these trends reflect a broader shift in the economics of subscriptions. The model is no longer primarily about converting large numbers of new users. It is about maximising value from a smaller base of known, engaged audiences.

FROM SUBSCRIPTIONS TO RELATIONSHIP MONETISATION

This shift requires a rethink of what reader revenue actually means. The traditional model was relatively linear –

from traffic to subscription to retention. The emerging model is more layered, moving from identity to engagement to monetisation.

In this framework, the most valuable asset is not the subscriber alone, but the known user – someone with whom the publisher has an ongoing, trackable relationship across platforms and products. Subscriptions remain central, but they are only one expression of that relationship. Growth depends as much on how users engage as on how value is captured over time.

THE NEW ECONOMICS OF SUBSCRIPTIONS

In most markets, subscriptions are no longer a high-growth acquisition product. They are increasingly a retention-driven business. Monthly churn rates remain relatively low – often below 5% – which means even small improvements in retention can have a disproportionate impact on revenue. As a result, engagement has become as important as conversion. The goal is not simply to acquire subscribers, but to build habits that sustain long-term relationships.

At the same time, a significant share of recent growth is being driven by increases in average revenue per user. Publishers are raising prices, moving users off long promotional offers, and encouraging upgrades to higher-value bundles. At The New York Times, bundled and multi-product subscriptions now account for a substantial share of the subscriber base, with these users showing higher engagement, lower churn, and greater lifetime value. Bundling, in this sense, has evolved from a pricing tactic into a core strategic lever, strengthening retention while expanding the value of each user relationship.

Pricing itself is also becoming more fluid. Rather than being set once, it is increasingly treated as a variable to optimise – through shorter trials, higher introductory prices, alternative pricing formats, and more targeted offers based on user behaviour. This reflects a broader shift toward continuous optimisation, rather than reliance on static subscription models.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AS AN OPERATING SYSTEM

Perhaps the most important change is how subscriptions are managed internally. Among the most advanced publishers, subscriptions are no longer treated as a single product or funnel, but as an operating system.

Data and AI are increasingly embedded into core decision-making, with systems evaluating multiple signals – such as user behaviour, referral source, device, and engagement history – to determine what experience a user should see. This marks a shift from static paywalls to more dynamic, personalised journeys.

At the same time, internal metrics are evolving. Rather than focusing primarily on immediate conversions, publishers are increasingly optimising for long-term retention and lifetime value. Engagement scores, loyalty metrics, and predictive models are aligning editorial, product, and commercial teams around shared objectives. In this model, subscriptions are not a funnel to be optimised, but a system of continuous decisions about how to balance reach, engagement, and revenue.

As retention becomes more central, the points at which users engage – or disengage – are being treated more deliberately. One of the clearest examples is the redesign of the cancellation journey. What was once a back-end process is now seen as a critical moment of intervention. Personalised cancellation flows, alternative offers, and direct customer engagement are becoming standard practice. These moments provide both a signal of dissatisfaction and an opportunity to reinforce value.

More broadly, the distinction between acquisition and retention is beginning to blur. Publishers are increasingly managing the entire user journey – from first visit to long-term engagement – as a single, integrated system focused on maximising lifetime value.

AN UNDER-MONETISED MARKET

All of this comes with an important caveat: despite a decade of solid progress, most publishers still monetise only a small fraction of their total audience. Median household penetration for digital subscriptions remains low – typically just a few percentage points – indicating that the market is far from saturated. There is still room to grow, but the strategies need to be more nuanced.

The opportunity, therefore, is not simply to increase prices or reduce churn. It is to expand participation. Publishers are experimenting with lower-priced entry points, more flexible access models, and alternative pathways into paid relationships. Rather than pushing all users toward a single product, they are building multiple ways for audiences to engage and pay.

A MODEL IN TRANSITION

The subscription model remains the most developed and reliable form of reader revenue. Its fundamentals are strong, and its role in the industry is secure.

What was once a growth engine is becoming a foundation to build on – one part of a broader answer to how the media industry adapts to a changing content and information environment. It is no longer sufficient on its own, but remains central within a wider system of revenue built around ongoing user relationships.

The challenge for publishers is no longer simply to convert audiences into subscribers. It is to maintain relevance, build engagement across multiple touchpoints, and capture value in a more competitive and fragmented environment.

THE CHALLENGE IS NO LONGER SIMPLY TO CONVERT AUDIENCES INTO SUBSCRIBERS. IT IS TO MAINTAIN RELEVANCE, BUILD ENGAGEMENT ACROSS MULTIPLE TOUCHPOINTS, AND CAPTURE VALUE IN A MORE COMPETITIVE AND FRAGMENTED ENVIRONMENT.

Bundling as a Retention Engine

Building on the discussion in the previous chapter, one theme runs through much of what follows in this section: strengthening subscriptions by deepening relationships with audiences. Bundling is one of the clearest expressions of that shift.

We include it here as a focused section because it is no longer an emerging idea. It is now established practice among the most successful publishers, and one that others should be actively considering. What began as a pricing tactic has evolved into a core part of product and revenue strategy. As industry analysis from INMA has shown, bundling is now close to universal among leading news brands. Publishers are no longer selling a single product, but combining content, features, and services into broader value propositions designed to increase frequency of use.

In practice, this takes multiple forms. Some publishers bundle together standalone products, often at a discount. Others integrate additional benefits directly into the core subscription – including apps, personalisation, podcasts, or video. In this sense, the subscription is no longer just access to news. It is a structured package of use cases.

This shift changes the underlying logic of subscriptions. The question is no longer only what a user pays for, but how often and how meaningfully they engage. But it does raise practical questions – namely, what should publishers actually include in a bundle for it to be a successful proposition?

For the largest players, the answer has often been to expand well beyond journalism – into games, cooking, and other lifestyle products. These have been effective, but they are not easily replicable. They rely not only on scale and resources, but on a position in the culture that allows these organisations to extend beyond news. Not every publisher occupies that space, and that is where the challenge lies.

For most publishers, the challenge is different. The more consistent lesson emerging from across the industry is that the most effective bundles tend to stay close to the core product – building outward from journalism, rather than away from it. Additions that feel like a natural extension of editorial content are more likely to drive sustained engagement, while those that require a greater conceptual leap often struggle to gain traction. In that sense, bundling is not just about adding more, but about adding the right things.

The economic logic of bundling is often misunderstood. At first glance, it appears to be about increasing price or average revenue per user. In reality, most of the value comes from retention.

The case of The New York Times illustrates this clearly. Bundle subscribers represent just over half of the digital subscriber base, yet generate a disproportionately large share of subscription revenue. This is not because they pay significantly more per month. In fact, their average revenue per user is slightly lower than that of news-only subscribers.

The difference lies in behaviour. Bundle subscribers are more engaged and churn less. As the company has noted, churn among bundle users is significantly lower, extending subscriber lifetimes and increasing overall lifetime value. Bundling, in other words, works less by extracting more value upfront, and more by ensuring that value compounds over time.

And what sustains that retention is not evenly distributed across the bundle. At The New York Times, habit-forming products such as games and puzzles account for a disproportionate share of user engagement – in some cases matching or exceeding time spent on news itself. Other components play a more supporting role.

The implication is straightforward. Users may subscribe for news, but they often stay for habit. This shifts the role of bundling. It is not simply about packaging more content, but about embedding the product into a user's daily routine. The more frequently a subscriber engages, the more durable the relationship becomes.

A FOCUSED EXAMPLE: MEDIAHUIS

A useful recent case study of how this logic is being applied in practice comes from Mediahuis, as reported in an excellent article in The Audiencers, which has extended bundling beyond journalism while remaining closely anchored to it.

As outlined in its 'essential subscription' model, Mediahuis combines journalism with e-books, masterclasses, and standalone applications such as RouteYou, a hiking and cycling platform. The bundle is structured across three layers: inform (journalism), guide (service content), and enable (tools that allow users to act).

The intent is not simply to add more content, but to increase frequency of use. A reader might encounter a story about a hiking route and move directly into the app to follow it. A review leads to an e-book download. The subscription becomes a set of connected experiences rather than a single destination.

The impact is visible in the data. Subscribers who activated RouteYou showed significantly lower churn – around 26.5% lower over a 12-week period – and engaged with the product multiple times per month. As with other bundles, the challenge is not proving value, but driving usage.

At the same time, Mediahuis has been deliberate in how far it extends the bundle. The most effective additions sit within what might be described as one degree of separation from journalism – closely related to editorial content, and reinforcing rather than diluting it. Services that require a greater conceptual leap tend not to stick.

This offers a useful rule of thumb. Bundling works best not when it expands indiscriminately, but when it builds outward from journalism in ways that feel natural to the user.

PRICING AS A SYSTEM

This shift and larger adoption of bundling as a strategy also changes how pricing is understood. It is no longer a single decision made at the point of conversion, but part of a broader system that connects acquisition, engagement, retention, and product design.

Basically - entry pricing determines access. The bundling drives usage, and the retention determines revenue. The most advanced publishers are spending less time optimising the initial price point and more time designing the conditions under which subscribers stay, upgrade, and renew.

A BRIDGE BEYOND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Bundling perfectly reinforces a broader point made in the previous chapter. Subscriptions remain the foundation of reader revenue. But their effectiveness increasingly depends on how they are structured, extended, and embedded within a wider product ecosystem. It has to be understood not just an optimisation layer but as a practical expression of a larger shift from selling a product to building an ongoing relationship with the user.

Users may subscribe for news, but they often stay for habit. [...] It is not simply about packaging more content, but about embedding the product into a user's daily routine. The more frequently a subscriber engages, the more durable the relationship becomes.

Chapter 2

Publishers as Content Licensors

Making money with AI platforms in 2026

ALONGSIDE LICENSING REVENUE, THERE HAS BEEN AN EXPECTATION THAT AI PLATFORMS MIGHT ALSO DRIVE TRAFFIC BACK TO PUBLISHERS. THE REALITY IS MORE COMPLEX.

AI licensing has moved quickly from a fringe issue to a central part of the industry's commercial landscape. Over the past year, a growing number of technology platforms – including those from Meta, Microsoft, and Amazon – have entered into agreements with publishers, adding to earlier deals involving OpenAI and Perplexity AI.

What has emerged is not a settled model, but a marketplace defined by trade-offs. Reporting from Digiday, based on feedback from multiple publishers, suggests that no single platform currently offers a complete solution. As one executive put it, "no one gets a great grade." Deals vary widely in terms of transparency, payments, attribution, and traffic impact. For many publishers, these agreements represent incremental progress – but also compromise.

But it is notable nonetheless, that a process that began with a lot of disputes over scraping and intellectual property has, within a short period, evolved into a more structured set of commercial arrangements. OpenAI has signed agreements with a number of major publishers. Microsoft has introduced a publisher marketplace model, allowing content to be accessed on a controlled, pay-per-use basis. Perplexity has built a broad network of partners around revenue sharing.

This has created new opportunities for monetisation, but, as expected, the benefits are unevenly distributed. Larger publishers, with strong brands and negotiating leverage, are able to secure more favourable terms. Smaller and mid-sized publishers often struggle to gain access to these deals or to influence their structure.

Even where agreements are in place, the financial impact remains relatively modest. For most publishers, licensing contributes a small share of overall revenue – often in the low single digits. It is a useful addition, but not a replacement for existing business models.

TRAFFIC, ATTRIBUTION, AND CONTROL

Alongside licensing revenue, there has been an expectation that AI platforms might also drive traffic back to publishers. The reality is more complex.

According to an analysis by Upgrowth, AI interfaces now influence roughly 12–18% of total web referral traffic globally, up from around 5–8% just over a year ago. Platforms such as ChatGPT and Perplexity are sending users to publisher sites, often with higher intent and stronger engagement than traditional search traffic.

At the same time, this growth is being offset – and in some cases overwhelmed – by structural changes in how discovery works.

AI-generated summaries, particularly within search, are reducing the need for users to click through to publisher sites. Google's AI Overviews, now appearing on a significant share of queries, are associated with a 15–25% reduction in organic click-through rates for affected searches. More broadly, zero-click searches – where users find answers without leaving the platform – are estimated to account for as much as 65–70% of all Google queries in early 2026.

For publishers, the result is a redistribution of traffic rather than a simple gain. AI referrals are increasing, but from a low base. In many cases, they account for only a small share of total visits, even as traditional search traffic declines. Media and

publishing sites appear particularly exposed: some estimates suggest AI-mediated search is reducing organic click-through rates in this category by 25–40% .

There is also a measurement problem. A significant portion of AI-influenced traffic is difficult to track. Clicks from AI-generated search results are often recorded as standard search traffic, while some users move from AI interfaces to direct visits or branded searches that are not attributed back to their original source. Estimates suggest that as much as 25–35% of AI-influenced traffic may be misattributed in standard analytics.

Taken together, this points to a deeper shift in distribution. Publishers are no longer competing only for clicks, but for visibility within systems that increasingly answer questions directly. Content is still being used, but often without a corresponding visit. Licensing provides one way to capture value from that usage. Traffic, however, is becoming less reliable as the primary mechanism of monetisation.

This is where the limits of AI licensing become clearer. While it can generate incremental revenue and provide compensation for content usage, it does not replace the need for direct relationships with audiences. If anything, the shift toward AI-mediated discovery makes those relationships more important.

In response, publishers are adjusting in practical ways. There is greater emphasis on understanding how content surfaces within AI interfaces, and on tracking changes in referral patterns more closely. Research from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, based on interviews with more than 280 news executives, suggests that many publishers are responding by increasing investment in areas where they retain a clear advantage – particularly original reporting, specialist expertise, and proprietary formats that are harder to replicate or summarise.

A MODEL MATURING, BUT STILL TAKING SHAPE

AI licensing is likely to remain an important, but still evolving, part of the media business landscape. For the largest publishers, it offers an additional layer of revenue and influence. For others, it presents both an opportunity and a challenge – access to new income streams, but on terms that are not always favourable.

The direction of travel is clear, even if the model is not. Content will continue to be used within AI systems. The question is not whether publishers participate, but on what terms. For now, licensing should be understood for what it is: not a solution in itself, but one component of a broader set of strategies required to sustain journalism in a changing distribution environment.

More fundamentally, it reinforces a point that runs through this whole chapter. As distribution becomes more mediated and less predictable, value shifts away from the click and toward the relationship. Licensing may compensate for usage, but it does not build connection. Over time, the publishers that are best positioned will be those that are able to do both – participate in these new ecosystems while continuing to build direct, durable relationships with their audiences.

AI discovery – what changes for publishers

- AI interfaces now influence 12–18% of web referral traffic globally
- Growth is rapid, with projections of 20–28% by end of 2026
- Zero-click searches dominate (65–70%), reducing the need to visit publisher sites
- AI summaries reduce organic click-through rates by 15–25%
- Media and publishing are among the most affected sectors

Source: upgrowth AI Traffic Share Report 2026

Which content is most affected

MOST VULNERABLE:

- FAQ and glossary pages
- listicles ("Top 10", "Best of")
- basic how-to guides
- news summaries

MORE RESILIENT:

- original reporting and proprietary data
- expert analysis and opinion
- case studies and first-hand accounts
- tools, calculators, and interactive formats

Practical responses for publishers

- Diversify traffic sources – reduce dependence on search
- Prioritise direct relationships – subscriptions, newsletters, owned channels
- Focus on differentiated content – reporting, data, expertise
- Structure content clearly so it can be cited and surfaced within AI systems – well-organised, attributed, and source-led content is more likely to be picked up
- Track beyond clicks – account for AI-influenced and misattributed traffic

Chapter 3
Publishers as Marketing Partners

Advertising beyond programmatic in an AI-mediated world

AI-GENERATED ANSWERS AND ZERO-CLICK EXPERIENCES ARE KEEPING USERS WITHIN PLATFORMS, REDUCING THE NEED TO VISIT PUBLISHER SITES.

Digital advertising's old guard – programmatic auctions and search-driven traffic – continues to be under sustained pressure.

For years, the model rested on scale. Publishers produced content, platforms distributed it, and programmatic systems monetised the resulting traffic. That system is now being reshaped from multiple directions. Privacy regulation has reduced the effectiveness of tracking and targeting. Third-party cookies are being phased out, while ad blocking continues to rise in many markets.

At the same time, the role of search is changing. AI-generated answers and zero-click experiences are keeping users within platforms, reducing the need to visit publisher sites. Various industry analyses suggest that a majority of searches now end without a click, while AI systems are increasingly able to resolve informational queries directly.

The combined effect is structural. Traffic is less reliable, targeting less precise, and monetisation through open-market programmatic increasingly constrained. This matters because, despite the growth of reader revenue, advertising remains central to the economics of most publishers. Industry reporting, including WAN-IFRA's World Press Trends, indicates that for many organisations, advertising still accounts for 50–60% of total revenue.

Programmatic is not disappearing, but it is losing its centrality.

FIRST-PARTY DATA AND THE RETURN OF LEVERAGE

In this environment, first-party data is becoming a primary source of competitive advantage.

Publishers that are able to identify and understand their audiences – through subscriptions, registrations, or repeat usage – are better positioned to offer targeted and measurable advertising opportunities. Unlike third-party data, which is increasingly restricted, first-party data remains both compliant and proprietary.

This shift is visible across both news and magazine media. For some, it is about scale and segmentation. For others, particularly magazine brands, it is about depth – highly defined audiences built around interests, professions, or lifestyles.

Examples reflect this range. The New York Times continues to invest in BrandMatch, its AI-powered targeting tool, using subscriber data to align campaigns with audience segments. Bloomberg focuses on high-value professional audiences, offering advertisers access to specific decision-makers.

More recent developments show how this capability is evolving. People Inc.'s D/Cipher platform targets advertising based on contextual signals rather than cookies, with its D/Cipher+ offering extending this approach to third-party publishers. Similarly, LADbible Group has developed a proprietary data platform that tracks content performance across web and social in real time, supported by AI tools that translate client briefs into creative opportunities.

The next step in this evolution is the move from targeting to prediction. Future plc, for example, has introduced Helix, an audience intelligence system that combines first-party data, editorial context, and predictive modelling to identify users at the point of purchase intent. Rather than segmenting audiences in advance, the system maps real-time behaviour across its portfolio of specialist titles and recommends audiences based on proven conversion patterns.

This reflects a broader shift in how publishers are positioning their data capabilities. The emphasis is moving away from reach and even segmentation, toward outcomes – identifying not just who an audience is, but how likely it is to act. Early implementations point to measurable improvements in performance metrics such as click-through rates and return on ad spend, reinforcing the commercial logic of this approach.

In parallel, publishers are experimenting with new forms of audience signal generation. Forbes, for example, is testing a prediction-based platform that captures user sentiment and behaviour, feeding into its broader first-party data systems and creating new segments for advertisers.

PUBLISHERS ARE COMBINING FIRST-PARTY DATA, AUDIENCE INSIGHT, AND CREATIVE PRODUCTION TO DELIVER CAMPAIGNS THAT ARE MORE INTEGRATED AND OUTCOME-ORIENTED – SPANNING FORMATS SUCH AS VIDEO, EVENTS, COMMERCE, AND MULTI-PLATFORM STORYTELLING.

The underlying shift is clear. Data is no longer a by-product of publishing. It is a core asset – increasingly structured not just to describe audiences, but to predict their behaviour.

FROM INVENTORY TO PARTNERSHIP

Rather than simply selling space, many publishers are moving toward more integrated commercial offerings.

Branded content studios, once a specialist function, are now a core part of the business for both news organisations and magazine groups. Classic examples include T Brand Studio at The New York Times, Vox Creative at Vox Media, and Guardian Labs at The Guardian. Comparable models have long been established in magazine publishing, where editorial and commercial storytelling have historically been more closely aligned.

What is notable now is how these capabilities are being extended. Publishers are combining first-party data, audience insight, and creative production to deliver campaigns that are more integrated and outcome-oriented – spanning formats such as video, events, commerce, and multi-platform storytelling.

At the same time, the structure of advertising relationships is changing. Companies such as Semafor have built their models around brand sponsorships across newsletters, podcasts, events, and digital content, emphasising long-term partnerships over transactional advertising. Axios has taken a similar approach, focusing exclusively on direct sponsorship and reporting strong performance from this model.

In this context, advertising is no longer a placement. It is a coordinated set of outputs built around audience, context, and brand alignment.

EXTENDING THE MODEL

Publishers are also repositioning themselves as broader marketing partners.

Regional publishers, in particular, are building capabilities that extend beyond their own platforms – offering campaign support, audience targeting, and performance services to local and mid-sized advertisers. In doing so, they move closer to agencies than traditional media sellers.

Elsewhere, new formats are creating additional opportunities. The integration of prediction markets into editorial environments – through partnerships with platforms such as Polymarket and Kalshi – is beginning to generate new forms of engagement and advertiser interest, particularly in business and financial media.

What emerges is a broader role. Not simply as a seller of media space, but as a partner in audience engagement and brand-building.

A MORE DELIBERATE ADVERTISING MODEL

What is emerging is a more deliberate, and in some ways more demanding, advertising model.

Programmatic remains part of the mix, but with a reduced role. Direct deals, private marketplaces, branded content, and data-driven campaigns are becoming more important – offering higher margins and greater control, but requiring stronger capabilities in data, product development, and commercial strategy.

AI is beginning to support these capabilities by improving segmentation, optimisation, and creative production, but it does not change the underlying requirement. Value continues to depend on the quality of the audience, the strength of the environment, and the ability to deliver outcomes that advertisers are willing to pay for.

As a result – and this is a theme that runs through much of this report – differences between publishers are becoming more pronounced. Those with strong brands, clear audiences, and differentiated offerings are better positioned to benefit, while others face a more difficult transition as legacy models weaken.

Advertising is not disappearing. But it is becoming more selective, more integrated, and more closely tied to what each publisher can uniquely offer.

Chapter 4

Publishers as Philanthropy Partners

Funding journalism in a more complex revenue mix

PHILANTHROPY IS MOVING FROM EPISODIC FUNDING TOWARD A MORE INSTITUTIONALISED ROLE – ONE THAT SUPPORTS NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL STORIES, BUT ONGOING AREAS OF COVERAGE AND CAPABILITY.

Traditional revenue streams have stabilised, but for many publishers they still do not fully support the cost of public-interest journalism. In that gap, philanthropy has become a more visible part of the revenue mix – particularly for investigative reporting, local news, and specialist coverage that is difficult to sustain on commercial terms alone.

This is not a new development, but it is becoming more structured. Foundations continue to play a central role, large-scale funding initiatives are becoming more coordinated, and some publishers are building internal capacity to pursue philanthropic support more systematically.

At the same time, the model remains uneven – concentrated in certain markets, dependent on external funding cycles, and requiring clear editorial safeguards to maintain credibility.

FROM FUNDING PROJECTS TO BUILDING STRUCTURES

One of the more notable shifts is how publishers are integrating philanthropic funding into their operations.

For some, philanthropy still supports specific editorial projects – investigations, thematic coverage, or particular beats. But increasingly, it is being embedded more formally within organisations.

International news agencies and large publishers are setting up dedicated initiatives to work with foundations and non-profit partners, creating clearer frameworks for how funding is secured and deployed. In parallel, industry-wide vehicles such as the AP Fund for Journalism have raised more than $30 million to support reporting capacity in local and regional newsrooms, particularly in the United States.

The shift here is gradual but important. Philanthropy is moving from episodic funding toward a more institutionalised role – one that supports not just individual stories, but ongoing areas of coverage and capability.

LOCAL JOURNALISM AS A PRIMARY FOCUS

The impact of philanthropic funding is particularly visible in local journalism.

In many markets, local news organisations face structural challenges that are difficult to address through commercial models alone. Philanthropy has become one of the more viable mechanisms for sustaining coverage in these areas.

Large-scale initiatives such as Press Forward have directed tens of millions of dollars toward local outlets, supporting hundreds of organisations in their initial funding rounds. Complementary programmes such as Report for America have taken a different approach, placing journalists directly within local newsrooms to expand reporting capacity.

These models reflect a broader pattern. Philanthropy is not only supporting individual publishers, but also building systems that extend reporting capacity across networks of news organisations.

CONSTRAINTS AND TRADE-OFFS

Despite its growth, philanthropy introduces its own set of constraints.

Funding remains unevenly distributed,

Making philanthropy work in practice

- Align funding with editorial priorities – the strongest models begin with clear editorial needs, not donor agendas
- Build internal structures – dedicated teams or processes help manage relationships and maintain consistency
- Maintain clear editorial safeguards – ringfencing and transparency are essential to credibility
- Plan beyond grant cycles – combine philanthropy with other revenue streams to reduce volatility
- Focus on areas of clear public value – investigative, local, and specialist reporting remain the strongest fit

with a significant proportion concentrated in the United States. Access varies widely across regions and between different types of publishers.

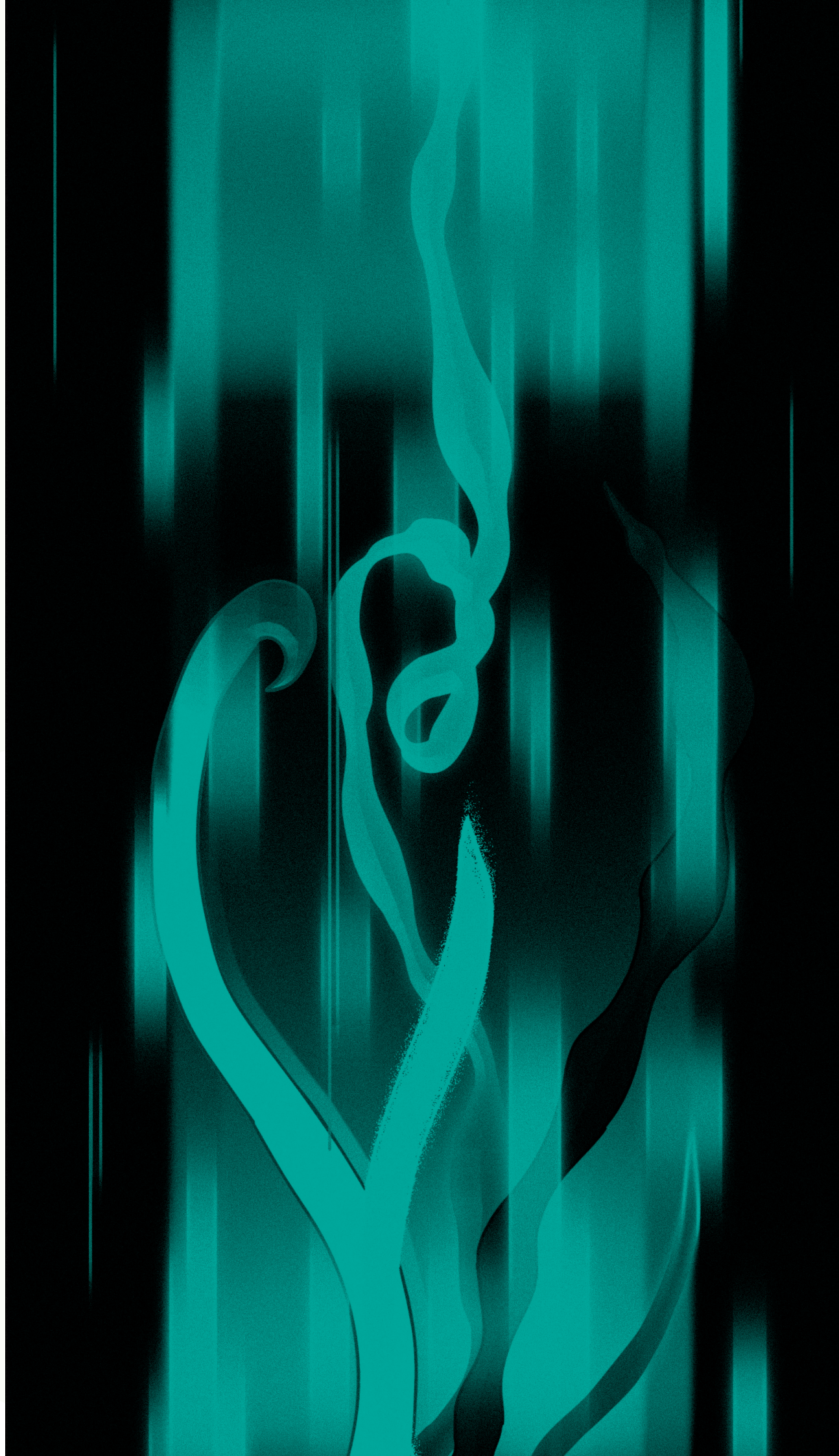
There are also questions of independence. Most publishers have established editorial safeguards – including ringfencing funding and separating donor relationships from editorial decision-making – but maintaining these boundaries requires constant attention.

Perhaps the most practical constraint is volatility. Philanthropic funding is typically time-limited, often structured around grant cycles rather than recurring revenue. This makes it difficult to rely on as a stable, long-term foundation without complementary income streams.

A COMPLEMENTARY LAYER

Philanthropy is unlikely to replace core revenue streams such as subscriptions or advertising. Its role is different. It is best understood as a complementary layer – one that enables coverage that would otherwise be difficult to sustain, supports experimentation, and strengthens areas of public-interest journalism.

In that sense, it reflects a broader shift across the industry where no single revenue model is sufficient on its own. Publishers are increasingly assembling combinations of revenue streams, each serving a different purpose. Philanthropy is now part of that mix – not as a universal solution, but as a targeted and increasingly structured source of support.



Chapter 5

Publishers as Educators

From content to capability

PUBLISHERS ARE INCREASINGLY STRUCTURING THEIR KNOWLEDGE INTO COURSES, CERTIFICATIONS, AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES – AIMED AT AUDIENCES WILLING TO PAY NOT JUST FOR INFORMATION, BUT FOR UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION.

For a long time, publishers have been in the business of explaining the world. What is changing is how that expertise is being packaged and monetised.

Education is emerging as one of the more natural extensions of this role. Rather than simply producing content, publishers are increasingly structuring their knowledge into courses, certifications, and training programmes – aimed at audiences willing to pay not just for information, but for understanding and application.

This is not a new idea, but it is becoming more deliberate. What was once occasional experimentation is now, for some publishers, a defined product line.

FROM INFORMATION TO STRUCTURED LEARNING

The shift is straightforward. Journalism already produces a form of continuous learning – analysis, explanation, and synthesis. Education formalises that into structured experiences.

The Financial Times offers one of the clearest examples. Its Non-Executive Director Diploma is a formal programme aimed at senior professionals, translating its authority in business and governance into a high-value educational product. Alongside this, the FT has also experimented with lighter-touch formats such as newsletter-based courses, using editorial expertise to create entry points into its broader ecosystem.

The Economist has taken a similar approach with its executive education offering. Its programmes focus on areas where its journalism already carries authority – geopolitics, business strategy, climate, and technology – and are targeted at mid-career professionals looking to translate global insight into practical decision-making.

What these models demonstrate is that the core asset is not the course itself, but the credibility behind it. Publishers are not competing as general education providers; they are monetising expertise built over time.

DIFFERENT MODELS, DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

While the underlying logic is consistent, the models vary significantly.

Some are high-touch and premium. The Financial Times' diploma programmes, for example, are positioned closer to executive education than to mass-market online learning, with pricing and structure reflecting that positioning.

Others are designed for scale. Bloomberg Market Concepts is widely used across universities and business schools, often as part of finance curricula or as a certification linked to Bloomberg Terminal training. Here, the value lies in standardisation and institutional adoption rather than exclusivity.

There are also examples that sit closer to skills and employability. The Hindu's STEP platform focuses on English language and communication skills, drawing on its editorial archive and reputation to serve students and early-career professionals.

What links these approaches is not format, but alignment. The most effective programmes are those that remain closely tied to what the publisher already does well – whether that is financial journalism, global analysis, or language and communication.

SPOTLIGHT

Mundo Deportivo is the leading daily sports newspaper in Barcelona and has

extended its brand beyond publishing into live experiences through the Mundo Deportivo Futcamp. Launched in 2018, the programme is a one-week football camp for children aged 6–16, designed to combine technical training with structured group learning and values-based education.

The camp is organised in partnership with MIC Sports, which manages operations end-to-end, including registration, coaching, facilities, and logistics. Hosted in Barcelona, typically at established school sports facilities, the camp brings together around 100 participants per edition, divided by age and ability, with qualified coaches delivering sessions focused on technical skills, tactical awareness, and match play, alongside complementary recreational activities.

The business model is primarily fee-based, with participants paying approximately €340 per week, covering coaching, facilities, meals, equipment, and insurance. This core revenue stream is supplemented by sponsorship and brand partnerships, which provide additional financial support and marketing reach. For Mundo Deportivo, the value extends beyond direct income: the camp serves as a strategic engagement platform, strengthening relationships with families and embedding the brand within grassroots football. For MIC Sports, it represents a scalable operational model, leveraging its expertise in sports event delivery to run a turnkey programme.

More broadly, the Futcamp is a clear example of the publisher evolving into an educator. Mundo Deportivo moves from reporting on football to actively teaching it, translating editorial authority into a practical, physical experience. The camp operationalises the content of the newspaper by turning football knowledge, culture, and values into structured learning. In doing so, it reflects a wider shift in media, where publishers build participation-based ecosystems, using education and live experiences to deepen audience engagement, diversify revenues, and extend their role from content providers to active facilitators of learning and development."

WHY THIS MODEL WORKS

Education allows publishers to do something that is increasingly difficult in core media markets: charge directly for expertise.

In a landscape where content is abundant and often commoditised, structured learning remains scarce. Courses offer a different kind of value — one that is outcome-oriented, time-bound, and often tied to professional advancement.

This also changes the economics. Education products can command higher price points than subscriptions, particularly in professional and executive segments. Corporate cohorts — where organisations pay for tailored training for teams or leadership groups — are often among the highest-value formats, combining premium pricing with repeat demand. These models also tend to create longer engagement cycles and deeper user relationships.

There is also a natural overlap with existing audiences. Readers of business, finance, or policy journalism are often also candidates for professional education. In that sense, education becomes an extension of an existing relationship rather than a completely new market.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Despite its potential, education is not an easy extension.

It requires capabilities that sit outside traditional newsroom functions — curriculum design, learner engagement, assessment, and certification. It also requires clarity of positioning. Not every publisher can credibly offer education products, and those that do need to ensure that the offering is closely aligned with their editorial strengths.

There is also the question of format. While early models focused heavily on video-based courses, more recent approaches are more varied — combining live cohorts, self-paced modules, newsletters, and hybrid formats.

Finally, there is a balance to be maintained between editorial and commercial priorities. As with other adjacent revenue streams, credibility remains the defining asset. Education products that drift too far from editorial strengths risk undermining the very advantage that makes them viable.

A NATURAL EXTENSION OF EXPERTISE

Education is unlikely to become a primary revenue stream for most publishers. But it is becoming a meaningful one — particularly for those with strong authority in specific domains.

It works best when it is treated not as a pivot, but as an extension. The same qualities that underpin strong journalism — expertise, clarity, and trust — translate naturally into learning products when they are structured appropriately.

In that sense, this is part of a broader pattern across the industry. Publishers are finding ways to package what they already know into forms that audiences are willing to pay for.

Chapter 6

Publishers as Clubs

From access to belonging

SUBSCRIPTIONS PROVIDE ACCESS TO CONTENT. MEMBERSHIP EXTENDS THAT RELATIONSHIP – COMBINING ACCESS WITH EXPERIENCES, INTERACTION, AND, IN SOME CASES, SHARED PURPOSE.

Across this chapter, one theme has appeared repeatedly: the shift from content to relationship.

Subscriptions, bundling, and even education all point in the same direction – that long-term value is increasingly defined not by access alone, but by the strength of the connection between publisher and audience.

Membership builds on that shift.

Where subscriptions are primarily transactional – access in exchange for payment – membership introduces a different proposition: participation, identity, and, at its strongest, a sense of belonging.

BEYOND ACCESS: WHAT MEMBERSHIP ADDS

The distinction between subscription and membership is subtle but important.

Subscriptions provide access to content. Membership extends that relationship – combining access with experiences, interaction, and, in some cases, shared purpose.

The Guardian has long operated a membership model alongside its subscription business, offering readers ways to support its journalism while also participating in events and editorial initiatives.

eldiario.es provides a different example. Its model is built around transparency and engagement, with members contributing financially while playing a visible role in sustaining the organisation.

In both cases, the value proposition is not limited to content. It is about being part of something.

WHY THIS IS KEY FOR MAGAZINES

If this shift is visible in news publishing, it is even more pronounced in magazines.

Magazine brands are, by their nature, built around identity and interest. They do not just inform; they reflect and reinforce how audiences see themselves.

In an interview with Robbie Kellman Baxter, Katie Vanneck-Smith draws a clear distinction between the two models: “membership is really about belonging to something, while subscription is a transactional relationship.”

She also frames membership in more experiential terms – as “the joy of being part of something” – pointing to a shift away from access alone toward participation and identity.

This is particularly relevant for magazine publishing. Unlike news, which often serves a functional purpose, magazine brands are more explicitly tied to interests, aspirations, and lifestyle. Readers do not

simply consume them; they identify with them.

That identity is not uniform. A title like Elle builds a very different kind of community from Good Housekeeping or Men's Health. What Hearst's approach suggests is that membership is most effective when it reflects those differences – allowing each brand to express its own version of community, rather than forcing a single model across a portfolio.

For many magazine publishers, the relationship already exists. Membership does not create it; it formalises and extends it – through events, experiences, and forms of interaction that bring that identity into sharper focus. The logic is consistent: membership works best when it amplifies what is already present in the brand.

DIFFERENT MODELS, SHARED INTENT

Membership models vary widely depending on the publisher and its audience.

Some are purpose-driven. The Kyiv Independent has built a membership-supported model rooted in reader backing and editorial independence, particularly in the context of conflict reporting.

Others are built around lifestyle and affinity. Magazine publishers, in particular, are extending their brands into experiences – events, workshops, and community-led initiatives that reflect the interests of their audiences.

There are also more premium interpretations. Forbes has experimented with physical club spaces, where membership is tied to access, networking, and status as much as content.

What links these approaches is not format, but intent. Membership is designed to deepen engagement, strengthen loyalty, and create a more durable relationship between publisher and audience.

FROM TRANSACTION TO PARTICIPATION

Membership changes the nature of the relationship.

Rather than paying for access alone, users are contributing to something they value – whether that is independent journalism, a shared identity, or a community of peers.

This has practical implications. Membership models are often associated with higher retention, as the relationship extends beyond content consumption. They also create additional layers of value – particularly through events, experiences, and community interaction.

In an environment where distribution is less predictable and content is increasingly mediated by platforms, these direct, participatory relationships become more important.

THE LIMITS OF THE MODEL

Membership is not universally applicable. It requires a clear sense of identity and purpose and not every publisher has a brand or audience that lends itself naturally to community-building.

There is also a more fundamental challenge: clarity. In practice, many membership models sit awkwardly between subscription and donation. They combine elements of both – access, support, and participation – but are not always clearly defined from the user's perspective.

This can create confusion about what is actually being offered. Is the user paying for access, supporting a cause, or joining a community? In some cases, the answer is all three – but unless that proposition is clearly articulated, it can weaken the model.

Operationally, membership is also not a shortcut. Many of the underlying requirements remain the same as subscription businesses – from marketing and conversion to retention and ongoing engagement. The difference lies more in positioning and relationship than in the fundamentals of how the business operates.

Membership models are also resource-intensive. Engagement – whether through events, communication, or editorial interaction – requires time and investment, and some of the most effective approaches rely on forms of personal connection that are difficult to scale.

There is, finally, a balance to be managed between openness and exclusivity. Membership benefits need to feel meaningful without undermining broader audience reach.

A MORE HUMAN LAYER

Membership is unlikely to replace subscriptions. In most cases, the two models coexist. But it represents a shift in emphasis – from access to engagement, from transaction to participation.

In that sense, it reinforces a broader point made at the outset of this chapter. As content becomes more abundant and more easily mediated, the value of the relationship itself becomes more central. Membership is one way of formalising that relationship – and, for the right type of media organisation, strengthening it.

Chapter 7

Publishers as Purveyors of Games

Building habit beyond news

[ON THE NEW YORK TIMES] WHILE NEWS DRIVES AWARENESS AND RELEVANCE, GAMES DRIVE FREQUENCY. THEY ENCOURAGE USERS TO RETURN DAILY, OFTEN FOR SHORT BUT CONSISTENT SESSIONS THAT REINFORCE THE HABIT OF ENGAGEMENT.

Across this chapter, a recurring challenge has been clear: sustaining attention in an environment where content is abundant and increasingly mediated.

Games and puzzles represent one response to that challenge.

They offer something that news alone often cannot – repeatable, low-friction engagement that fits into daily routines. In doing so, they create a different kind of relationship with the user, one built less around information and more around habit.

FROM CONTENT TO HABIT

The most developed example of this approach is The New York Times.

Its portfolio of games – including crosswords, Spelling Bee, Connections, and Wordle – has become a central part of its digital product. These are not peripheral features, but structured experiences supported by dedicated editorial teams and integrated into the broader subscription offering.

The role of games within this ecosystem is distinct. While news drives awareness and relevance, games drive frequency. They encourage users to return daily, often for short but consistent sessions that reinforce the habit of engagement.

This distinction matters. In a subscription environment, retention is often more valuable than acquisition. Products that increase frequency of use can therefore have a disproportionate impact on long-term value.

DIFFERENT MODELS, SHARED LOGIC

While The New York Times represents the most visible example, the broader pattern is spreading.

Hearst's acquisition of the Puzzmo platform points to a different approach. Rather than focusing solely on its own titles, Hearst is using games as infrastructure – distributing them across its portfolio and licensing them to other publishers. This introduces a second model: games not just as a product, but as a service. Publishers can integrate puzzles into their own environments, benefiting from increased engagement without building the capability from scratch.

Other publishers have experimented with more focused offerings, including standalone puzzles subscriptions or integrating games into existing bundles. The formats vary, but the underlying logic is consistent.

Games create regularity.

What makes games work for publishers

- **Design for daily return** – short, repeatable formats build habit
- **Maintain editorial quality** – consistency and curation matter
- **Integrate, don't isolate** – games should sit naturally within the core product
- **Use games as entry points and aggressively cross promote** – they can lead users into subscriptions and bundles over time
- **Focus on retention first** – frequency of use drives long-term value

WHY THIS WORKS

Games operate differently from most forms of editorial content.

They are repeatable, time-bound, and often designed around daily completion. This makes them particularly effective at building routine. A user may not read the news every day, but they are more likely to return for a puzzle or game that resets each morning.

This has implications for retention. Regular interaction strengthens the relationship between user and product, increasing the likelihood of continued subscription.

It also creates additional entry points. Games can act as a gateway for new users, introducing them to a publisher's ecosystem through a format that is less demanding than traditional content.

Importantly, the value of games does not depend on scale alone. Even relatively simple formats – crosswords, word games, logic puzzles – can deliver meaningful engagement when they are well designed and consistently updated.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Games are not a universal solution.

They require ongoing editorial input, design capability, and product integration. Maintaining quality and consistency is essential, particularly where games become part of a paid offering.

There is also a question of fit. Not every publisher has a natural connection to games, and poorly integrated experiences can feel disconnected from the broader product.

Finally, games are most effective when they complement, rather than replace, core editorial content. Their role is to reinforce engagement, not to redefine the purpose of the publication.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF ENGAGEMENT

Games represent a shift from information to interaction.

They do not replace journalism, but they change how users engage with it – creating moments of daily return that extend beyond the consumption of news.

In that sense, they align with a broader pattern across the industry. As attention becomes more fragmented, products that build habit and frequency become increasingly valuable.

Games are one way of doing that – simple in form, but powerful in effect.

Chapter 8
Publishers as Think Tanks

From reporting to decision support

THE LOGIC REMAINS CONSISTENT: THE SAME EXPERTISE THAT UNDERPINS THE ECONOMIST'S JOURNALISM IS TRANSLATED INTO STRUCTURED, DECISION-ORIENTED PRODUCTS FOR GOVERNMENTS, INSTITUTIONS, AND BUSINESSES.

Across this section, a consistent theme has emerged: publishers are extending their core capabilities beyond content.

In some cases, this means moving beyond reporting and commentary toward structured research, analysis, and advisory work. In others, it involves adapting journalism itself to serve professional and organisational use.

This shift reflects a broader change in how value is created. Content remains central, but it is increasingly part of a larger system – one that connects insight, audience, and application.

Industry data points in the same direction. According to the WAN-IFRA World Press Trends 2026 report, "other" revenue sources – including events, B2B services, and partnerships – have grown from 13.2% of total revenue in 2021 to more than a quarter (25.2%) today. Within this category, events remain the most widely used revenue stream, followed by B2B services and platform partnerships.

This is not incidental. It reflects a structural shift toward models that build on expertise and relationships rather than scale alone.

FROM AUDIENCE INSIGHT TO COMMERCIAL INTELLIGENCE

At the heart of this shift is a simple advantage.

Publishers sit at the intersection of subject-matter expertise, direct audience relationships, and continuous observation of markets and behaviour. Over time, this creates a form of accumulated knowledge that can be structured into higher-value products.

In practice, this can take several forms – from research reports and data products to advisory services and institutional subscriptions designed for organisational use.

Public-facing outputs often build visibility and authority. Deeper layers of analysis, however, are increasingly developed into paid offerings for professional audiences.

The distinction is subtle, but important. Content is no longer always the endpoint. In some cases, it is the starting point.

DIFFERENT MODELS, SHARED DIRECTION

One of the most established examples of this model is now being restructured at The Economist Group. In 2026, it brought together its B2B product and service lines under a unified brand, Economist Enterprise, consolidating capabilities that include macroeconomic and geopolitical forecasting, advisory networks, events, and corporate access to its journalism. What was previously seen as a set of adjacent activities – including the Economist Intelligence Unit – is now positioned as a single, integrated offer serving more than 2,700 organisations globally.

The logic remains consistent: the same expertise that underpins The Economist's journalism is translated into structured, decision-oriented products for governments, institutions, and businesses – but increasingly delivered as a coordinated system rather than a standalone research function.

A similar approach can be seen at Financial Times through FT Strategies, where editorial and audience insight is translated into advisory work, supporting organisations on areas such as digital transformation, subscriptions, and audience development.

In some organisations, these activities are no longer peripheral. At Hearst, for example, B2B services – spanning data, software, and professional information through businesses such as Fitch Group and Hearst Health – now account for the

majority of profits. Comparable patterns can be seen at Thomson Reuters and Haymarket Media Group, where proprietary data, research, and specialist services sit at the centre of the business.

What these models share is a move toward specialisation. Rather than competing broadly, publishers are building depth in specific domains where they can offer credible, differentiated insight.

This is increasingly visible in magazine media as well, particularly in verticals built around defined industries or interests. Business of Fashion, for example, has developed a research and insights arm serving the global fashion industry, translating editorial authority into structured analysis for professional audiences. Condé Nast has taken a comparable approach with Vogue Business, positioning it as a source of industry intelligence for fashion and luxury executives.

In other cases, the model is less explicitly branded as research but operates in a similar way. Future plc, with its portfolio of technology and consumer titles, draws on large volumes of product reviews, buyer behaviour, and audience intent data to generate insight that informs both editorial and commercial strategy. This data is increasingly valuable to brands seeking to understand demand, pricing, and positioning.

While not always structured as standalone research divisions, these models operate in similar territory: using editorial authority and audience insight to inform decision-making beyond the newsroom.

FROM INSIGHT TO EMBEDDED DECISION-MAKING

A related development can be seen in how publishers are packaging their journalism more directly for professional use.

Semafor's CEO Signal, for example, is positioned as an invitation-only briefing for senior executives – a curated view of the ideas, companies, and shifts shaping global business. The emphasis is not on volume, but on relevance: distilling information into a form that fits the needs of decision-makers.

Axios has taken a more product-driven approach with Axios Pro. Its vertical offerings, including Axios Pro Deals, combine reporting with structured data, transaction tracking, and sector-specific intelligence designed for professionals operating in real time. The proposition is explicit: to provide "actionable intelligence" that supports decisions, not just awareness.

These models point to a broader shift. Publishers are no longer only producing insight; they are shaping how that insight is consumed within professional workflows.

This can take different forms – curated briefings, data-rich products, or institutional subscriptions – but the underlying logic is consistent. Journalism is being reorganised around use, not just access.

In this sense, the value of journalism shifts from being read to being used.

WHY THIS WORKS

This model draws directly on strengths that publishers already possess.

Journalists operate close to the industries they cover, often with access, context, and perspective that are difficult to replicate. Over time, this creates a form of accumulated expertise that can be structured into higher-value products.

There is also a clear audience. Many readers of business, policy, or sector-specific journalism are professionals who require deeper, more actionable insight. Research products, advisory services, and institutional offerings build on that relationship.

The economics are different from consumer media. While audiences are smaller, the value per user is significantly higher. In this sense, the model shifts from scale to depth – from reaching large numbers of readers to serving more specialised, higher-value segments.

Events often play a complementary role. Research and insight can anchor conversations, while convening power – through conferences, briefings, and roundtables – reinforces the publisher's position within professional communities.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Despite its potential, this model is not easily replicated.

Credibility is the primary barrier. Research and advisory products depend on trust, and that trust is built over time. Not every publisher has the authority required to operate in this space.

There are also structural challenges. Clear separation between editorial and commercial activity is essential, particularly where publishers are advising organisations they may also cover journalistically.

Capability is another constraint. Producing high-quality research requires skills that extend beyond traditional newsroom functions, including data analysis, modelling, and client-facing delivery.

Finally, there is a question of focus. The most effective models tend to be tightly defined, built around specific sectors or areas of expertise. Generalised offerings struggle to compete with established consultancies and specialist firms.

FROM CONTENT TO INFLUENCE

The shift toward research, advisory, and institutional products reflects a broader change in how publishers create value.

Content remains central. But in some cases, it is no longer the endpoint. It becomes the foundation for deeper forms of analysis, engagement, and influence.

In that sense, this model sits alongside others explored in this section. It builds on the same core assets – expertise, audience, and trust – but applies them in a different context. Publishers are not becoming think tanks in the traditional sense. But they are increasingly operating in adjacent territory.

The keys to making this model work

- Build on domain expertise – depth matters more than breadth
- Structure insight into usable products – reports, briefings, and tools
- Focus on high-value audiences – smaller, more specialised segments
- Maintain clear editorial boundaries – credibility depends on it
- Leverage convening power – events and access reinforce positioning

Chapter 9

Publishers as Affiliate Marketers

Where journalism meets the moment of purchase

WIRECUTTER REMAINS THE CLEAREST EXAMPLE [OF EDITORIAL CONTENT HELPING READERS MAKE DECISIONS]. ITS AUTHORITY COMES FROM TESTING AND CLARITY, NOT PROMOTION. COMMERCE IS EMBEDDED WITHIN THAT TRUST.

A reader searches for the best laptop. Another looks up which air purifier actually works. Someone else wants to know whether a financial product is worth considering.

These are not moments of passive consumption. They are moments of decision.

Publishers have always been present at these points – explaining, comparing, recommending. What is changing is how that role is being monetised. Affiliate commerce builds on a simple shift: from capturing attention to capturing intent.

FROM RECOMMENDATION TO TRANSACTION

At its core, the model is straightforward.

Editorial content – reviews, guides, comparisons – helps users make decisions. When those decisions lead to a purchase, the publisher earns a commission.

But the mechanics are less important than the positioning. The most effective implementations do not feel like commerce layered on to content. They feel like content that naturally leads to action.

Wirecutter remains the clearest example. Its authority comes from testing and clarity, not promotion. Commerce is embedded within that trust. The model continues to scale, with affiliate, licensing, and related revenues contributing significantly to the business.

Other publishers have adapted the model to their audiences. The Guardian extends its editorial voice into consumer advice and buying guides, while The Wall Street Journal's Buy Side applies a similar approach to a more premium, financially oriented readership.

In each case, the commercial outcome depends on editorial credibility.

A MODEL SHAPED BY INTENT

What distinguishes affiliate commerce from traditional advertising is alignment.

Advertising monetises exposure. Affiliate models monetise outcomes.

The difference matters. Content that is designed to answer specific questions – what to buy, what to avoid, what represents value – sits much closer to action than general news consumption.

This makes intent the central asset.

Publishers are not just attracting audiences; they are meeting them at a point where a decision is already forming.

Increasingly, that intent is being treated not just as a moment to monetise, but as a signal — something that can be captured, analysed, and extended into broader commercial systems.

More recent developments suggest the model is beginning to evolve.

Some publishers are moving beyond affiliate links toward more direct participation in commerce. The Arena Group, for example, is building a commerce strategy that combines editorial authority with retail media infrastructure and transaction layers, supported by first-party purchase data. The aim is not just to refer users to products, but to sit closer to the transaction itself.

Others are experimenting with more community-driven forms of commerce. New York Magazine has revived its classifieds model as a subscriber feature, allowing readers to buy and sell items within a curated environment. Editors select listings, and transactions take place directly between users, creating a hybrid of editorial curation, community, and marketplace.

In both cases, the model extends beyond referral. It begins to incorporate elements of ownership — over data, relationships, and, in some instances, the transaction itself.

This shift is being articulated more explicitly in some markets. In India for instance, HT Media has described content-to-commerce as a strategic response to the limits of advertising-led models, structured around building trust through specialised content, focusing on audiences with clear purchase intent, and enabling transactions through owned or partner platforms.

Typically organised around verticals such as automotive, consumer technology, and personal finance, the emphasis is not simply on traffic, but on outcomes.

WHAT THIS CHANGES

Affiliate commerce does not replace existing revenue models. It sits alongside them.

But it does shift the centre of gravity. It rewards clarity over volume, usefulness over novelty, and trust over reach.

At the same time, it introduces new dependencies. Revenue is tied to external platforms, retailer relationships, and discovery mechanisms such as search. As these evolve — particularly with the growing role of AI in mediating information — visibility and performance may become less predictable.

Not every publisher is well positioned to pursue this model. It works best where there is a clear link between content and purchase intent — consumer technology, lifestyle, travel, and finance being the most obvious examples.

Chapter 10

Publishers as Archivists

Where the past becomes usable

WHAT DISTINGUISHES PUBLISHER ARCHIVES FROM THE WIDER WEB IS NOT JUST VOLUME, BUT CONTINUITY. YEARS, SOMETIMES DECADES, OF REPORTING CREATE A LONGITUDINAL VIEW OF INDUSTRIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND EVENTS.

For a long time, the archive was a specialised asset.

It was most valuable to a small group of publishers – typically those with scale, longevity, and institutional audiences – where decades of reporting could be packaged into premium products or research services. For most others, it remained a passive layer: useful, but rarely central to the business model.

That is beginning to change.

In an environment shaped by AI and new forms of content consumption, archives are becoming active systems. Not just something to search, but something to work with – to query, connect, and apply. What was once a niche advantage is now a broader opportunity.

THE VALUE OF ACCUMULATED CONTEXT

What distinguishes publisher archives from the wider web is not just volume, but continuity. Years, sometimes decades, of reporting create a longitudinal view of industries, institutions, and events. This kind of context is difficult to replicate, particularly when it is shaped by consistent editorial standards.

In an environment where information is increasingly fragmented, that continuity becomes more valuable. It allows users to understand not just what is happening, but how situations have evolved over time.

The archive is no longer just a record of what was written. It becomes a way of understanding change.

FROM SEARCH TO SYNTHESIS

This shift is visible in how some publishers are reworking access to their archives.

Financial Times's Ask FT allows users to query years of reporting and receive structured responses grounded in its own journalism. Rather than returning a list of articles, it synthesises material into answers that reflect the publication's coverage and perspective.

The Telegraph has explored similar approaches in areas such as travel, where archival content can be recombined into tailored outputs – itineraries, recommendations, and guides – based on user input.

In a more specialised context, Politico has extended this logic into its professional intelligence products. Politico Pro, its subscription service aimed at policy professionals, has long combined reporting

with regulatory tracking, legislative analysis, and sector-specific briefings across areas such as energy, healthcare, and technology. More recently, it has begun to layer AI-driven tools on top of this archive – enabling users to generate structured outputs from its proprietary reporting.

Rather than functioning as a general-purpose chatbot, these tools operate within a closed corpus of Politico Pro content. Users can query policy developments, compare regulatory approaches, and generate briefing-style outputs that draw on years of accumulated coverage.

The value here lies in context and specificity. Policy professionals are not simply looking for information; they need to understand how positions have evolved, how different actors compare, and what precedents exist. Politico's archive, built around continuous coverage of institutions and regulation, provides a foundation for this kind of analysis.

In this sense, the archive becomes something closer to a working system for policy intelligence – not just a record of reporting, but a tool for navigating complex, evolving domains.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The transition from archive to product is not straightforward.

It requires technical capability – not just in search, but in structuring, tagging, and retrieving information in meaningful ways. It also raises editorial questions, particularly around accuracy, attribution, and the risk of misinterpretation when content is recombined.

There is also a strategic balance to manage. Making archives more accessible and usable can increase their value, but it may also change how users engage with original articles.

Finally, not all archives are equally suited to this approach. The most effective implementations tend to be in areas where continuity and context matter – policy, finance, travel, and other domains where past coverage informs present decisions.

FROM MEMORY TO UTILITY

What is emerging is a different understanding of the archive. It is no longer simply a record of what has been published. It is a resource that can be structured, queried, and applied in new ways.

For a long time, this kind of value was concentrated among the most established publishers – those with the scale and continuity to turn archives into premium products. Today, the conditions are different. Tools that allow content to be reorganised, surfaced, and recombined are lowering the barrier to entry.

In that sense, the archive is being redefined. It is no longer just an inheritance. It is an opportunity.

REVIVING THE ARCHIVE AS A PRODUCT OPPORTUNITY

- **Reframe the archive** – not as storage, but as a usable asset
- **Identify a clear domain** – policy, finance, lifestyle, local history
- **Structure before scaling** – organise, tag, and curate before layering tools
- **Use AI selectively** – focus on synthesis and retrieval, not automation alone
- **Position it as a product** – internal tools, subscriber features, or B2B offerings

Innovation insight:

For publishers with strong historical content but limited current scale, archive-led products can be a viable way to attract funding or partnerships.

Chapter 11

The Publisher as an IT Provider

A model in transition

THE UNDERLYING IDEA HAS PERSISTED: THAT THE SYSTEMS REQUIRED TO RUN A MODERN PUBLISHING OPERATION CAN THEMSELVES BECOME A PRODUCT.

We have been writing about this model for some time now.

For a number of years, a small group of publishers have explored how the technology they built for themselves – content management systems, subscription platforms, analytics tools – might also be offered to others. What began as a practical extension of internal capability gradually took on a more defined commercial shape.

At first, this was a relatively contained development, limited to organisations with the scale and resources to support it. But the underlying idea has persisted: that the systems required to run a modern publishing operation can themselves become a product.

This chapter revisits that idea at a moment when it is beginning to shift again.

We expect this model to evolve quickly into something broader – what might be described as the publisher as an AI and solutions provider. Much of what publishers have been building internally over the past few years will not remain internal.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY BEING SOLD

At its simplest, this model is about turning internal infrastructure into external services.

The Washington Post's Arc XP is the clearest example. Built to run its own newsroom, it now operates as a full-stack platform used by other publishers. The value is straightforward: technology that has already been tested under real editorial and traffic conditions.

In India, HT Media's Upublish takes a different position, offering a more accessible stack for smaller and regional publishers – covering content management, distribution, and monetisation in one system.

Quintype sits somewhere in between, combining newsroom workflows with distribution and monetisation tools, with an increasing emphasis on AI-driven capabilities.

These are not experimental tools. They are production systems, repackaged.

WHERE IT GETS HARDER

The barrier is not the idea, but the execution.

Running a platform is very different from running a newsroom. It requires product thinking, long-term support, and tolerance for slower, more complex sales cycles. Expectations are also higher. A failure in a CMS is not a missed story; it is a failed business operation.

There is also competition. Publishers entering this space are effectively positioning themselves alongside established software providers, many of whom operate at a different scale.

For most, this is not an easy extension.

WHAT THIS IS BECOMING

The more interesting shift is not in CMS or infrastructure, but in what sits on top of it.

Over the past few years, publishers have been experimenting extensively with AI – across writing, editing, distribution, personalisation, and analytics. Much of this work remains internal. But it will not stay that way. Some of these capabilities will begin to move outward – as tools, services, and integrated products.

At that point, the model changes. It is no longer about licensing infrastructure. It is about offering solutions – built on editorial workflows, data, and AI – to organisations facing similar problems. We are looking forward to this shift.

Chapter 12

The Publisher as an Event Organiser

From audience to convening power

WAN-IFRA'S WORLD PRESS TRENDS OUTLOOK IDENTIFIES EVENTS AS THE MOST IMPORTANT "OTHER" REVENUE SOURCE FOR NEWS PUBLISHERS GLOBALLY, CITED BY 32.2% OF RESPONDENTS.

For some time now, it has been clear that events are not simply an extension of the publishing business. When executed well, they operate much closer to its core and can account for a significant part of revenue.

Events may still come under the category of 'other sources' of revenue but it has, for many publishers, become a central part of how value is created and captured. This is not just about diversification. It reflects a more fundamental shift in how publishers engage with their audiences.

Recent industry data reinforces this direction. WAN-IFRA's World Press Trends Outlook identifies events as the most important "other" revenue source for news publishers globally, cited by 32.2% of respondents. AOP Digital Publishing research points in the same direction, with 38% of publishers identifying events as a key growth area – rising to 69% among B2B publishers.

The implication is clear. Publishers are not only reaching audiences – it is an essential part of their business to bring them together.

EVENTS AS AN EXTENSION OF EDITORIAL

What publishers do particularly well is not logistics, but curation.

They understand the subject, the audience, and the people who matter within it. This allows them to create environments – physical or hybrid – that are shaped by editorial judgement.

In this sense, events are less an add-on and more an extension of the core product.

People Inc. illustrates this particularly clearly. Its portfolio spans large-scale flagship events such as Food & Wine's Aspen festival, as well as smaller, more intimate formats. What is notable is how these are positioned internally: as content. Events generate stories, engagement, and audience interaction before, during, and after the experience itself.

Magazine publishers have been especially effective in this space because their brands are already built around identity and experience.

Condé Nast has expanded its global events portfolio significantly, turning franchises such as Vogue World, The New Yorker Festival, and Wired's conference series into substantial businesses in their own right. These are not simply marketing exercises; they are central to how the brand engages audiences and partners.

DIFFERENT MODELS, SHARED LOGIC

While the formats vary, the underlying logic is consistent.

Some publishers focus on high-level convening. Bloomberg Media's global forums – spanning areas such as finance, technology, and geopolitics – bring together senior decision-makers and are closely tied to sponsorship and partnership revenue.

Others operate closer to audience experience. Immediate Media has taken this further by building an experiential agency, using its portfolio of brands to help partners create live experiences – sometimes without the publisher brand being front and centre.

Across these approaches, events function as a bridge:

- between audiences and advertisers
- between content and experience
- between editorial authority and commercial opportunity

WHY THIS WORKS

Events create something that digital products struggle to replicate: direct connection.

They allow publishers to:

- convene audiences in ways that algorithms cannot mediate
- create shared experiences around content
- and build relationships that extend beyond reading

They also combine multiple revenue streams:

- sponsorship
- ticketing
- branded partnerships
- and data capture

Importantly, they generate content themselves. A single event can produce editorial coverage, social media engagement, video, and ongoing discussion – extending its value well beyond the moment.

As one industry perspective has noted, events are among the closest commercial models to journalism: fast to launch, high in margin, and directly tied to editorial authority.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Events are also among the most complex products publishers run.

They require operational expertise, commercial execution, and careful positioning. Scale and intimacy often sit in tension – what works for a 15,000-person festival does not translate directly to a 20-person roundtable.

Audience behaviour has also shifted. Ticket purchasing cycles are shorter, and expectations around value are higher, requiring more deliberate pricing and marketing strategies.

Finally, not every publisher has the ability to convene effectively. Events depend on:

- a clearly defined audience
- a strong editorial proposition
- and a credible reason for people to participate

FROM CONTENT TO CONNECTION

Events perhaps best illustrate the central point we are trying to make in this chapter about building direct connections. As content becomes more abundant and distribution more fragmented, the value ofdirect connection increases. We will go so far as to say that publishers can no longer only produce content. They have to focus also on creating environments around it – spaces where audiences, ideas, and partners intersect.

Chapter 13

The Publisher as a Marketplace

From recommendation to ownership

THE SHIFT IS SUBTLE BUT IMPORTANT. A FORMAT THAT ONCE EXISTED AS A LIST IS REIMAGINED AS A PLACE, ALLOWING THE PUBLISHER TO MOVE FROM INFLUENCING DECISIONS TO HOSTING THEM.

Publishers have always shaped what people buy - lists, reviews, and editorial curation influence decisions every day, often at scale. But traditionally, the transaction itself has taken place elsewhere.

For a growing group of publishers, that is no longer sufficient. The opportunity now is not just to guide choice, but to create the environment in which that choice is acted on.

WHEN A LIST BECOMES A PLACE

Time Out remains the clearest expression of this idea.

What began as editorial curation of cities – where to eat, what to do – has been translated into physical marketplaces through Time Out Markets. These are curated food and cultural halls that bring together leading chefs, drinks, and local experiences under one roof, based on the same editorial selection that underpins the magazine's coverage.

The model first took shape in Lisbon in 2014 and has since expanded to cities including New York, Chicago, Dubai, and Cape Town. In each case, the principle is consistent: editorial judgement is used not just to recommend venues, but to assemble them.

The shift is subtle but important. A format that once existed as a list is reimagined as a place, allowing the publisher to move from influencing decisions to hosting them.

THE MAGAZINE INSTINCT: CURATION AS EXPERIENCE

Magazine brands are particularly well suited to this model because they are already built around taste, identity, and access.

Tatler's trunk shows and private events illustrate this well. These are not conventional retail environments, but curated experiences that bring together luxury watches, jewellery, and fashion for a defined audience. The appeal lies as much in the setting and access as in the products themselves, reflecting the editorial world of the publication.

Similarly, Condé Nast titles such as Vogue have extended their editorial authority into commerce-led experiences, including styling sessions, designer showcases, and limited product drops tied to editorial moments. In these cases, the act of purchasing is embedded within a broader experience shaped by the brand.

Magazine brands like Monocle take a more permanent approach with retail spaces, which combine shops, cafés, and carefully selected products, function as a physical extension of the magazine. Everything on offer reflects the publication's editorial sensibility – design-led, globally oriented, and highly curated.

In one standout example, a publisher has extended this logic further into larger, multi-use environments - Grupo Nación's Parque Viva, in Costa Rica, combines events, exhibitions, and live experiences within a single venue, with the publisher's media platforms driving discovery and attendance. Here, the marketplace is not simply curated but owned, allowing the publisher to capture value across the entire experience rather than at a single point.

A NATURAL EXTENSION – BUT NOT AN EASY ONE

This is one of the most demanding models to execute.

Physical marketplaces require capital, operational expertise, and ongoing management. Even smaller-scale formats such as pop-ups or curated events depend on careful execution and a strong alignment between brand and audience.

It also depends on credibility. The ability to sell products or experiences rests on the same foundation as editorial authority: trust. Not every publisher can make this transition. But for those that can, it represents one of the most direct ways of converting influence into revenue.

Chapter 14

The Publisher as a Vanity Publisher

Packaging credibility

PUBLISHERS TAKE CAPABILITIES THEY ALREADY POSSESS – EDITORIAL DEVELOPMENT, WRITING, DESIGN, AND DISTRIBUTION – AND APPLY THEM TO INDIVIDUALS RATHER THAN INSTITUTIONS. THE OUTPUT IS USUALLY A BOOK, BUT THE VALUE LIES IN WHAT IT REPRESENTS.

In the personal-brand economy, visibility is easy but credibility is not. That gap is what publishers are beginning to monetise.

A professionally produced book carrying a trusted media imprint still signals something few other formats can: depth, permanence, and authority. Increasingly, publishers are turning that signal into a product – offering executives and public-facing professionals a structured way to translate their ideas into a finished work.

THE MODEL IN PRACTICE

The mechanics are relatively simple. Publishers take capabilities they already possess – editorial development, writing, design, and distribution – and apply them to individuals rather than institutions. The output is usually a book, but the value lies in what it represents.

Forbes Books is the clearest example. It offers a structured process that turns executive expertise into a finished publication, supported by editorial teams and positioned as part of a broader thought leadership strategy.

SXSW's publishing initiative follows a similar logic, but ties it directly to its event ecosystem, allowing authors to launch and promote their work within an established audience. In both cases, the publisher's role extends beyond production into positioning.

A parallel case can be drawn from Time, which has systematically expanded its editorial authority into what can be described as a form of structured vanity publishing. At the FIPP World Media Congress in Madrid, Time outlined how its flagship franchises – such as Time Person of the Year, Time 100, and Time Women of the Year–have evolved from purely editorial selections into multi-platform commercial ecosystems. These properties begin as curated lists or honours, grounded in editorial judgement, but are then extended into events, summits, branded content, and partnerships. The result is a model where recognition itself becomes a product: individuals and organisations seek inclusion not only for prestige but for visibility, access, and association with the Time brand.

Operationally, this model blends journalism, curation, and commercialisation. The lists retain editorial framing, but they generate downstream

revenue through sponsorships, ticketed events, licensing, and corporate partnerships. Honourees are often invited into a broader ecosystem that includes conferences, networking platforms, and media exposure, creating a feedback loop between recognition and influence.

While Time does not "sell" inclusion directly, the surrounding infrastructure monetises the status conferred by the brand. This is where the concept of vanity publishing emerges in a modern form: the publisher leverages its authority to anoint individuals, and then builds high-margin experiences and visibility products around that anointment.

In this context, Time illustrates how a legacy publisher can transform itself from a content producer into a curator of status. Much like Mundo Deportivo's Futcamp translates editorial authority into education, Time translates it into recognition and social capital. The shift is subtle but significant: the core asset is no longer just content, but the power to define who matters. By institutionalising that power through repeatable franchises, Time has effectively created a scalable model of prestige distribution — one that sits at the intersection of media, events, and personal branding, and which increasingly resembles a sophisticated form of vanity publishing adapted to the modern attention economy."

WHY IT WORKS

A book still carries weight. It signals commitment, coherence, and authority in a way that shorter formats rarely do. For individuals, it becomes a durable asset — something that supports speaking, advisory roles, and long-term visibility.

For publishers, it represents a high-margin extension of what they already do, built on brand, trust, and editorial capability.

THE CONSTRAINT

The model depends on restraint. Its value comes from the credibility of the imprint. If extended too broadly, that credibility weakens. The line between editorial endorsement and commercial service must remain clear.

Execution matters as well. Poorly produced work undermines both the author and the publisher.

Chapter 15

The Publisher as a Betting Agency

Where information meets speculation

THE MOST DIRECT SHIFT OF PUBLISHERS INTO BETTING IN 2026 IS THROUGH INTEGRATION WITH PREDICTION MARKETS AND SPORTSBOOKS, TURNING NEWS INTO A REAL-TIME WAGERING INTERFACE.

Publishers have always reported on outcomes – elections, markets, sport. What is changing is how closely they are beginning to sit to the act of prediction itself.

In recent years, a number of publishers have moved closer to betting and wagering ecosystems, not only through partnerships, but by integrating odds, forecasts, and probabilistic thinking into their content. This reflects a broader shift: from reporting what has happened to engaging audiences in what might happen next.

FROM COVERAGE TO PARTICIPATION

The connection between media and betting is not new. Sports coverage, in particular, has long shaped how audiences understand probability, performance, and risk.

What is different now is the level of integration – and the speed at which it is evolving.

The most direct shift of publishers into betting in 2026 is through integration with prediction markets and sportsbooks, turning news into a real-time wagering interface. Companies such as CNN, CNBC, Dow Jones, and Yahoo Finance have entered partnerships with platforms like Polymarket and Kalshi, embedding live odds and prediction data directly into editorial coverage.

This effectively converts audiences from passive readers into active participants, with publishers earning licensing fees, data partnerships, and engagement-driven advertising uplift. The strategic logic is clear: prediction markets increase time spent and repeat visits, with some industry estimates suggesting these integrations open up entirely new revenue streams tied to transaction volume and data monetisation.

In this model, journalism begins to function as both content and betting interface.

DEEP INTEGRATION

A second model is deep commercial partnerships between media brands and betting operators, illustrated by ESPN's integration with DraftKings. The deal embeds betting functionality directly into ESPN's digital ecosystem, including a dedicated betting tab, odds integration, and betting-focused programming.

This effectively transforms a publisher into a distribution layer for betting products. The economics are significant: DraftKings operates across dozens of jurisdictions with millions of users, and the broader U.S. sports betting market is generating multi-billion-dollar revenues annually, with operators like BetMGM projecting $3.1–$3.2 billion in 2026 revenue.

For publishers, these partnerships typically include revenue-sharing agreements, affiliate commissions, and advertising guarantees, creating a high-margin incremental business tied directly to audience scale.

MOVING UP THE VALUE CHAIN

A third case is the emergence of publisher-owned or co-branded betting products, where media companies move further up the value chain. The Canadian sports media company theScore provides

What defines this model

- **Engagement through prediction** – not just information
- **Proximity to transaction** – varies by publisher
- **High revenue potential** – but uneven
- **Clear ethical tension** – between reporting and participation
- **Strategic positioning matters** – distance is a choice

the clearest precedent, having built and scaled theScore Bet into a multi-state sportsbook integrated within its media app.

This model allows the publisher to capture the full betting lifecycle – acquisition, engagement, and wagering margin – rather than just referral revenue. The strategy has proven valuable enough that Penn Entertainment acquired theScore for $2 billion, underlining the financial upside of vertically integrating media and betting.

In effect, the publisher ceases to be a media company with betting partnerships and becomes a betting company with a built-in media funnel.

CONTENT DESIGNED FOR WAGERING

Finally, newer digital publishers are adopting content-led betting ecosystems, where editorial formats are explicitly designed to drive wagering behaviour. The youth media brand Complex, for example, launched Complex Bets in partnership with Fanatics, combining editorial content, betting insights, and direct links into Fanatics' sportsbook and prediction markets.

This reflects a broader industry shift in which betting is not an adjacent revenue stream but a core design principle of content itself. Across streaming and digital media, structured betting partnerships are already shown to increase revenues by up to 25% through sponsorships, data integrations, and targeted advertising.

Taken together, these case studies show a clear trajectory: publishers are evolving from reporting on uncertainty to monetising it, positioning betting as a central pillar of future media business models.

THE TENSION

The model is inherently contested.

Blending journalism with betting raises clear questions about independence, incentives, and responsibility. The closer a publisher moves to the transaction, the more difficult it becomes to maintain a clear separation between editorial judgement and commercial interest.

Even where no direct partnership exists, the framing of content can shift. Coverage that emphasises odds, predictions, or potential outcomes risks privileging speculation over verification.

WHAT THIS REPRESENTS

This chapter is less about betting than about proximity.

Publishers are being drawn closer to moments of decision – not just informing audiences, but engaging them in prediction, probability, and potential outcomes.

In doing so, they move into more ambiguous territory.

The opportunity is real. So is the risk.

How to Get AI to Pay for *Your* Journalism

Revenue Models in the AI Economy

Monetising AI —

The AI revolution has upended traditional media economics in ways that go far beyond previous platform shifts. For years, publishers watched anxiously as large language models (LLMs) and AI agents scraped their content at scale, driving traffic away while delivering little or no referral value.

The familiar playbook of the platform era – trading content for distribution – has broken down. In the AI ecosystem, content is no longer simply surfaced or linked to; it is ingested, processed and recombined, often without attribution or meaningful audience return.

In 2026, however, a quiet but profound shift is under way. Forward-thinking news organisations and specialist magazine publishers are no longer treating AI as a threat, or even merely as a productivity tool. Instead, they are beginning to recognise AI for what it increasingly is: a new kind of customer. Unlike traditional audiences, AI systems consume content at machine scale, demand high levels of accuracy and structure, and rely disproportionately on trusted, verified sources to function effectively. They are not browsing; they are extracting, synthesising and operationalising information in real time.

This distinction matters. Previous waves of digital disruption – from search to social – reshaped how journalism was distributed and monetised, but they still ultimately depended on human attention as the core unit of value. AI changes that equation. It introduces a parallel market in which the primary buyer is not a reader, but a system – one that requires continuous, high-quality inputs to power everything from consumer chat interfaces to enterprise decision-making tools. In this emerging landscape, journalism is not just content; it is infrastructure.

This chapter explores the revenue models that are beginning to emerge from this shift – models that treat AI consumption not as leakage to be controlled, but as demand to be priced. From technical "tollbooth" platforms that monetise scraping, to collective licensing marketplaces, premium data feeds, proprietary AI products built on editorial archives, and the growing influence of regulation, publishers are discovering that their core asset – trusted, edited, structured information – has never been more valuable. What is becoming increasingly clear is that AI systems are not just consumers of content, but depend on a continuous supply of high-quality, human-generated information to function effectively – a dependency that is beginning to reshape the economics of journalism itself.

The mindset change is fundamental. AI is moving from a cost-reduction lever (automation, translation, summarisation) to a primary revenue engine. Those who continue to think in terms of traffic loss and platform dependency risk missing the larger opportunity. Those who recognise AI as a paying customer – and build the infrastructure, products and partnerships to serve it – are beginning to define a new economic model for journalism in the agentic web.

Turning Unauthorised Scraping into Sanctioned Revenue: TollBit and Cloudflare

Two platforms have emerged as practical infrastructure for publishers seeking to reclaim value from AI bots: TollBit and Cloudflare's Pay Per Crawl / AI Crawl Control.

TollBit operates as a "digital tollbooth" for the AI era, now serving more than 7,000 publisher sites globally. The platform monitors AI traffic in real time, authenticates legitimate agents, and allows publishers to set their own rates – typically per 1,000 pages or per request. AI companies pay via a marketplace model; TollBit handles metering, billing and a small transaction fee while publishers receive the lion's share. Implementation takes under 30 minutes, often via simple JavaScript or CDN integration.

TollBit's quarterly "State of the Bots" reports provide sobering yet empowering data. In Q2 2025, human page requests fell 9.4% across ~400 partner sites while AI bot visits surged, now representing one in 50 visits (up from one in 200 at the start of the year). One publisher discovered it had been crawled by AI companies 13 million times in a single month, delivering just 650 human visits. Toshit Panigrahi, CEO and co-founder of TollBit, explains the opportunity clearly. "The only way to correct that is to go out and fetch that information in real-time," he says. "We saw that as an opportunity to monetise by charging them every time AI comes in to scrape content." Early adopters are already seeing results. TNL Mediagene became the first major Asian media group to generate initial licensing revenue through TollBit in December 2025. VerticalScope and other niche publishers are unlocking fees from community and vertical content that was previously scraped for free.

Cloudflare's Pay Per Crawl (launched in private beta mid-2025 and now generally available) offers a complementary, infrastructure-native approach. Publishers choose, bot-by-bot, whether to allow free access, block entirely, or charge a per-request fee using HTTP 402 "Payment Required" responses. Cloudflare acts as the merchant of record and distributes earnings. High-traffic sites report realistic monthly earnings potential of $50,000–$200,000; even mid-sized outlets see meaningful offsets to hosting costs. Matthew Prince, co-founder and CEO of Cloudflare, frames the shift. "We're changing the rules of the internet across all of Cloudflare," he says. "If you're a robot, now you have to go on the toll road in order to get the content of all of these publishers." Major publishers, including Condé Nast, the Associated Press, Gannett and Stack Overflow, have endorsed the tools.

For B2B magazines – whose deep industry reports, regulatory analysis and specialist datasets are scraped intensively – these platforms are particularly powerful. A single high-value vertical article can command premium per-access rates because AI agents use it for training or real-time inference in enterprise tools.

Licensing Archives and Structured Content for Model Training

Beyond per-crawl micropayments, one-time or multi-year archive licensing remains a cornerstone model. The value lies in structured, verified data, which include XML-tagged articles, fact-checked quotes, timestamps, provenance metadata and editorial oversight. These reduce hallucination risk and training costs dramatically.

Case Studies: TIME Magazine

TIME has struck deals with six AI companies (including OpenAI and Perplexity) while implementing TollBit and related monitoring tools. Mark Howard, COO of TIME, shared the results: "We brought money in as a result of these deals. I'm happy about what we brought in. Some of it is fixed, a lot of it is variable and a lot of it is access to product resources and technology." TIME also launched its own TIME AI platform in December 2025, turning its archive into personalised reader experiences while monetising the underlying data.

News Corp

News Corp has emerged as one of the most aggressive and successful players in AI licensing. In May 2024 it signed a landmark multi-year global partnership with OpenAI, widely reported to be worth more than $250 million over five years, bringing content from The Wall Street Journal, The New York Post, The Times (London) and other titles into ChatGPT. In March 2026 it added a new multiyear deal with Meta worth up to $50 million annually. "News Corp is essentially an AI 'input company'," CEO Robert Thomson said of the strategic pivot. The deals have not only delivered substantial new revenue but have positioned the group as a premium supplier of high-trust journalism in an era when AI platforms compete fiercely for credible training data.

Case Study: Axel Springer – Europe's Proactive Pioneer

As one of Europe's largest and most forward-looking media groups, Axel Springer was among the first major publishers to sign a comprehensive AI licensing agreement with OpenAI in December 2023. The multi-year deal – reported to be worth tens of millions of euros upfront plus variable backend fees – covers flagship titles including Bild, Welt, Business Insider and Politico. It was the first global partnership of its kind, allowing OpenAI to train models on Axel Springer content and surface summarised articles (with links and attribution) in ChatGPT.

CEO Mathias Döpfner framed the move as a proactive business strategy. "We want to explore the opportunities of AI empowered journalism," he said, "to bring quality, societal relevance and the business model of journalism to the next level." He personally negotiated the agreement with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman over two months, emphasising "the content delivery and the remuneration of that... is always based in the original content we create with the spirit [of our company]."

By 2025–2026, Axel Springer had expanded discussions with Meta, Microsoft and others, treating AI licensing as a third major revenue pillar alongside advertising and subscriptions. Döpfner has repeatedly urged the industry to "embrace AI or die," positioning the group to build a new high-margin, hyper-growth AI-driven business as a strategic hedge. For European B2B and specialist magazine publishers, Axel Springer's example is instructive: even organisations with strong print legacies and vertical titles can turn deep archives into high-value AI assets without compromising editorial independence or independence from Big Tech.

The Regulatory Tailwind: How AI Laws Are Accelerating Paid Licensing

Regulation is now a powerful catalyst for monetisation. The EU AI Act (fully phased in by 2026) imposes strict transparency obligations on providers of general-purpose AI (GPAI) models. They must disclose summaries of copyrighted training data, respect rightsholders' opt-outs and demonstrate compliance with EU copyright law. The Digital Single Market (DSM) Directive's text-and-data-mining (TDM) exception includes an explicit opt-out mechanism for rightsholders, creating a clear legal pathway for publishers to reserve their content or license it on commercial terms.

In March 2026 the European Parliament passed a resolution urging new licensing rules to ensure fair remuneration for news media whose content is exploited by AI systems. It called for full compensation, the right to refuse use, and safeguards for media pluralism. Pending CJEU cases (such as Like Company v Google Ireland) are expected to clarify how reproduction rights and TDM exceptions apply to AI training, adding further pressure on AI developers to secure licences rather than risk litigation.

Outside the EU, the UK government has maintained the status quo on TDM exceptions but is actively monitoring EU developments and international standards on crawler transparency.

Globally, these rules are shifting negotiations from "take it or leave it" scraping to structured commercial conversations. For B2B and specialist publishers with high-value, niche archives, regulation creates a more predictable, enforceable licensing market – turning what was once a cost of enforcement into a revenue opportunity.

Ongoing Real-Time Data Feeds for AI Systems

If archive licensing reflects the value of the past, real-time data feeds represent the value of the present. Modern AI systems are not static; they are continuously operating environments that depend on fresh, verified inputs to remain relevant. Whether powering financial copilots, enterprise dashboards, or consumer-facing assistants, these systems require a steady stream of up-to-date information. In this context, journalism is no longer just a historical dataset for training models. It becomes a live intelligence layer.

This shift is particularly significant for B2B and specialist publishers. Financial news, earnings transcripts, regulatory filings, policy updates, clinical research and industry-specific reporting all carry time-sensitive value that degrades rapidly. For an AI system operating in real time — advising an investor, monitoring compliance risk, or tracking supply chain disruptions — yesterday's information is often insufficient. The premium, therefore, moves from access to archives toward access to continuously updated, structured feeds of information that can be directly integrated into AI workflows.

Technically, this is enabled through APIs and structured data pipelines. Publishers are increasingly packaging their content not as articles alone, but as machine-readable streams: tagged, timestamped, and enriched with metadata that allows AI systems to ingest and act on it instantly. This changes both the product and the pricing model. Instead of one-time licensing fees or per-crawl micropayments, real-time feeds lend themselves to recurring, usage-based revenue — closer in nature to enterprise SaaS than traditional media monetisation. For publishers, this offers a more predictable and higher-margin income stream; for AI companies and enterprise clients, it provides reliability, reduced latency and lower risk of error.

A useful way to understand this evolution is to compare it with established information businesses such as Bloomberg or Refinitiv, where the value lies not only in the accuracy of the data, but in its immediacy and integration into decision-making systems. AI accelerates this logic. As agents take on more operational roles — executing trades, generating reports, triggering alerts — the demand for trusted, real-time inputs increases. In effect, journalism begins to function as a form of critical infrastructure within these systems, supplying the signals that guide automated action.

For publishers, the strategic implication is clear. The opportunity is not only to license what has already been produced, but to productise the ongoing act of reporting itself. This requires investment in structured data, standardised formats, and delivery mechanisms that go beyond traditional publishing workflows. It also requires a shift in mindset: from thinking of content as discrete outputs to treating it as a continuous service. Those who make this transition are not simply selling access to information; they are embedding themselves directly into the operating layer of the AI economy.

But this shift toward real-time information also points to a deeper reality. The value of journalism in the AI economy is not only commercial, it is structural.

Why AI Systems Still Depend on Original Journalism

Alongside these emerging revenue models, a deeper technical reality is becoming clearer: AI systems continue to depend on access to original, high-quality human-generated content – not only for training, but for maintaining relevance over time.

Research published in the academic journal Nature has explored the concept of "model collapse" – the idea that models trained repeatedly on synthetic or recycled data can lose diversity and degrade in quality. While subsequent work has shown that this effect is unlikely under real-world conditions – where human-generated data, filtered synthetic data and retrieval-based systems are combined – it reinforces an important point: AI systems require a continued supply of reliable, human-authored information to remain grounded.

As Nick Diakopoulos, professor of communication at Northwestern University notes in a Medium post, the value of news data in this context is not primarily one of scale. Even large publishers contribute only a small fraction of the total data used to train modern AI systems. "Providing data for pre-training new models is not where the value of news data lies," he writes. "Instead of volume, the value of news data is in its freshness."

This distinction is critical. As generative AI systems are deployed in real-world environments, they must incorporate up-to-date information continuously to remain useful – whether in financial markets, policy analysis or specialised industry contexts. Without access to current, verified information, even the most advanced models quickly become outdated.

This places journalism in a distinct position within the AI ecosystem. It is not simply a historical dataset, but an ongoing source of new, verified information about a changing world – precisely the kind of input that AI systems cannot generate independently. As a result, the role of publishers extends beyond content creation to something more foundational: supplying the continuous stream of human-generated intelligence that keeps AI systems accurate, current and relevant.

As this dependency becomes clearer, the question is no longer whether publishers have value in the AI ecosystem, but how that value is captured, and who captures it.

Collective Bargaining Frameworks: The Dow Jones / Factiva Model and European Innovations

Dow Jones' Factiva unit has become the largest AI licensing marketplace for premium content. As of January 2026, Factiva has secured generative-AI usage rights from more than 8,000 news and business sources. Small and mid-size publishers opt in and earn usage-based royalties when their content powers Factiva's enterprise GenAI tools. Almar Latour, CEO of Dow Jones, believes there is a mutual benefit involved. "Companies need to know that they can trust the data and information powering their AI solutions," he says. "And publishers need a marketplace that fairly compensates them for their proprietary news, data and information."

European models are also innovating. Le Monde Group has pioneered direct revenue sharing with journalists, directing 25% of all AI licensing income (from OpenAI, Perplexity and others) back to editorial staff – an approach now being adopted by several other French publishers and offering a compelling template for European B2B groups seeking to align commercial and journalistic incentives.

Case Studies: Financial Times – Specialist/B2B Leadership

The Financial Times signed a landmark licensing partnership with OpenAI in April 2024, followed by expansions in 2025. The deal allows OpenAI to use FT content for training and summarisation while the FT gains early access to AI technology for new reader products. FT Group CEO John Ridding noted the arrangement recognised the value of their award-winning journalism and provided strategic insights into AI distribution. For specialist magazines, the FT demonstrates how deep, authoritative vertical content (markets, regulation, industry analysis) commands premium terms and can be leveraged into proprietary enterprise tools.

Schibsted Media – Nordic Scale and Revenue Share

In February 2025, Norway-based Schibsted Media (publisher of VG, Aftenposten, Aftonbladet and Svenska Dagbladet) signed a major deal with OpenAI covering its Nordic portfolio. The agreement includes not only licensing for training and summarisation but also journalist revenue-sharing elements and collaborative AI product development, a model that has since influenced other European groups.

Turning Proprietary Archives into Enterprise AI Products: The Citywire Example and Beyond

B2B publishers are uniquely positioned to build premium AI experiences on top of their own content. In October 2025, leading financial publisher Citywire launched Citywire AI, a generative research assistant trained exclusively on its 25+ years of verified articles (27,500+ published annually). Available across Citywire Selector, Pro Buyer, Wealth Manager and New Model Adviser, the tool delivers conversational, source-linked research for wealth managers and advisors, driving deeper engagement and retention.

Similar opportunities exist across specialist verticals: personalised AI-generated news briefings, corporate intelligence dashboards, automated industry monitoring tools, API access to editorial databases, white-labelled editorial AI systems, and custom solutions for governments and institutions. These products command thousands of dollars per user per year and improve retention dramatically while creating new enterprise sales pipelines.

Advertising and Audience Innovation in the AI Era

AI is also beginning to reshape advertising and audience economics, although these developments are less mature than the licensing and data models outlined above. As third-party cookies decline and audience tracking becomes more constrained, publishers are increasingly turning to first-party data and contextual signals to support advertising strategies. AI tools are accelerating this shift, enabling more precise segmentation, automated content adaptation and improved matching between user intent and commercial messaging.

At the same time, the rise of AI interfaces is beginning to alter how audiences encounter content. As search, discovery and recommendation become mediated by AI systems, traditional traffic flows are fragmenting. This creates both risk and opportunity. On one hand, reduced direct traffic can weaken advertising revenue tied to page views. On the other, it increases the value of high-intent environments – where users are actively seeking information or making decisions – and where advertising can be more effectively aligned with context.

Some publishers are already adapting by developing new commercial formats and capabilities. Branded content studios, such as those operated by The New York Times Company (T Brand Studio) and Vox Media (Vox Creative), continue to expand their role in producing high-quality, audience-aligned commercial content. In parallel, publishers are experimenting with AI-assisted workflows to personalise content, localise campaigns and improve performance measurement, particularly in environments where traditional targeting mechanisms are no longer viable.

While these models remain closely tied to audience engagement rather than direct AI monetisation, they point to a broader shift: advertising in the AI era is likely to depend less on scale alone and more on the quality of context, the strength of first-party relationships and the ability to align commercial messaging with user intent. For publishers, this reinforces the importance of maintaining direct audience connections even as AI becomes an increasingly important intermediary.

Innovation Insight: Practical Advice for Magazine Publishers

1. **Start with visibility** – Implement TollBit or Cloudflare analytics today to quantify your AI traffic footprint.

2. Prepare your archive – Invest in structured data, metadata and rights management; it directly increases licensing value.

3. Monitor regulation – Track EU AI Act compliance and opt-out mechanisms – they strengthen your negotiating position.

4. Join a collective – Factiva, RSL or national alliances lower the barrier for smaller titles.

5. Build internal AI products – Even a simple research assistant on your archive (as Citywire demonstrated) can drive subscription uplift and enterprise deals.

6. Price for price – Differentiate on trust, freshness and structure.

7. Measure holistically – Track licensing revenue alongside engagement lift, retention and brand safety in AI surfaces.

The Strategic Tension: Value Creation vs Platform Dependency

There is, of course, an elephant in the room to address. As publishers begin to monetise AI consumption, they also risk deepening their dependence on the very systems that have disrupted their traditional economics. Licensing deals, data feeds and platform integrations create new revenue streams, but they also position journalism organisations as upstream suppliers in an AI value chain largely controlled by technology companies.

This raises familiar, but newly intensified, questions. If AI systems become the primary interface through which users access information, the direct relationship between publisher and audience may weaken further. Pricing power, initially strengthened by the scarcity of high-quality, trusted data, may come under pressure as more publishers enter the market or as AI companies seek to optimise costs. Collective models may improve access to revenue for smaller players, but can also standardise pricing in ways that limit differentiation.

For publishers, the challenge is therefore not only to participate in this new market, but to do so on terms that preserve long-term strategic control. The goal is not simply to become a supplier of content to AI systems, but to remain a creator of distinctive, high-value intelligence that cannot be easily substituted. In that sense, the question is not whether AI will pay for journalism, but how publishers can ensure that the value they create is not progressively captured elsewhere in the ecosystem.

The New Revenue Engine Mindset

The publishers and magazine groups succeeding in 2026 have stopped asking, “How do we stop AI from using our content?” They are now asking a more productive question: how can AI be made to pay – fairly, and repeatedly – for the unique value journalism creates?

The contours of this new model are already visible. TollBit and Cloudflare have shown that technical enforcement can operate at scale. Factiva has demonstrated that collective licensing can extend AI revenue to thousands of smaller publishers. Axel Springer, News Corp, the Financial Times, Le Monde, Citywire and other B2B innovators have shown that proprietary archives can be transformed into high-margin enterprise AI products, supported by an increasingly favourable regulatory environment.

What underpins all of this is a simple shift in perspective. AI companies and enterprise systems require credible, structured and continuously updated information to function effectively. Journalism organisations own that supply. The closer this information sits to decision-making – whether in financial markets, policy environments or specialised industries – the more valuable it becomes.

By combining technical enforcement, collective frameworks, direct licensing, real-time data feeds and value-added AI products, publishers are beginning to build a new revenue stack – one that is more predictable, higher-margin and less dependent on volatile advertising markets. The challenge is not simply to participate in this shift, but to do so strategically, ensuring that value is captured rather than ceded.

The era of AI as a cost centre is already giving way to something more consequential: AI as a paying customer and, in some cases, a strategic partner. For WAN-IFRA and FIPP members and specialist publishers worldwide, the implication is clear. Content is no longer just something to be distributed; it is infrastructure for the AI economy. Those who build the products, partnerships and systems around that reality – and do so early – will define the next decade of profitable, independent journalism.

Promoting Human-Made Journalism in the Synthetic Age

Trust, Synthetic Media and AI Ethics

Introduction: Journalism After Authenticity

The defining shift in news media is not just the rise of artificial intelligence, it's the slow collapse of the assumptions the industry once relied on.

Let's step back for a moment. For most of its modern history, journalism operated within a stable set of conditions: content was relatively scarce, production was costly, and authenticity was largely taken for granted. Audiences might question whether information was accurate or biased, but they rarely had to ask whether it was real, who created it, or how it came into being.

Misinformation and disinformation have been growing challenges for some time, but generative AI, however, disrupts all three assumptions at once. Text, images, audio, and video can now be produced at near-zero marginal cost, at massive scale, and with a level of realism that often renders them indistinguishable from human-created content. What was once scarce – content – has become abundant. What was once implicit- the authenticity - has become uncertain.

This is not just a technological shift, it changes how trust in information is established. The problem is no longer access to information, nor even the speed at which it can be delivered. It is the growing difficulty of establishing what can be trusted. The most recent Reuters Institute survey, and indeed previous ones, point to a widening "trust gap" across multiple countries: confidence in generative AI systems remains significantly lower than trust in established news brands. Yet even that residual institutional trust is fragile, uneven, and in many markets declining.

Under these conditions, journalism's traditional value proposition begins to erode. Speed is no longer scarce. Access is no longer exclusive. Distribution is no longer controlled. When machines can generate plausible content instantly, the act of publishing information is no longer, in itself, a differentiator.

The implication, we feel, is structural. Journalism is no longer primarily in the business of producing information - it is equally also in the business of guaranteeing its integrity.

To do this, news organisations must rethink not just what they produce, but how they produce it. Trust can no longer be treated as a byproduct of good journalism. It must be designed into the system itself – through workflows, technologies, and governance structures that make the origins, methods, and accountability of content visible and verifiable. What emerges is a new organising logic for journalism: not content as product, but trust as infrastructure.

1. From Information Abundance to Trust Scarcity

Generative AI has fundamentally altered the economics of content production. Automated text generation, synthetic imagery, and AI-assisted video tools have dramatically reduced the cost and increased the speed of creating media. The result is not simply more content, but a different kind of information environment—one defined by saturation, uncertainty, and continuous production.

Three consequences follow from this:

First, content saturation. The volume of available information now far exceeds any individual's capacity to process or evaluate it. The constraint is no longer supply, but attention and judgment.

Second, the erosion of authenticity. As synthetic media becomes more sophisticated, the distinction between human-created and machine-generated content becomes increasingly difficult to detect. In many cases, it is functionally invisible. Audiences are left without reliable signals to distinguish between different kinds of content or production processes.

Third, the redistribution of verification. Traditionally, the burden of establishing credibility rested with publishers, who developed editorial processes to verify information before publication. In a saturated, platform-driven environment, that burden shifts toward audiences, who are expected to assess credibility in real time, often without sufficient context or tools.

Together, these dynamics create a condition that can be described as trust scarcity. It is not that accurate information disappears, but that its status becomes harder to establish and easier to contest. Even verified information may be doubted if its origins are unclear or if it circulates alongside convincing synthetic alternatives.

Survey data reflects this unease. A 2025 Pew Research Center study found that half of U.S. adults expect AI to have a negative impact on the news they consume over the next two decades, with many anticipating both a decline in journalistic employment and an increase in misleading content. The concern is not only about misinformation, but about a broader loss of confidence in the information environment itself.

For journalism, this produces a structural paradox. The same technologies that enable faster, cheaper, and more scalable content production also undermine the conditions that make that content credible. Competing on speed or volume becomes increasingly futile when those attributes are easily replicated by machines. What cannot be replicated as easily is the capacity to establish, signal, and maintain trust.

The shift, therefore, is not from one distribution model to another, or from one format to another. It is from an information economy to a trust economy. And in that economy, the central question is no longer what is published, but whether it can be believed—and why.

2. From Content to Provenance: Redefining Media Value

Historically, journalism's value chain has prioritised:

- Speed of reporting
- Access to sources
- Editorial judgment
- Distribution reach

In the synthetic age, these are no longer sufficient differentiators. Instead, value shifts toward:

- **Provenance:** Where did this content come from?
- **Traceability:** How was it produced?
- **Accountability:** Who is responsible for it?
- **Verifiability:** Can its claims be independently confirmed?

This transformation requires a conceptual shift. Journalism is no longer just about producing content; it is about producing trusted information objects with verifiable origins. The implication is that news organisations must treat process transparency as a product feature, not an internal practice.

3. Labelling & Transparency: Making Human-Made Visible

One of the most immediate strategies for differentiation is clear labelling of content origins. This includes:

- Explicit identification of AI-generated or AI-assisted content
- "Human-made" labels for fully human-produced journalism
- Disclosure of tools used in reporting and production

Such labelling serves multiple purposes. It informs audiences, signals accountability and reinforces brand identity. More importantly, it creates a new form of authenticity signalling. In this context, human-made journalism becomes analogous to "organic" or "fair trade" certification in other industries. It is not simply the absence of automation, but the presence of ethical production standards.

Case Study: The New York Times

The New York Times has taken a cautious approach to generative AI, restricting its use in core journalistic functions while experimenting with AI-assisted tools in controlled environments. Its publicly stated Principles for Using Generative AI in The Times's Newsroom (updated 2024–2025) declare: "We don't use AI to write articles, and journalists are ultimately responsible for everything that we publish... Any use of generative AI in the newsroom must begin with factual information vetted by our journalists and... must be reviewed by editors." When substantial AI use occurs (e.g., for headlines, summaries or images), the Times mandates "clear labelling and explanations." By foregrounding its editorial standards and human judgment, the Times reinforces its brand as a trusted human institution in an increasingly synthetic landscape. As the paper's explainer notes: "The expertise and judgment of our journalists are competitive advantages that machines simply can't match."

Platforms and publishers are experimenting with visible labelling regimes. Meta, for instance, rolled out "AI info" labels (previously "Made with AI") across Facebook, Instagram, and Threads starting in 2024. These labels appear on images, video, and audio when the platform detects industry-standard AI signals or when users self-disclose generative AI use. The policy aims to reduce misleading content, particularly on matters of public importance. The BBC similarly mandates clear disclosures: whenever AI is used in content creation or presentation, audiences should be informed in a context-appropriate manner, with active human editorial oversight required.

4. Provenance Technologies: Building the Infrastructure of Trust

Labelling alone is insufficient without underlying technical systems that ensure authenticity. This is where provenance technologies become critical. Emerging standards, such as those developed by the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA), enable content to carry embedded metadata documenting: origin, editing history, tools used in creation, and verification status.

These systems function as digital audit trails, allowing both platforms and audiences to trace the lifecycle of a piece of content. Prominent participants include Adobe, Microsoft, the BBC, The New York Times, and Reuters.

Adobe has embedded Content Credentials directly into Photoshop and other Creative Cloud tools, automatically tracking edits, origin, tools used, and authorship history as a tamper-evident metadata trail.

Watermarking technologies, developed by companies like Google (SynthID for images, text and video) and OpenAI, further support this ecosystem by embedding invisible signals within AI-generated outputs. Google and OpenAI committed to these mechanisms in 2023 White House voluntary agreements, with Google making SynthID available to developers in 2025.

For publishers, then, it is strategically imperative that provenance becomes part of the content architecture, and not merely an optional add-on.

5. Verification-by-Design: Embedding Trust in Workflows

Traditional journalistic verification has often been reactive, with fact-checking occurring after content is produced. In the synthetic age, this approach is insufficient. Verification must be embedded at every stage of the editorial process. This includes source authentication systems, AI-assisted fact-checking tools, cross-referencing databases, and editorial checkpoints before publication.

Case Study: The Associated Press

The Associated Press has long been a pioneer in automated journalism, particularly in areas such as financial reporting. Its new AP Verify dashboard launched in December 2025 combines AI-powered features (e.g. generative AI detection, "People Finder" for photo/video identification) with traditional verification tools, while insisting on human oversight. As AP's own documentation states: "All facts, sources and claims generated by AI must be independently verified and fact-checked by Reuters journalists." Automation handles repetitive tasks, while journalists focus on validation, context and interpretation. This hybrid model demonstrates that AI integration, if governed by robust editorial processes, does not necessarily erode trust.

Other organisations demonstrate similar hybrid approaches. Full Fact (UK) deploys AI-powered tools to monitor text, video, audio, and social media for claims worth checking, transcribe content in real time, and flag repeated misinformation—always with human fact-checkers making the final verification decisions. Reuters uses AI-assisted tools within its Visual Verification Team to process and authenticate large volumes of user-generated content (UGC), combining OSINT techniques, geolocation, and metadata inspection with rigorous human review.

6. Human Oversight as Editorial Capital

The question has been bandied about relentlessly: does human labour become redundant in automated environments? Quite the opposite. Its value is greater than ever, though its emphasis has shifted. Journalists have always been more than content producers: they validate information, interpret context, make ethical judgments, and sustain public trust. What has changed is the heightened importance of these functions within increasingly automated systems. This shift can be understood as the rise of editorial capital, which is the value generated by human judgment in an era of automation.

Case Study: BBC

The BBC has developed comprehensive Editorial Guidelines on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (2025), stating: "Any use of AI by the BBC in the creation, presentation or distribution of content must include active human editorial oversight and approval... A senior editorial figure must be responsible and accountable for overseeing the deployment and continuing use of AI." The guidelines explicitly require transparency to audiences: "The audience should be informed in a manner appropriate to the context and it may be helpful to explain not just that AI has been used but how and why it has been used." This model reinforces the principle that human oversight is the very foundation of innovation.

The Guardian takes a similarly cautious stance. Its updated editorial code and AI principles (2026) state that generative AI can assist but must never replace journalistic expertise. Journalists remain fully accountable, any significant use requires senior editor approval, and transparency footnotes are mandatory when GenAI contributes materially (e.g. for illustrative images or data analysis). This reinforces the conceptual framing: in the synthetic age, human labour becomes the scarce credibility resource—not as content producers per se, but as validators, interpreters, ethical decision-makers, and custodians of trust.

7. Ethical Frameworks for AI-Assisted Reporting

As AI becomes integrated into journalism, ethical considerations must be formalised into operational frameworks. These include transparency in AI usage, avoidance of bias and discrimination, protection of sources and privacy, and accountability for errors.

Global frameworks from organisations such as UNESCO (Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, 2021) provide high-level guidance. UNESCO's standard—adopted by all 194 member states—centres on "the protection of human rights and dignity... transparency and fairness, always remembering the importance of human oversight of AI systems". The OECD AI Principles similarly emphasise accountable, transparent and human-centric systems. The European Union's AI Act further operationalises these ideas through risk-based regulation, imposing transparency obligations on high-risk AI systems, including those generating synthetic media.

However, news organisations must translate these into context-specific editorial policies. This requires internal ethics committees, regular audits of AI systems, and staff training on AI risks and responsibilities. Ethics, in this sense, becomes operational rather than abstract.

While official reports explicitly highlight that the 194 Member States adopted the Recommendation, the 12 Associate Members of UNESCO are naturally included in the broader consensus and implementation activities of the General Conference

8. Transparency Reporting and Audit Trails

To build trust, it is not enough to be transparent; organisations must demonstrate transparency through structured reporting. This includes public disclosure of AI usage, correction and retraction logs, documentation of editorial processes, and audit trails for content production. Reuters, for example, publicly states: "When we rely primarily or solely on generative AI to produce news content, we clearly disclose this use, providing context about how we have used the tool."

Tech companies supporting the ecosystem also publish structured disclosures. Google releases periodic transparency reports detailing AI-related practices, while OpenAI provides system cards for major models and reports on content moderation and government data requests. Independent outlets such as The Markup exemplify radical transparency by openly documenting their investigative methods, data sources, and editorial processes in every major report.

Such practices align journalism with broader trends in corporate governance, where transparency is linked to accountability and stakeholder trust. Transparency reporting also creates a feedback loop, enabling organisations to identify weaknesses and improve their systems over time.

9. Trust Metrics and Performance Dashboards

In the synthetic age, trust must be measurable. News organisations are increasingly exploring ways to integrate trust metrics into their performance systems. These may include accuracy rates, correction frequency, source transparency scores, and audience trust surveys.

While comprehensive public dashboards remain emerging, initiatives like Schibsted's trust initiatives and the Reuters Institute's ongoing surveys demonstrate the shift from attention economies to trust economies. Reuters Institute data consistently shows that audiences value explicit explanations of AI use more than opaque automation. By incorporating these metrics into dashboards alongside traditional KPIs (such as engagement and revenue), organisations can align their operational priorities with their ethical commitments.

Initiatives such as The Trust Project operationalise this further by embedding visible "Trust Indicators" (e.g., author bios sourcing details, corrections policy, and ownership transparency) directly into articles. Broader public sentiment is tracked through surveys such as those from Gallup, which in 2025 recorded U.S. trust in mass media at a historic low of 28%, underscoring the urgency of measurable trust-building efforts. The Reuters Institute's annual Digital News Report continues to provide cross-country benchmarks on audience trust levels and perceptions of AI in journalism.

10. Brand Trust and Creator Trust Dynamics

Another critical transformation is the changing relationship between institutional and individual trust. Audiences increasingly place trust in individual journalists, subject-matter experts and independent creators. At the same time, trust in institutions has declined in many contexts. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity for news organisations, who must amplify the visibility of their journalists, build recognisable editorial voices, and integrate personal credibility into institutional branding.

Case Study: Schibsted

Schibsted has invested heavily in trust-building strategies, including the launch of "ethics boxes" in articles (explaining editorial decisions) and industry-wide AI transparency recommendations for Swedish media (co-initiated by Schibsted in 2024). These recommendations require disclosure when AI has "significant journalistic impact." Schibsted's Head of Trust Initiatives, Agnes Stenbom, notes that such tools address young audiences' desire for insight into "why we choose to name a suspect in one case but not in another." By combining institutional authority with personal accountability, Schibsted demonstrates how legacy media can adapt to changing trust dynamics.

11. Governance, Risk and Editorial Accountability

The integration of AI into journalism introduces new forms of risk, including algorithmic bias, manipulated or synthetic content, loss of editorial control, and legal liability. To address these risks, organisations must develop governance structures that include clear lines of accountability, risk assessment frameworks, and cross-functional oversight (editorial, legal, technical).

Regulatory developments, such as the European Union's AI Act (2024/2026 implementation), further underscore the need for structured governance. The Act imposes transparency obligations on AI-generated content and risk-based oversight, principles that are broadly applicable even outside the EU. While not all organisations operate within the same regulatory environments, the principles of risk-based oversight and accountability are broadly applicable.

12. Editorial Risk Management in Automated Environments

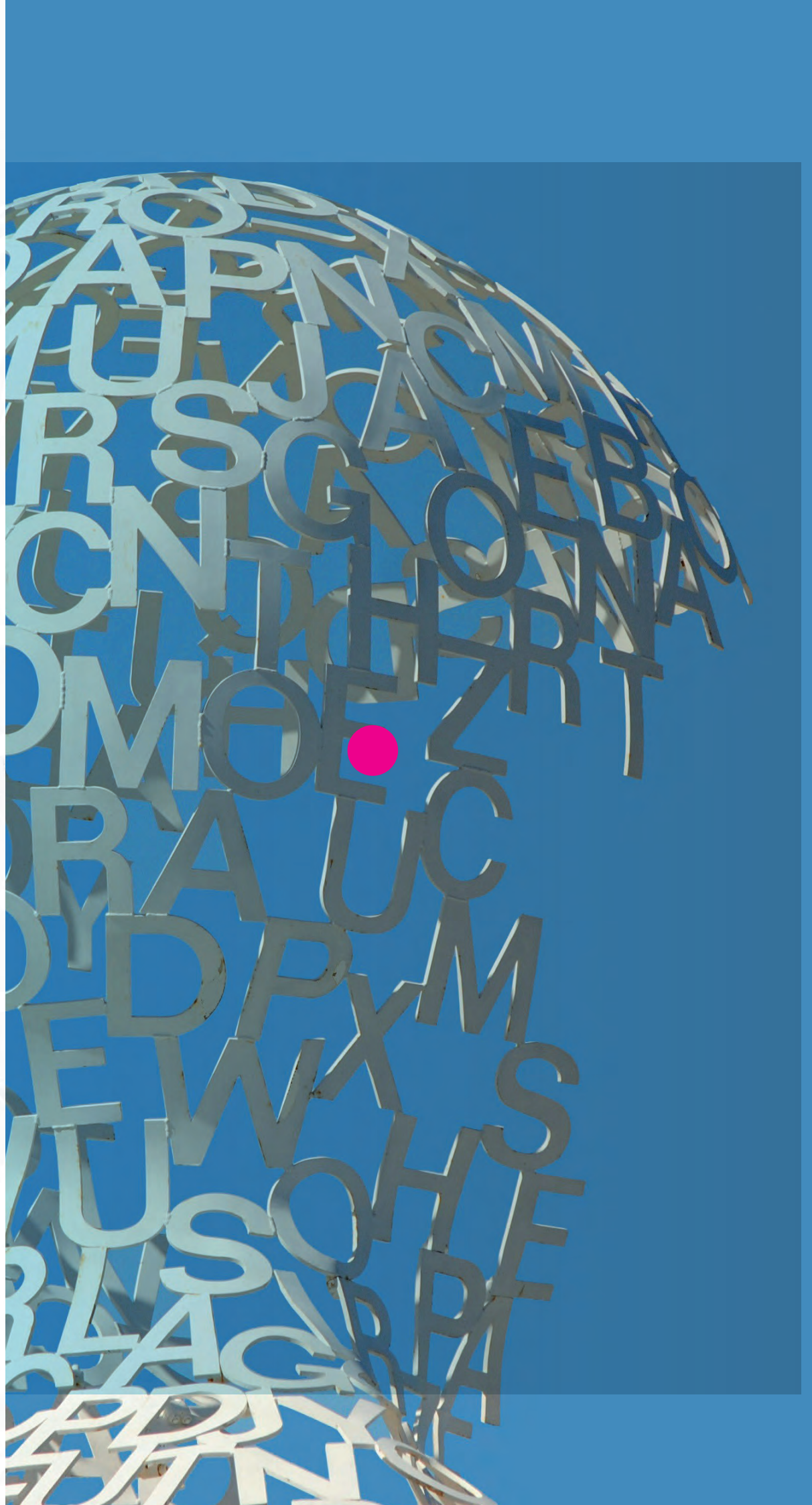
While automation inarguably introduces efficiency, it amplifies the consequences of error. A single flawed algorithm can produce large volumes of incorrect or misleading content. Therefore, risk management must be proactive and systemic. This includes testing and validation of AI tools before deployment, continuous monitoring of outputs, and rapid response mechanisms for errors. Editorial risk management becomes an integral part of newsroom operations, requiring collaboration between journalists, technologists and legal teams. The Washington Post's AI policy exemplifies this, stating: "We are transparent about how and when we use AI... We will not employ AI to generate images, video or visual works that purport to represent reality without disclosing its use."

13. Human-Made Journalism as Competitive Advantage

The cumulative effect of these transformations is a redefinition of journalism's core value. In a synthetic media environment, content is abundant, authenticity is uncertain, trust is scarce. Under these conditions, human-made journalism becomes a premium good. Its value lies in transparent production processes, verifiable origins, ethical accountability, and human judgment.

This does not mean rejecting AI. On the contrary, AI can enhance efficiency and support reporting. However, its use must be framed within a broader strategy that prioritises trust. The competitive advantage of journalism, therefore, is not technological superiority, but credibility anchored in human oversight.

Rebuilding Trust



The transition to a synthetic media environment represents one of the most significant challenges—and opportunities—in the history of journalism. As generative technologies reshape the production and circulation of information, the foundations of trust are being renegotiated.

To navigate this transformation, news organisations must move beyond reactive strategies and adopt a proactive, systemic approach to trust. This involves embedding transparency into content, building technical infrastructures for provenance (C2PA/Content Credentials), redesigning workflows around verification (AP Verify), strengthening human oversight (BBC, NYT), and developing robust governance frameworks (UNESCO, EU AI Act).

Above all, it requires a reimagining of journalism itself. In a world where machines can generate content, the defining feature of journalism is no longer its ability to produce information, but its ability to guarantee its integrity. Human-made journalism, in this context, is not a nostalgic ideal. It is a strategic necessity. It represents a form of value that cannot be easily replicated by machines: the capacity for judgment, responsibility and ethical reasoning.

In the synthetic age, the future of journalism will not be determined by how effectively it adopts artificial intelligence, but by how clearly it defines—and defends—the role of the human within it.

How to Build an AI-Native Newsroom

From tools to systems: redesigning how journalism is produced



From tools to workflows

The early phase of AI adoption in newsrooms was shaped by what can best be described as an additive logic.

Tools were introduced quickly, often despite initial misgivings, to assist with specific tasks such as transcription, summarisation, headline generation, and tagging. These interventions were valuable in isolation. They reduced time spent on repetitive processes and delivered modest gains in efficiency. At the same time, they operated at the edges of existing systems rather than transforming them.

Over time, the limits of this approach have become harder to ignore, particularly given the scale of technological change now under way. Adding AI tools into existing workflows tends to reproduce the same structural constraints that have long defined newsroom production. Work still moves in stages, handoffs remain fragmented, and the final output, most often an article, continues to sit at the centre of everything. Individual steps may become faster, but the system itself changes very little.

This tension is reflected in a 2026 survey published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, which brought together newsroom leaders and AI practitioners from organisations including the BBC, Financial Times, and Nikkei. Across those conversations, there is a growing recognition that early gains from task-level automation have been limited, and that the real opportunity lies in rethinking workflows more fundamentally.

In practice, that shift is already visible. Work that once moved step by step, from research to reporting, writing, editing, and publishing, is beginning to blur into something more continuous. Information can be gathered, filtered, and summarised in parallel rather than in sequence. Systems are starting to take on parts of the process that previously sat with individuals, particularly in the early stages of monitoring and synthesis.

This is where the emergence of agentic AI begins to matter. Rather than supporting a single task, these systems can handle chains of activity. They identify relevant information, organise it, and prepare it in a form that can be used editorially. Media consultant David Caswell describes this, in the Reuters Institute survey, as a move beyond task automation towards systems capable of supporting entire workflows across research and reporting.

The shift also changes how content itself is understood. In a traditional newsroom, content is produced as a finished product. In an AI-mediated environment, that sense of finality begins to loosen. Content can be updated, recombined, and reshaped depending on how it is accessed and by whom. The idea of a single article as a fixed container for a story becomes less stable.

Once content becomes fluid in this way, infrastructure starts to matter much more. Material needs to be structured, tagged, and stored so that it can be found, reused, and reassembled. As Sonali Verma notes in a January 2026 post for INMA's Newsroom Innovation Initiative, making content fully searchable and actionable is no longer a technical detail but a strategic priority.

At the same time, the limits of current systems remain clear. AI can filter, summarise, and organise information at scale, but it struggles with credibility, context, and editorial judgement. Journalists consistently emphasise the need for transparency, especially the ability to trace outputs back to original sources. AI can take on more of the mechanics of journalism, but it does not remove the need for judgement. If anything, it makes that role more visible.

This is where the challenge becomes clear. Even well-designed systems fail if they do not align with how journalists actually work. Tools that require behavioural change or add complexity are rarely adopted at scale. The transition to AI-native workflows is therefore not just a technical shift, but an organisational one.

In this chapter, we examine how that shift is taking shape. What is changing is not simply the speed of production, but the structure behind it. The focus is moving away from improving individual tasks towards rethinking how the work itself is organised. The end state is not a fully automated newsroom, but one in which AI is embedded in the way journalism is produced from the start.

AI workflows and agentic production systems

INNOVATION Insight
From tools to systems – what actually changes

AI-assisted newsroom

- AI supports individual tasks
- Workflows remain step-by-step
- Outputs are fixed
- Tools sit outside core systems

AI-native newsroom

- AI is embedded across workflows
- Processes run continuously and in parallel
- Content is modular and reusable
- Systems are built around structured data

What this means for media leaders

- Stop evaluating AI as tools; treat it as infrastructure
- Redesign workflows before scaling automation
- Make structured content and metadata a priority
- Align editorial, product, and technology around shared systems

If the first phase of AI in newsrooms was about adding tools, the second is about how work itself begins to change.

For a long time, newsroom workflows followed a predictable rhythm. Information was gathered, checked, written, edited, and published. Each step was distinct, and each had its own owner. Even as digital systems evolved, this basic structure held.

What is now changing is less the steps themselves and more how they connect.

In many newsrooms, the early stages of reporting are already being reshaped. Monitoring, filtering, and initial synthesis, once time-consuming and manual, are increasingly handled by AI systems. Journalists are starting from material that has already been sorted and structured rather than from a blank page. The effect is subtle, but it changes the flow of work.

Agentic AI plays an important role here. Instead of responding to a single request, these systems carry out sequences of actions. They identify information, group it, summarise it, and prepare it for editorial use. What used to be a chain of small tasks begins to feel like a continuous process.

As a result, the boundaries between stages of production soften. Research feeds directly into drafting, drafting into structuring, and structuring into distribution. The workflow becomes less linear and more fluid. Journalists still write and report, but more of their time is spent shaping and validating material that has already been partially processed.

AI-assisted investigations and the rise of structured newsrooms

This shift also changes how time is spent inside the newsroom. Tasks such as transcription, translation, and first summaries are increasingly handled by systems. Editors and AI leads note that these activities are beginning to disappear as distinct steps, creating more space for judgement. Decisions about what matters, how it should be framed, and whether it meets editorial standards become more central.

Magazine and long-form production workflows are also beginning to shift. Layout generation, versioning across formats, and packaging for different platforms can now be automated or semi-automated. Production cycles that once took days can be compressed into hours.

Not all parts of the newsroom change at the same pace. Video production, for instance, remains labour-intensive and constrained by time. This makes it particularly suited to AI-driven redesign, with significant potential for efficiency and adaptation across formats.

Over time, it becomes clear that AI does not simply speed up existing workflows. It reorganises them. Tasks move to the background, steps merge, and new forms of production emerge, especially where content needs to move quickly across platforms.

At the same time, these changes introduce new tensions. As workflows become more automated, visibility becomes more important. Journalists need to understand how information has been selected, what sources are being used, and where errors might enter the process.

This is where the distinction between assistance and delegation becomes critical. AI can assist by expanding capacity and reducing friction. Delegating too much risks weakening editorial control. The challenge is not simply deciding where to use AI, but deciding where human intervention must remain.

What emerges is a different picture of newsroom production. It is less about moving a story through stages and more about managing a continuous flow of information. The role of the journalist shifts accordingly, from executing each step to shaping, validating, and taking responsibility for the outcome.

If earlier shifts in the newsroom have been about speed and workflow, a deeper change is now becoming visible in how journalism itself is produced, and what gives it value.

For a long time, the limits of reporting were defined by human capacity. Journalists could only read so much, analyse so much, and connect so many dots. AI begins to change that, not by replacing reporting, but by expanding what it is possible to see.

This is most clearly visible in investigative work. In a February 2026 webinar hosted by INMA's Newsroom Innovation Initiative, Florent Daudens, founder of Mizal AI and former head of AI at CBC/Radio-Canada, described how recent projects have moved beyond isolated tools towards full AI pipelines. These combine OCR, transcription, and data processing to surface patterns in large datasets, allowing journalists to identify connections and narratives that would have been difficult to detect manually.

The significance here is not simply efficiency. It changes the scale at which journalism can operate. Instead of working through material piece by piece, journalists can begin with a structured overview of large datasets and then move into interpretation and verification. The workflow shifts upstream.

At the same time, not all journalism changes in the same way. Some parts of newsroom output are far more suited to automation than others. This is captured

clearly in the model developed by DRIVE, a collaboration of regional publishers across Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

DRIVE describes newsroom output as a pyramid. At the base sits what one participant described as "dark bread" journalism. This includes routine local content such as police reports, school announcements, and community notices. It is essential for audiences, but time-consuming to produce. Using AI systems that process emails, PDFs, and other structured inputs, this layer can be largely automated. The result is a significant reduction in manual effort alongside an increase in output.

At the top of the pyramid sits premium journalism. This includes investigations, analysis, and deeply reported stories. Here, the role of AI is different. Rather than replacing human work, it supports it. Systems assist with research, archive searches, fact-checking, and drafting, while editorial judgement remains central.

This model makes an important point. AI is not a single tool applied across the newsroom. It is a system that reshapes different layers of output in different ways. Routine content can be automated. Complex journalism is augmented. The space in between becomes more fluid.

A broader structural shift also begins to emerge. Agentic AI does not simply assist with tasks. It can plan, orchestrate, and execute multi-step processes. Increasingly, these systems sit between users and the information they consume.

One consequence is that journalism itself needs to be rethought. It is no longer sufficient to think in terms of finished articles or fixed formats. Instead, journalism begins to function as structured, machine-readable infrastructure. Facts, context, attribution, and editorial logic need to be accessible, reusable, and verifiable across systems as well as by people.

Part of this shift is already under way. Stories are being broken down into smaller components, with clearer separation between fact and analysis. Metadata plays a more important role, allowing content to be reused across formats without distortion. Archives, transcripts, and institutional knowledge are no longer static repositories. They become queryable systems that can surface insight in real time.

This move from content to structure has some important implications. Competitive advantage begins to shift away from individual outputs and towards the systems behind them. Questions of access, context, provenance, and measurement become more important. Trust, in this environment, is no longer just a brand attribute. It becomes a system requirement.

Taken together, these developments point to a deeper transformation. AI is not simply making journalism faster. It is changing how it is organised, from the automation of routine reporting to the augmentation of investigative work and the structuring of knowledge itself.

The newsroom, in this model, becomes less a place where stories are produced one by one, and more a system that continuously processes, structures, and surfaces information. The role of the journalist does not disappear, but it becomes more focused. It centres on identifying what matters, interpreting what is found, and taking responsibility for how it is presented.

Where AI transforms journalism most

Automated layer (high volume)

- Local updates, announcements, routine reporting
- Structured inputs such as emails, PDFs, and records
- Fully automated pipelines

Augmented layer (hybrid)

- Research and archive searches
- Data analysis and pattern detection
- Drafting and structuring

Human-led layer (high value)

- Investigations
- Editorial judgement
- Framing, accountability, and trust

Redesigning the newsroom – roles, teams, and leadership

If workflows are changing, the next question is what happens to the organisation around them.

For much of the past two decades, newsroom transformation has been framed in terms of digital adoption. The focus has been on new platforms, formats, and revenue models. What is now becoming clear is that the next phase is more structural. It is not just about what is produced, but how organisations are designed to produce it.

One of the first shifts becomes visible at the level of roles. As AI systems take on more of the mechanical work of journalism, the boundaries between traditional functions begin to soften. Editorial, product, and technology teams, once clearly separated, increasingly work on the same problems from different angles.

This is partly a function of necessity. AI-native workflows do not sit neatly within existing silos. They cut across them. Building and refining these systems requires editorial judgement, product thinking, and technical capability to be closely aligned. In practice, this often results in smaller, more integrated teams with greater autonomy.

A similar shift is visible in how work is initiated and executed. In traditional models, ideas move through layers of planning, documentation, and approval before anything is built. In AI-enabled environments, that process compresses. Teams can prototype quickly, test ideas in real time, and iterate based on feedback. The emphasis shifts from planning to building, and from specification to experimentation.

This is where developments in AI tooling begin to have organisational consequences. What has been described as “vibe coding” allows teams to generate working prototypes simply by describing what they want in natural language. Instead of writing detailed specifications or waiting for engineering cycles, teams can create simple tools, dashboards, workflows, or product features directly, testing ideas in a tangible form within hours or days.

This lowers the barrier to building and allows non-engineering teams to move beyond ideation into execution far more quickly. Product managers, designers, and even editorial teams can experiment with new formats, internal tools, or audience experiences, iterating in real time rather than relying on handoffs across teams.

More broadly, a different organisational model begins to emerge. Instead of large teams organised around specialised roles, there is a shift towards smaller groups with broader capabilities. Decision-making becomes more distributed. Alignment happens around working outputs rather than detailed documentation. The pace of iteration increases.

These patterns are not unique to media. They are visible across organisations where AI is embedded in day-to-day workflows. The same dynamics are now beginning to play out inside newsrooms.

At the same time, this shift places new demands on leadership. Managing an AI-native newsroom is not simply a matter of adopting tools. It requires new forms of coordination, new approaches to risk, and a clearer understanding of where human judgement needs to sit within increasingly automated systems.

Capability becomes a defining issue. Access to AI tools is no longer the constraint. What matters is how effectively they are used. In many organisations, a small group of individuals drives most of the progress, while the rest of the organisation lags behind. Scaling that capability becomes a strategic priority.

This requires more than training. It requires shared systems, common workflows, and a clear understanding of what effective use looks like. Without this, adoption remains uneven and the benefits of AI are limited to pockets of the organisation.

Governance then, presents a second challenge. As more people gain the ability to build and deploy tools, the risk of fragmentation increases. Without clear standards around data use, privacy, and editorial oversight, organisations can quickly encounter inconsistent outputs and hidden dependencies.

For leaders, this creates a tension. The opportunity lies in speed, experimentation, and expanded capacity. The risk lies in loss of control, technical debt, and erosion of standards. Navigating this requires a shift in mindset, from managing outputs to managing systems, and from enforcing process to enabling capability.

The organisations that adapt most effectively are likely to be those that recognise this early. They invest not just in tools, but in the structures that allow those tools to be used well. This includes shared infrastructure, clear workflows, and a culture that supports experimentation while maintaining accountability.

What is emerging is not simply a more efficient newsroom, but a different kind of organisation. It is one that is designed to operate with AI as part of its core.

How AI is changing team structures and decision-making

A consistent pattern is beginning to emerge across organisations as AI becomes embedded in day-to-day work. Similar observations have been noted in industry discussions, including a recent post from INMA's Product & Tech Initiative:

- **Teams are becoming smaller and more capable**
  Traditional structures are giving way to tighter, more autonomous groups where editorial, product, and engineering begin to blur.

- **Build cycles are compressing**
  Work that once took months is now happening in weeks, as AI accelerates prototyping, testing, and iteration.

- **Prototypes are replacing documentation**
  Teams increasingly align around working outputs rather than detailed specifications.

- **AI is shaping how teams think, not just how they build**
  Teams use AI to explore options, test assumptions, and refine ideas before committing resources.

- **Capability is uneven — and becoming strategic**
  Advantage depends less on access to tools and more on how effectively teams know how to use them.

From newsroom layout to newsroom logic

For much of modern journalism, newsroom design has never been just about space. It has been about behaviour. At INNOVATION, we have long worked from a simple premise: physical change drives conceptual change. The way a newsroom is organised, who sits where, how teams are structured, and how information moves, inevitably shapes how journalism is produced. The shift to digital-first newsrooms was not just about adopting new platforms. It required rethinking the physical and organisational structures that supported them.

What is becoming clear now is that a similar shift is under way again, but at a different level. In the digital-first era, the focus was on redesigning physical spaces to reflect new ways of working. Open floors, central desks, and integrated teams were all attempts to align structure with workflow. Today, as AI becomes embedded in production systems, that same logic is moving beyond the physical environment and into the architecture of work itself.

The questions remain familiar. How does information move? Where are decisions made? Who has visibility into what? The difference is that the answers are no longer determined primarily by layout. They are increasingly shaped by workflows, systems, and data structures.

In an AI-native newsroom, organisational design sits as much in infrastructure as in physical space. This does not make the physical newsroom

irrelevant. If anything, it sharpens its role. As more of the production process becomes system-driven, the newsroom becomes less about managing workflow and more about enabling collaboration, trust, and shared understanding. These are qualities that remain difficult to replicate through systems alone.

This shift is visible in how leading organisations continue to think about physical space. Writing for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Priscille Biehlmann describes how organisations such as Le Monde and Agence France-Presse approach newsroom design as a way of shaping collaboration and decision-making.

At Le Monde, editorial floors were designed to reflect how teams actually work together, including the addition of a central staircase to connect departments more fluidly and encourage interaction. At AFP, senior editorial leadership was deliberately co-located to support faster decision-making, even while recognising the risk of reinforcing hierarchy.

These examples illustrate a consistent principle. Newsroom design has always been an attempt to align structure with workflow. In the digital-first era, that meant rethinking physical space. In the AI-native era, it increasingly means rethinking systems.

For media leaders, the implication is clear. Organisational design can no longer be understood purely in spatial terms. It needs to be approached as a combination of physical and digital architecture. The newsroom is not just a place where journalism happens. It is a system through which information flows.

Seen this way, the transition to AI-native newsrooms is not entirely new. It is the latest expression of a familiar challenge: aligning how an organisation is structured with how it needs to work.

What has changed is the level at which that alignment now operates.

Designing for behaviour – then and now

Digital-first newsroom (physical design)

- Layout shapes collaboration
- Proximity influences information flow
- Central desks enable faster decisions
- Space reflects editorial hierarchy

AI-native newsroom (system design)

- Workflows shape collaboration
- Data structures influence information flow
- Systems determine speed and visibility
- Infrastructure reflects organisational priorities

Leadership, governance, and what to measure

If the newsroom is being redesigned around AI, the final question is how it is led.

For much of the past decade, newsroom leadership has focused on managing outputs. Stories published, formats produced, and audiences reached have been the primary markers of success. In an AI-native environment, that emphasis begins to shift. The challenge is less about overseeing individual pieces of content and more about managing the systems that produce them.

This requires a different mindset. Instead of asking whether a story is complete, leaders increasingly need to ask whether the workflow that produced it is functioning well. Attention shifts from outputs to how information is gathered, structured, and reused. The unit of management moves from the article to the system.

What emerges in this model is a more explicitly hybrid form of journalism. Systems handle scale, repetition, and early-stage processing. Journalists focus on judgement, interpretation, and accountability. The boundary between the two is not fixed. It is continuously negotiated within the workflow.

This has implications for how decisions are made. AI-native workflows are inherently iterative. They improve over time through testing and refinement. This creates a tension with traditional editorial cultures, which have been built around precision before publication. Leaders need to create space for experimentation while maintaining standards. Balancing these priorities is essential.

This also requires a shift in incentives. Newsrooms have historically rewarded output, speed, and volume. In an AI-native environment, value increasingly comes from system design, insight generation, and reuse. Aligning incentives with these outcomes becomes as important as redesigning workflows themselves.

Governance becomes central in this context. As AI systems take on more responsibility, questions of control, accountability, and risk move to the foreground. It is no longer enough to rely on informal oversight. Organisations need clear frameworks for where AI can be used, how outputs are verified, and where human intervention is required.

Increasingly, this governance cannot sit outside the workflow. It needs to be embedded within it. Attribution, verification, and accountability must be built into how systems operate, rather than applied after the fact.

In practice, this often comes down to defining boundaries. Which parts of the workflow can be automated? Where must a journalist remain in the loop? How are errors identified and corrected? And how is responsibility assigned when systems are involved in producing content?

These are not purely technical questions. They are editorial. They go to the heart of how trust is maintained in an environment where more of the production process is mediated by machines.

Capability becomes another defining issue. Access to AI tools is no longer the constraint. What matters is how effectively they are used. In many organisations, a small group of individuals drives most of the progress. The challenge is scaling that capability across the newsroom. This requires more than training. It requires shared systems, common workflows, and a clear understanding of what effective use looks like. Without this, adoption remains uneven and the benefits of AI remain limited to pockets of the organisation.

Finally, there is the question of measurement.

Many of the metrics that have traditionally defined newsroom performance, such as volume, speed, and pageviews, become less meaningful in an AI-native environment. When content can be generated and distributed in multiple forms, quantity alone is no longer a reliable proxy for value.

Instead, new measures begin to matter.

- How effectively is information reused across formats?
- How quickly can insight be generated from large datasets?
- How well do systems support editorial judgement rather than obscure it?
- How visible and verifiable are the sources behind published content?

These are harder to measure, but they are closer to the core of what journalism is meant to do. In this context, performance is less about how much is produced and more about how effectively the organisation learns, adapts, and applies its knowledge.

The organisations that adapt most successfully are likely to be those that recognise this early. They move beyond seeing AI as a tool for efficiency and begin to treat it as infrastructure, something that shapes how work is organised, how decisions are made, and how value is created.

The transition to an AI-native newsroom is not a single initiative. It is an ongoing process of redesign that requires leadership, clarity, and a willingness to rethink how journalism is produced.

From experimentation to architecture

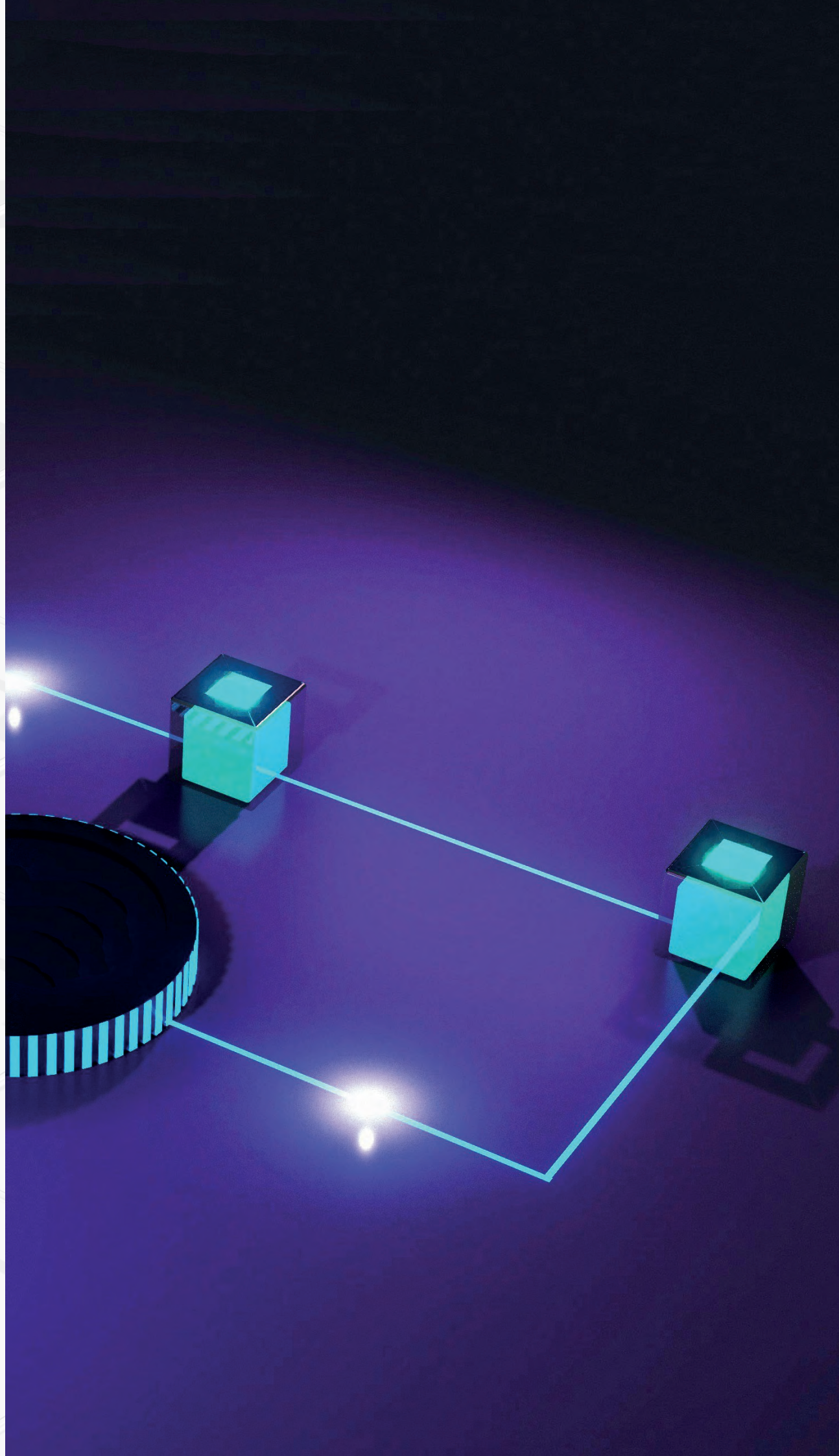
The shift to AI-native newsrooms is often framed in terms of tools and capabilities. In practice, it is more fundamental. It is a reorganisation of how journalism is produced, how information is gathered, structured, verified, and delivered.

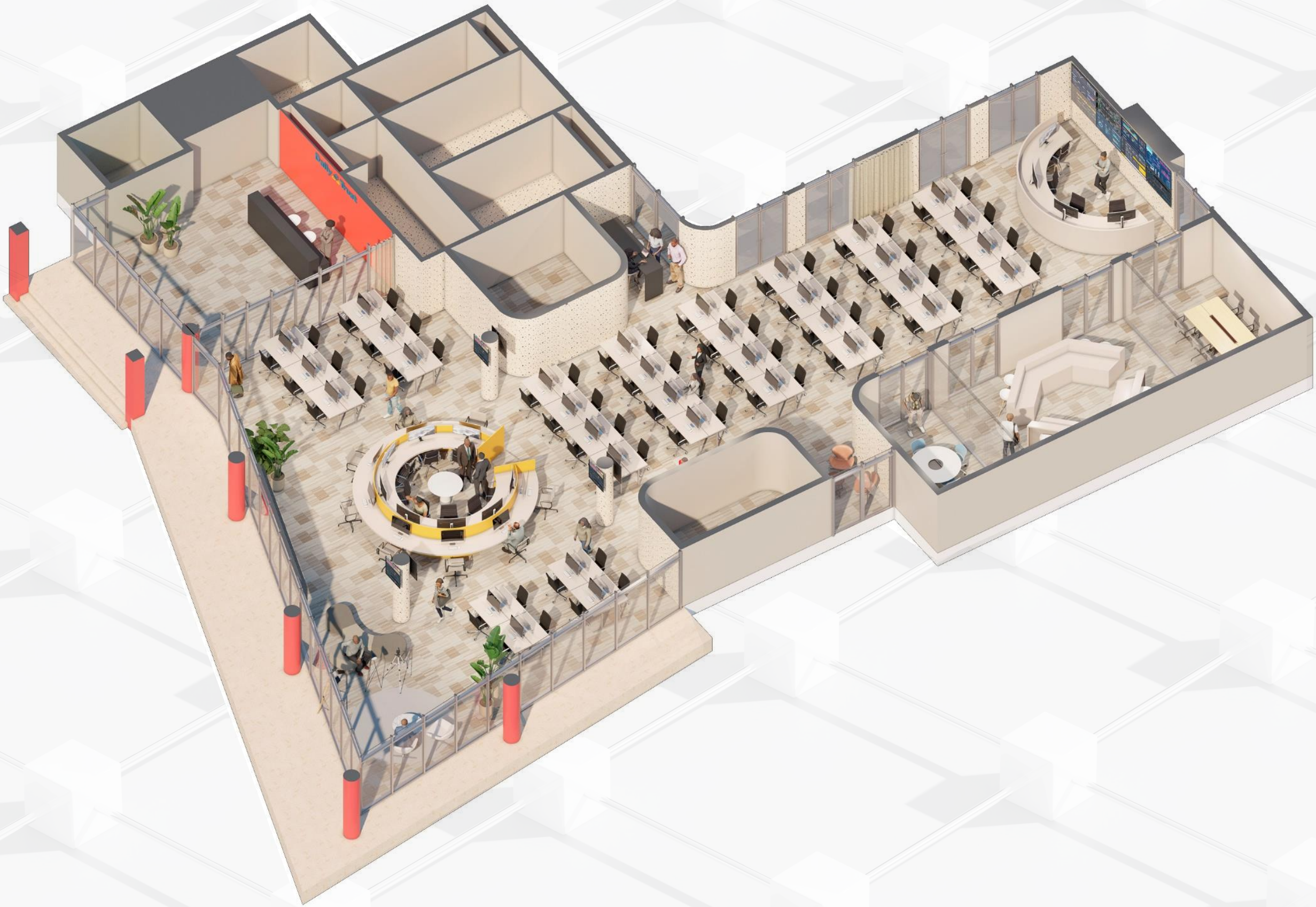
What distinguishes this phase from earlier waves of digital transformation is not the presence of new technology, but the level at which it operates. AI is no longer being added to workflows; it is beginning to shape them. The question for media organisations is no longer whether to adopt these systems, but how deliberately they are designed.

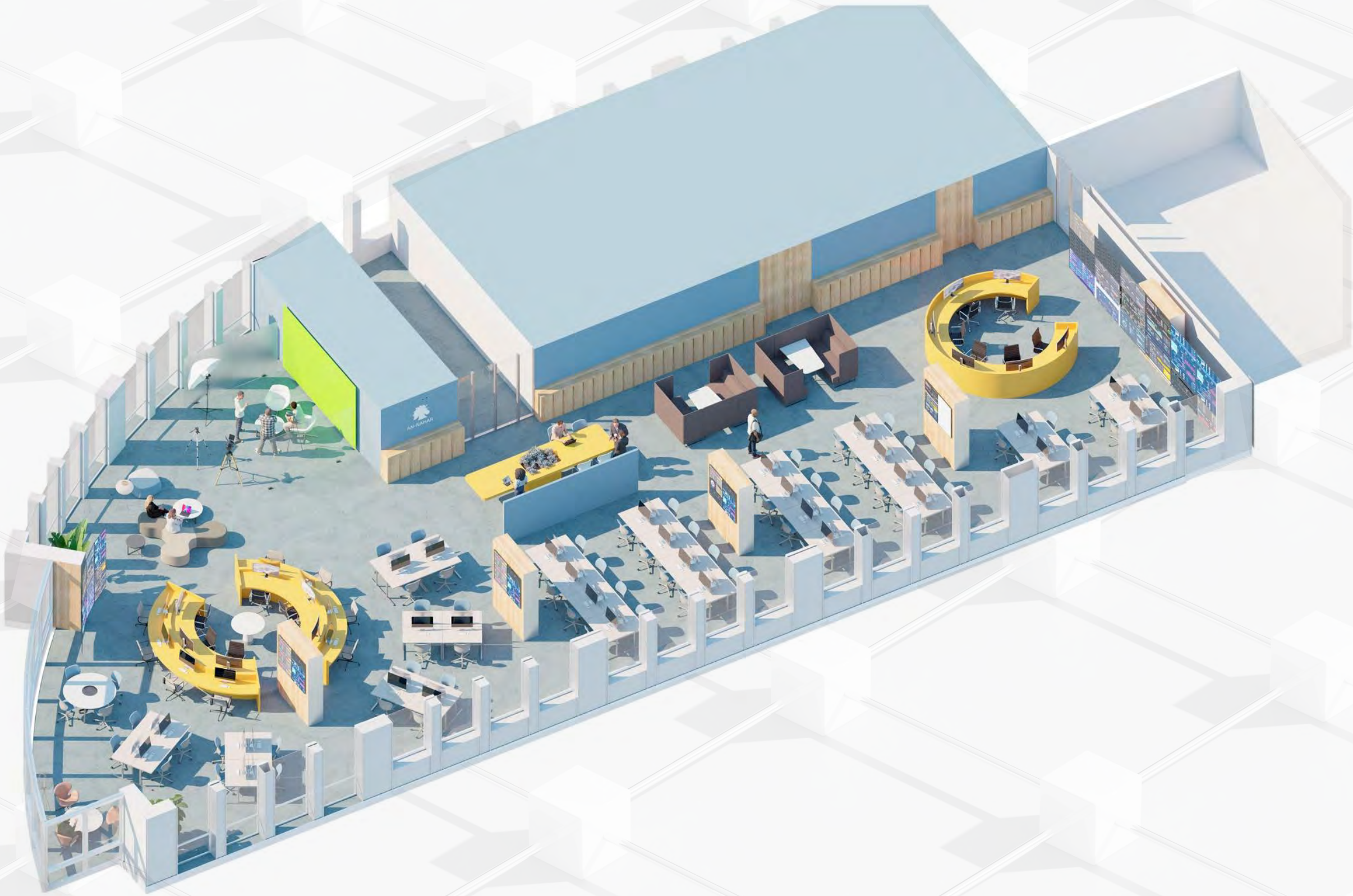
This is not a transition that can be completed and set aside. It is an ongoing process of redesign across workflows, roles, incentives, and systems. The organisations that move fastest will not necessarily be those with the most advanced tools, but those that are able to integrate them coherently into how they operate.

At the same time, much of this change remains uneven and, in some cases, experimental. The gap between what is possible and what is implemented in day-to-day newsroom practice remains significant. For that reason, it is useful to look at how these ideas are beginning to take shape in practice.

In the following pages, we present a set of recent examples drawn from our work with newsrooms undergoing this transition. Many of these began as digital-first transformations, but increasingly reflect the shift towards AI-native models. They are not blueprints in a fixed sense, but working frameworks — illustrating how these ideas can be applied across workflows, investigations, product development, and organisational design.






AN-NAHAR

How to Own Direct



From distribution to ownership: building resilient audience relationships

Audiences

From reach to control

For a long time, the economics of media rested on a fairly simple assumption: distribution could be outsourced.

Platforms would bring in audiences at scale, and publishers would focus on making content and finding ways to make money once people arrived. Growth, in this setup, was mostly about reach.

That assumption is starting to come under pressure. It's not that audiences have gone away. If anything, people are consuming more content than ever, across more platforms and formats. What's changed is the nature of the relationship between publishers and those audiences. Increasingly, that relationship is indirect. It sits in between systems that decide what gets seen, how it shows up, and whether people actually make it through to a publisher's own environment at all.

This shift has become more visible as platforms evolve from gateways into destinations. Search engines, social networks, and video platforms no longer function primarily as intermediaries directing users elsewhere. They aggregate, summarise, and surface content within their own interfaces, reducing the need for audiences to move beyond them. For publishers, this changes not just how content is discovered, but whether it is experienced in a context they control.

The competitive landscape reinforces this dynamic. The DPP European Media Trends 2026 report shows that global streaming services and US-based social and video platforms are capturing a growing share of audience attention across European markets, placing sustained pressure on national broadcasters and local publishers. As Mark Harrison, Founder and Chief Content Officer at the DPP, notes, the more significant question is not simply what content people are consuming, but how and where that consumption takes place.

For publishers, this creates a structural imbalance. Distribution is increasingly mediated by platforms whose incentives do not necessarily align with those of media organisations. Algorithms determine visibility, policy changes reshape access, and monetisation frameworks are often controlled externally. Audience growth may still be possible, but it is less predictable and more difficult to sustain.

These conditions make a familiar risk more immediate. Media organisations have long recognised the dangers of over-reliance on platforms, but the consequences are now harder to ignore. Declines in referral traffic, the emergence of zero-click environments, and the growing role of AI intermediaries all point in the same direction: audience relationships that are not owned are difficult to retain and even harder to monetise.

In response, the focus is beginning to shift from reach to control. The central question is no longer how to maximise distribution, but how to build audience relationships that can be maintained, understood, and developed over time. This involves rethinking distribution not as an end in itself, but as part of a broader system in which data, engagement, and monetisation are more closely aligned.

This chapter explores how that transition is taking shape. The move towards direct audience ownership is not a single strategic adjustment, but a broader reconfiguration of how media organisations approach distribution, data, and engagement. What is emerging is a model in which the value of an audience lies not only in its size, but in the depth and durability of the relationship behind it.

The collapse of platform certainty



If the earlier model of distribution depended on the stability of platforms, that stability is now increasingly in question.

For many publishers, search and social once provided a relatively predictable flow of traffic. While algorithms were never fully transparent, they operated within a range that could be understood, optimised for, and, to some extent, relied upon. That predictability has weakened. Changes to search interfaces, shifts in social platform priorities, and the growing influence of AI systems are altering how content is surfaced and consumed in ways that are harder to anticipate and control.

One of the clearest manifestations of this shift is the emergence of what is described as a zero-click environment. Users are increasingly able to access information directly within search results or platform interfaces, without needing to click through to publisher websites. Summaries, previews, and AI-generated responses satisfy informational needs at the point of discovery, reducing the role of the original source in the consumption journey.

What this means in practice is straightforward. The journey from discovery to destination is becoming shorter, and in some cases disappearing altogether. Content is encountered, but not necessarily accessed. For publishers, that distinction matters.

This has important implications for how value is created and captured. In a traditional model, traffic served as the bridge between content and monetisation. When that bridge weakens, the link between editorial output and revenue becomes less direct. Visibility does not necessarily translate into engagement, and engagement does not always lead back to environments where it can be monetised effectively.

In other words, publishers may still be seen, but they are less often visited. Content continues to circulate, but the relationship with the audience becomes thinner, harder to measure, and more difficult to convert into revenue. What once felt like a relatively straightforward exchange, attention in, value out, now operates through layers of mediation that dilute both.

At the same time, platform dynamics are becoming more volatile. Algorithm changes can have immediate and significant effects on traffic. Policy decisions, whether related to content moderation, data access, or monetisation rules, can reshape the conditions under which publishers operate. These shifts are not always gradual. They can be abrupt, and they often occur without the level of transparency that would allow publishers to adapt in advance.

For publishers, this creates a planning problem as much as a strategic one. When the rules of distribution can change overnight, long-term optimisation becomes harder to sustain. The growing role of AI intermediaries adds another layer to this uncertainty. As AI systems begin to sit between users and information, they increasingly determine how content is selected, interpreted, and presented. This introduces a new form of mediation, one that operates at the level of synthesis rather than simple referral.

Put simply, it is no longer just about whether your content is surfaced, but how it is represented once it is. That distinction has implications not just for traffic, but for editorial integrity and brand identity.

These dynamics are unfolding against a backdrop of intensifying competition for attention. As the DPP European Media Trends 2026 report highlights, global streaming platforms and dominant social and video networks continue to capture a disproportionate share of audience time, reshaping consumption habits and raising expectations around user experience.

For local and national publishers, this creates a double pressure. Not only is distribution less reliable, but the benchmarks for engagement are being set elsewhere.

Taken together, these developments point to a broader shift. Platforms are no longer just channels through which audiences are reached. They are environments in which consumption increasingly takes place, governed by logics that publishers do not control. This does not mean platforms are becoming less important. If anything, they are becoming more central. The difference is that their role has changed, from partners in distribution to gatekeepers of attention.

In this context, distribution can no longer be treated as a stable foundation for growth. It becomes a variable, subject to forces that lie outside the organisation. Rather than serving as the primary locus of audience strategy, platforms increasingly function as points of discovery, useful for reach, but insufficient for retention.

The implications are structural. When the pathways through which audiences arrive become less reliable, the emphasis necessarily shifts to what happens next. The question is no longer simply how to attract attention, but how to convert it into a relationship that can be sustained beyond the moment of discovery.

Owning the audience – data and infrastructure

If platforms are becoming less reliable as a foundation for growth, the logical response is to build systems that do not depend on them. This is not a new realisation, but it becomes more urgent in the AI age, where distribution is increasingly mediated and less predictable.

The focus therefore shifts from distribution to infrastructure. The question is no longer just how audiences are reached, but where those relationships are anchored and how they are sustained over time. In practice, this means investing in channels and systems that publishers control directly.

Owned environments – websites, apps, newsletters, and messaging platforms – are not new. What is changing is the role they play. For a long time, these channels were treated as endpoints, places where audiences arrived after being acquired elsewhere. Now they are becoming the centre of audience strategy.

In practice, this means designing experiences that encourage repeat engagement rather than one-off visits. It also means thinking about these environments not just as distribution channels, but as systems through which data is captured, relationships are developed, and value is created.

At this point, first-party data is no longer a differentiator but is becoming a baseline requirement. The more important shift lies in how it is used. The question is no longer whether publishers collect data, but whether they can operationalise it across the organisation. This is where many strategies begin to diverge. In some cases, data remains confined to marketing or advertising functions. In others, it begins to shape editorial decision-making, product development, and audience strategy in more integrated ways.

This distinction is becoming more visible in how publishers move away from traffic-driven models. In a panel discussion referenced by OX8, leaders from organisations such as the New York Post and Blavity describe a shift towards known users, audiences that can be tracked, segmented, and engaged over time, rather than anonymous traffic that cannot be sustained. The implication is not simply better targeting, but a different operating logic. Content, distribution, and monetisation begin to align around identifiable audiences rather than scale alone.

Or to put it another way, the value of data lies less in what it reveals and more in how it is activated.

This has structural consequences. Editorial teams begin to work with clearer signals about audience behaviour. Product teams design experiences around retention rather than acquisition. Commercial teams move towards more precise, higher-value inventory built on real user insight. As Zoomer Media's CRO notes, the ability to match advertisers with specific audience segments based on actual behaviour creates a more compelling and defensible proposition. More broadly, the organisation starts to reorganise around what it knows about its audience.

The broader trend supports this shift. Research cited by Digiday+ indicates that a growing majority of publishers now see first-party data as central to advertising performance, with its importance expected to increase as third-party signals decline. What follows from this is not just a change in targeting, but a reconfiguration of how value is created and captured.

At the same time, the challenges are becoming clearer. Collecting data is relatively straightforward; integrating and activating it is not. It requires alignment across systems, from content management to CRM and analytics, and across teams that have traditionally operated in silos. In practice, this often proves to be the limiting factor.

There is also a trust dimension that cannot be abstracted away. As privacy concerns become more prominent, the willingness of audiences to share data depends on how clearly the value exchange is understood. Transparency and utility become part of the product experience, not just compliance requirements.

This is where owned channels take on a more central role. Websites, apps, and newsletters are no longer just distribution endpoints. They are the environments in which data is generated, relationships are developed, and value is realised.

Podcasts are a useful example of how this plays out in practice. Unlike much of platform-driven content, they tend to build more direct and repeat relationships with audiences. Listening is often habitual, tied to routines rather than discovery, and audiences are more likely to return to the same show over time.

For publishers, this creates a different kind of engagement. It is less about scale and more about consistency, with stronger signals around loyalty and attention. At the same time, podcasts still depend on distribution platforms, so they sit somewhere in between. They are not fully owned environments, but they offer a clearer line to the audience than most other formats, and in that sense they highlight both the opportunity and the limits of audience ownership.

As owned media strategies evolve, they increasingly combine personalisation, interactivity, and analytics to create more responsive and adaptive systems.

The shift, then, is not from third-party to first-party data. It is a shift from data as an input to data as infrastructure. In this model, audience ownership is not a tactic layered onto existing workflows. Its role is much larger, as a design principle that shapes how the organisation operates.

From audiences to relationships

If the earlier shift we outlined is from reach to control, the next one is from audiences to relationships. For a long time in the early digital era, audiences were treated as numbers. Success was about scale – circulation, ratings, pageviews. Even as analytics improved, the basic approach didn't really change. Audiences were broken into segments and targeted, but still seen as groups, not really as people you build a relationship with over time.

That model is beginning to give way. As distribution becomes less reliable and traffic less predictable, the value of an audience is no longer defined primarily by how many people are reached, but by how well those people are known. The distinction between anonymous users and identified, returning audiences becomes more important. What matters is not just attention, but continuity.

This shift is already visible in how journalists and news organisations interact with their audiences. Research by Rande Price, VP of research at the trade body Digital Content Next, based on interviews with journalists across a range of organisations and formats, shows that audience relationships now extend well beyond one-way communication. Engagement takes place across platforms, through comments, newsletters, events, and direct messaging, shaping not just distribution but how journalism itself is produced.

In practice, audiences are no longer a single, unified public. They exist as a series of overlapping groups and individuals, each with different expectations, behaviours, and levels of engagement. A newsletter subscriber is not the same as a social media follower; a member of a community is not the same as a casual reader. Each relationship carries a different level of familiarity, trust, and expectation.

For journalists, this introduces a different set of dynamics. Interaction is no longer occasional or peripheral; it becomes part of everyday work. Feedback is immediate, visible, and often public, taking the form of appreciation, conversation, critique, and, at times, hostility. Research by Rande Price at DCN, based on interviews with journalists across formats and organisations, identifies a wide range of these interactions, from service and community-oriented relationships to more demanding or even antagonistic ones.

What changes is not just the volume of interaction, but its role in the journalistic process. Audiences are no longer encountered after publication. They are present throughout, shaping how stories are framed, how they are distributed, and how they are received. In some cases, they become part of the reporting process itself, contributing information, context, or feedback in real time.

This shift is increasingly being designed into products and formats. The New York Times, for example, has introduced a dedicated comments hub for subscribers, bringing together stories where journalists are actively in conversation with readers. On some articles, reporters now provide thread-style breakdowns of their reporting process within the comments, offering additional context and inviting deeper engagement. These features build on earlier moves to make journalists more visible, including enhanced bylines and profile elements that foreground the individual behind the story.

Other organisations are seeing similar effects. WIRED has positioned interaction with journalists as a core part of its subscription offering, while The Times of London reported a 119% increase in comments when writers participated directly in discussions. At the Financial Times, readers who engage with comments are significantly more active, with engagement levels reported to be multiple times higher than those who do not.

This has implications for both editorial practice and newsroom culture. Journalists are expected not only to report and write, but also to engage, respond, and, in some cases, represent or advocate for specific communities. The relationship between journalism and its audience becomes more continuous, but also more complex.

At the organisational level, this shift reinforces the importance of segmentation and personalisation. Content is increasingly tailored not just to broad demographics, but to specific interests, behaviours, and contexts. Data plays a role here, but so does editorial judgement. Understanding what different audiences value, and how they want to engage, becomes part of the core function of the newsroom.

There is also a strategic dimension to this. Stronger audience relationships tend to correlate with higher levels of trust, engagement, and willingness to pay. In an environment where monetisation is more closely tied to retention than to reach, these relationships become economically significant.

At the same time, they introduce new tensions. The need to respond to audience feedback must be balanced against editorial independence. Engagement can deepen trust, but it can also expose journalists to pressure, fatigue, and conflict. Managing these dynamics requires not just new tools, but new norms. In this context, owning the audience is not just about data or infrastructure. It is about the quality of the relationship. Scale still matters, but it is no longer sufficient. What matters increasingly is depth, consistency, and trust.

Audience sovereignty

The shift outlined in this chapter isn't just one thing happening at once, but a mix of pressures building up. Platforms are less predictable than they used to be, distribution is harder to rely on, and making money depends more on relationships that publishers don't fully control. As a result, media organisations – across both news and magazine publishing – are having to rethink how they build, understand, and hold on to their audiences. The formats and pace may be different, but the problem they are dealing with is largely the same.

Out of this, a clearer goal starts to take shape: audience sovereignty. The shift is not about abandoning platforms, but about rebalancing the relationship with them. Platforms remain important for discovery and reach, but they are no longer sufficient as the foundation of audience strategy. The focus shifts towards building direct, durable connections, supported by owned channels, first-party data, and more engaged forms of interaction.

In practice, this means moving beyond scale as the primary measure of success. Reach still matters, but it is increasingly complemented by depth, continuity, and trust. Audiences are no longer simply counted; they are understood, developed, and, over time, retained. This applies as much to fast-moving news environments as it does to magazine brands built around loyalty, identity, and repeat engagement.

This is not a transition that can be completed in a single step. Many of the changes described here remain uneven, and in some cases still experimental. The gap between what is possible and what is implemented in day-to-day newsroom practice remains significant. For that reason, it is useful to look at how these ideas are beginning to play out in practice and this is an area we expect to explore in greater depth in the following years.

INNOVATION Insight

Audience ownership is not a channel strategy. It is an operating model

- **You don't own audiences you can't identify**
  Anonymous reach creates visibility, not relationships.
- **You don't own audiences you can't bring back**
  If engagement depends on an algorithm, it is not durable.
- **You don't own audiences you can't learn from**
  Without first-party data, optimisation remains guesswork.
- **You don't own audiences you can't monetise directly**
  Value captured outside your environment is value you do not control.
- **You don't own audiences you can't serve consistently**
  Ownership is built through repeat interaction, not one-off visits.
- **Platforms scale attention. Ownership compounds value.**

Print & Offbeat

How print is finding new value in an age of digital abundance

Introduction One of the more interesting consequences of media abundance is that scarcity has acquired value again. As digital publishing becomes cheaper, faster and increasingly automated, print is being asked to do something different. →

→ It can make a statement precisely because it takes up physical space; start conversations rather than simply chase attention; offer respite from digital distraction; and make information, ideas and brands more memorable. At its best, it also has an afterlife that most digital media does not – as a magazine on a coffee table, a book in a bedroom or an object kept long after the moment of publication has passed.

This helps explain why some of the most inventive work around print today is also among the least nostalgic. Publishers and brands are not simply rediscovering paper; they are reconsidering what physical media can do inside an overwhelmingly digital system. Print can become a collectible object, an assertion of editorial control, a marker of belonging or a way of making an idea harder to ignore. And the distinction between analogue and digital is becoming less useful anyway. AI can generate or personalise the content; data can determine the audience; a digital interaction can extend the experience. The physical object is increasingly one part of a larger media idea.

That broader definition is also where the 'offbeat' part of this chapter belongs. Some of the most interesting media experiments now sit awkwardly between traditional categories: part publishing, part technology, part experience, sometimes barely recognisable as media in the conventional sense. What connects them is not a set format but an understanding that, in an age of near-infinite content, innovation can sometimes mean creating something with limits – tangible, situated and difficult to reproduce at scale.

Kompas 'Nostalgia to print media'

SPECIAL EDITION INITIATIVE | **EDITIONS**

Indonesia's 80 Years of Independence







FORMAT
80 pages broadsheet Newspaper (identical with regular edition)

DEMOGRAPHICS
General audience, current and former subscribers, all-age with specific targeting elder millennials

REVENUE MODEL
- Copy Sales
- Advertisement Inventories

Turning a Declining Subscription Model Into a Collectible One

Facing declining daily circulation, Indonesia's Kompas Daily built a rolling calendar of one-off print special editions rather than fighting to keep lapsed readers on a subscription. The insight: former readers didn't want a daily commitment back, but they did want an occasional, collectible reason to hold a newspaper again. The calendar has run from a 60-page broadsheet marking Kompas' 60th anniversary, through an 80-page edition for Indonesia's 80th year of independence, to, via sister titles BOLA and BOBO, tabloid specials built around the Indonesian national football team, a nostalgic BOBO comic reissue, the Polytron Indonesia Open, and a World Cup 2026 preview.

Each edition is priced and sold as a standalone collectible rather than bundled into subscriptions, targeting both loyal, older readers and lapsed "elder millennial" subscribers looking for a shorter, lower-commitment way back into print. Across six editions, the initiative has generated roughly IDR 8.95 billion in revenue — more than 10% of Kompas' regular annual copy-sales revenue — and 45,376 copies sold, with the anniversary newspaper editions alone selling 60% above average daily circulation. It's a rare example of a legacy newspaper treating scarcity, not frequency, as its most valuable print asset.

SPH Media: The Car Expo

PRE-PUBLICITY (PRINT - VERSION 2)



ST/SuT, BT
Full & Quarter Pages



ZB, SM
Full & Quarter Pages



BH/BM
Full & Quarter Pages



TM
Full & Quarter Pages

The Data Case for Print Still Selling the Room

Not every strong print story in this space is a creative concept — some are a straightforward return-on-investment argument, and SPH Media's post-event report for The Car Expo, Singapore's biggest motor show, makes that case in numbers. Backed by a S$2 million cross-channel publicity push across print, digital, radio, and out-of-home, the report's most striking finding for a publishing audience: when a sample of 478 visitors were asked how they found out about the event, newspapers were the single largest channel at 46% collective reach — ahead of Google/internet search (19.7%) and the event's own car-listings partner Sgcarmart (18%). The Straits Times alone accounted for 37% of all responses, more than double the next channel.

The event drew 7% higher visitorship than the previous edition and a 51% jump in website traffic, with 73% of that referral traffic arriving via SPH's own banner network. For an FIPP audience of publishers pitching print's continued advertiser value, the report is a useful counter-argument to "print doesn't drive discovery anymore": in a big-ticket, considered-purchase category like cars, it still does, decisively.

US Weekly 'The missing issue'

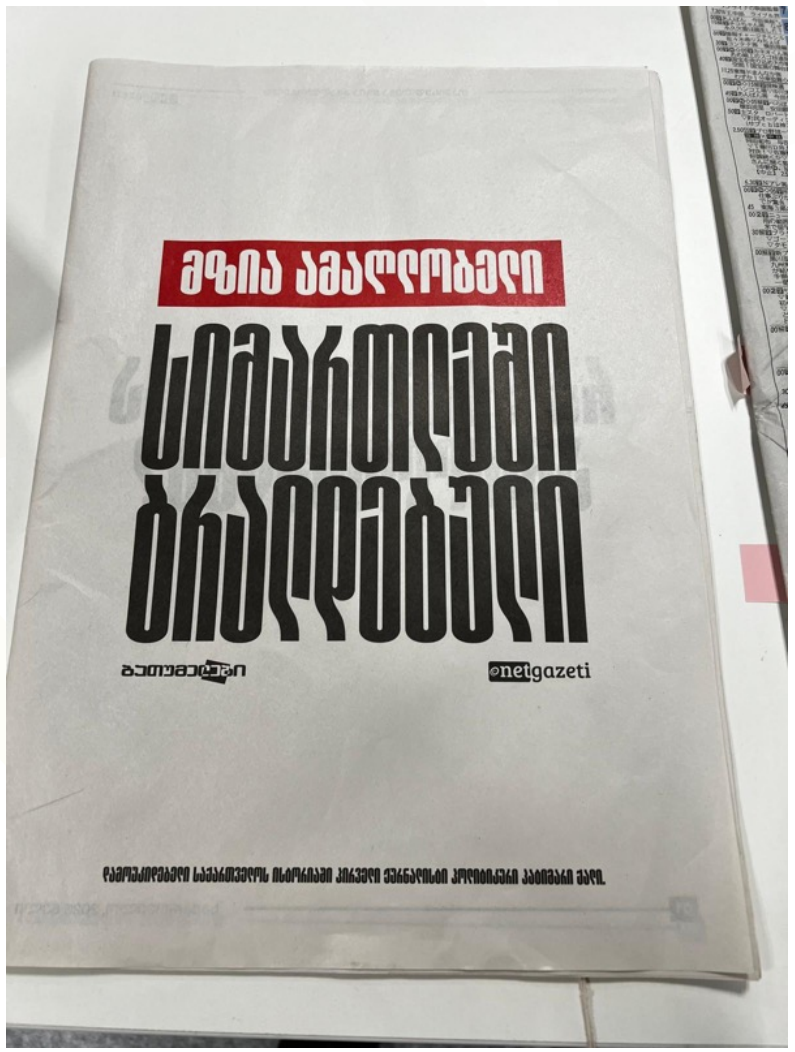


Rewriting Celebrity Tragedy Coverage With a Missing Piece

Us Weekly partnered with non-profit The Harris Project and agency Havas New York to publish a special edition that re-examined how the magazine itself had covered celebrity substance-use deaths — Matthew Perry, Liam Payne, Juice WRLD, Amy Winehouse — by re-running those stories with the piece that was always missing: honest reporting on co-occurring mental health disorders, which affect over 21 million Americans alongside substance use.

"The Missing Issue is our commitment to reporting on substance use with more depth, honesty and awareness," said editor-in-chief Dan Wakeford. The special edition was supported by a launch film, out-of-home in New York and Los Angeles (including Times Square), and social amplification — turning a celebrity gossip title's own back catalogue into the argument for change.

Accused of Truth

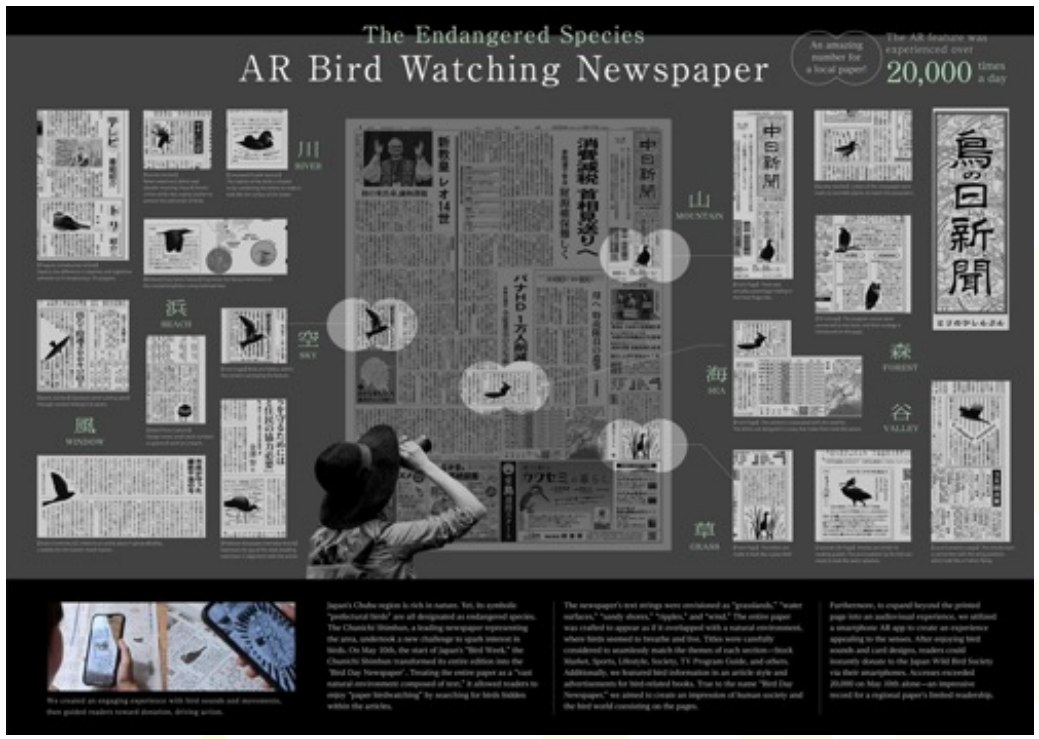


Letting a Jailed Journalist's Own Headlines Make the Argument

When Georgian journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli was arrested and later sentenced to prison, independent outlets Batumelebi and Netgazeti, working with agency Supermarket, responded not with a statement, but with a newspaper. "Accused of Truth" is a special print edition built entirely from more than 100 of Amaghlobeli's own headlines, spanning 21 years and three different Georgian governments, laid out chronologically in stark, monochrome design.

The argument makes itself: the headlines' investigative standard never wavers, no matter which government she was reporting on. The project won a D&AD Wood Pencil in Magazine & Newspaper Design, a rare case of print being used as legal and moral evidence rather than commentary.

Endagered Species: AR birdwatching newspaper

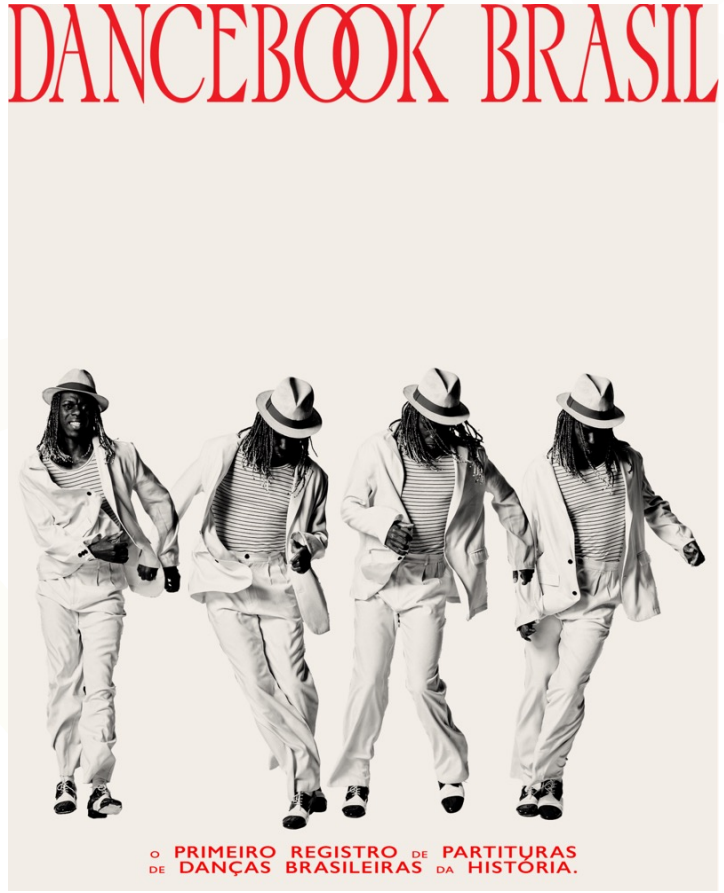


Hiding a Habitat Inside the Text Itself

Japan's Chunichi Shimbun, with Dentsu Inc. and design studio drawrope, turned a 2026 newspaper spread into a birdwatching habitat rather than an article about one. Using nothing but printed characters and typographic arrangement, designers built visual landscapes — grass, sea, shoreline, ripples, wind — entirely out of text, then hid illustrations of endangered birds native to central Japan within those textual environments for readers to spot, augmented by an AR layer that brought the birds to life on a phone camera.

It's an unusually literal answer to the brief of “using print creatively”: rather than depicting nature next to the text, the text becomes the nature. The project won a D&AD Wood Pencil in Magazine & Newspaper Design in 2026.

Dancebook Brasil



Notating a Country's Dance the Way Ballet Notates Its Own

In April 2026, Brazilian bank Bradesco and agency Lovely (Grupo Dreamers) did something no one had done before: transcribed Brazil's popular dances — samba, frevo, toada, chula — into Benesh Movement Notation, the formal choreographic system used internationally for ballet, but never previously applied to Brazilian dance. The result, Dancebook Brasil, is a 150-plus-page luxury print book, curated by choreographer Carlinhos de Jesus with French choreologist Johanna Classe and photographed by Maurício Nahas, with layouts designed so the text and notation visually move across the page like the dances themselves.

Positioned deliberately alongside classical ballet scores at the Royal Academy of Dance in London, the book reframes Carnival, the Parintins Festival, and Acampamento Farroupilha not as folklore to be filmed, but as a codified art form worthy of the same permanent, physical documentation as ballet — a case for print's unique authority as the format that makes something official..

Cushelle 'Porcelain'



The World's First Magazine You Read, Then Flush

UK toilet paper brand Cushelle had a specific problem to solve: it's a premium product, priced above the value brands people default to buying, but its own research found that once someone actually touches Cushelle, they convert to a loyal buyer almost half the time. Publicis London's answer was to stop sampling the product and start publishing it – "Porcelain," a 30-page magazine printed entirely on Cushelle toilet paper, edited by brand mascot Kenny the Koala, with content ranging from parody ads and horoscopes to a "softword" puzzle. Every page was left blank on its quilted reverse, so once a reader finished an article, they could tear it out and put the paper to its original use.

Getting a real magazine to print safely on toilet tissue was a genuine production fight: four weeks of skin-safe ink testing, twelve prototype rounds, 18,000 hand-perforated pages, and just one printer out of fifty approached who was willing to take the job on. Copies were distributed not through newsstands but through "toilet influencers" – a real, if niche, corner of social media – in branded pamper boxes alongside a candle, a "do not disturb" sign, and a velour toilet seat cover. The campaign generated 286 pieces of press coverage and an estimated 291 million-strong audience reach, with Cushelle reporting a 58% lift in preference over rival Andrex and a 49.5% rise in purchase consideration. It's a rare case of a print object's physical medium – not its content – being the entire punchline, and proof that "print" doesn't have to mean paper you keep.

Penny 'Price Packs'



Turning the Pack Itself Into the Price Tag

When German grocery chain Penny wanted to counter shopper distrust over "dynamic" and opaque pricing, it didn't write an ad about honesty – it printed honesty straight onto the product. Serviceplan Neo, Munich, redesigned packaging for five staple items (oatmeal, toast, salt, crisps, and mayonnaise), replacing the usual branding hierarchy with the item's fixed price rendered in oversized, brightly coloured type, so the price became the headline rather than a small-print afterthought.

Price Packs sold 1.4 million units, drew a 94% positive customer response, and generated an estimated 120 million earned media impressions before becoming a permanent line across all 2,150 Penny stores in Germany. It won the Grand Prix in Print & Publishing at Cannes Lions – proof that a print surface, used literally rather than decoratively, can still be the most persuasive part of the pack.

Dove 'Get Unready'



Print That Captures the Moment After, Not Before

Marking Dove's 65-plus years as a beauty brand, Ogilvy New York and London flipped the traditional “glow-up” print trope on its head. Instead of showing the Beauty Bar as a prelude to a polished, camera-ready look, photographer Sandro Miller shot it surrounded by the glorious wreckage of a good night out – glitter, confetti, smudged makeup, feathers – celebrating the ritual of washing the celebration off rather than putting it on.

Launched at midnight on New Year's Eve via out-of-home and print, then continued through the year's other big celebration moments, the sensory, textured print imagery earned a Gold Lion at Cannes Lions – widely praised for using the stillness of a print image to tell an emotionally specific, unglamorous story video coverage of a party could not.

Stella Artois 'Claustrobars'



Making the Crowd Part of the Pitch

Grey London's print and out-of-home campaign for Stella Artois embraced an experience most beer brands would rather ignore: the packed, elbow-to-ribs chaos of a heaving bar. Shot by photographer Ale Burset, the print executions leaned fully into the claustrophobia – bodies pressed together, drinks held aloft, no space to move – reframing the discomfort as evidence the beer inside is worth fighting for.

Running across Brazil, Chile, and the UK, the work won two Gold and two Bronze Lions at Cannes Lions, reinforcing Stella's “Taste Worth More” platform through humour rather than polish.

Stella Artois 'Hiders Keepers'

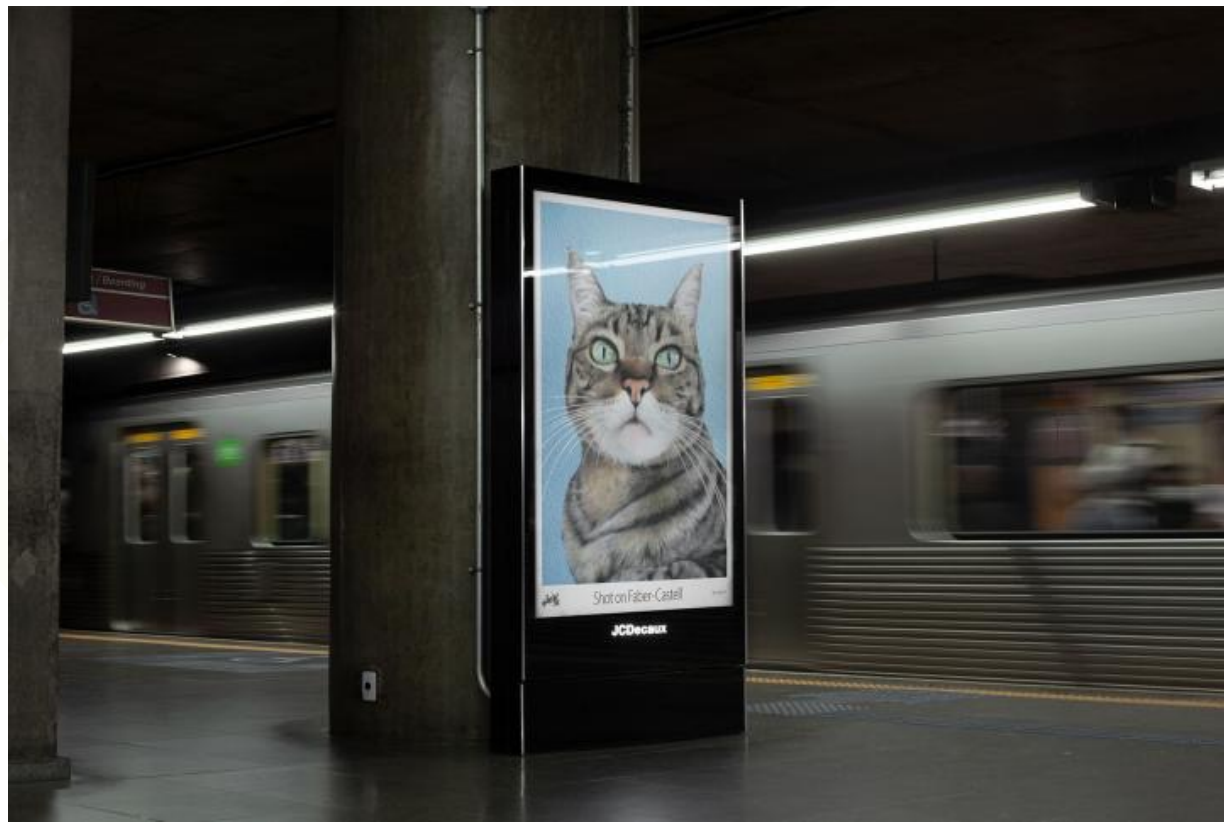


Print That Captures the Moment After, Not Before

Also for Stella Artois, Ogilvy New York took a more playful route to the same insight: everyone hides the good beer at a party. “Hiders Keepers” turned print and transit ads into elaborate “I-Spy”-style puzzles – densely detailed photographs of cluttered refrigerators stuffed with snacks, condiments, and party leftovers, with Stella bottles cleverly disguised among them for the reader to spot.

Rather than simply depicting a beer, the campaign used print's capacity for close, unhurried looking – something a six-second video scroll can't replicate – to reward attention with a small discovery.

Faber-Castell 'Shot on'



Pencils Beating the Smartphone at Its Own Slogan

Ogilvy Brazil and DAVID São Paulo took direct aim at tech marketing's favourite format – the “Shot on [phone]” billboard – and subverted it entirely. Every image looked like a hyperrealistic macro photograph: a cat's piercing blue eyes, the beaded texture of a sliced orange, a zebra's striped coat. None were photographs – each was hand-drawn using nothing but Faber-Castell coloured pencils.

Running across Brazil, Chile, and the UK, Displayed as subway and billboard posters, the campaign won a Bronze Lion at Cannes Lions and a Pencil at D&AD, praised for proving an old analogue tool could out-argue the newest camera tech using its own advertising language.

Oreo 'A decision was made here'



Print Stripped Down to a Single Unexplained Object

LePub Bogotá's print campaign for Oreo did the opposite of most food advertising: it removed the product from the frame entirely. Each execution showed a single, ordinary object — a banana with a bite taken out, a toy duck, a bouquet of roses missing one stem — accompanied only by the line "A decision was made here," daring readers to infer the Oreo connection themselves.

Cannes Lions judges specifically cited its "clever restraint and conceptual strength" in awarding it a Silver Lion in Print & Publishing at Cannes Lions.

Colgate 'Not every smile starts as a smile'



Printing the Tantrum, Not the Toothpaste-Ad Grin

VML Madrid's print and outdoor campaign for Colgate rejected the beaming, brushed-and-ready child that toothpaste advertising has relied on for decades. Instead, its images captured the real, unfiltered chaos of getting a toddler to brush: mid-scream faces, flailing arms, toothbrushes wielded like weapons.

Tied to a donation of 23 million toothbrushes and toothpastes, the honesty paid off commercially and creatively: 1.2 million impressions within 24 hours, a 35% rise in engagement, a 65% jump in brand recall, and a Silver Lion at Cannes Lions.

Oka Biotech 'Plastic blood'



When the Print Object Is Made From the Problem Itself

Brazilian biotech firm OKA and agency DM9 pushed “offbeat print” into physical-object territory. To make the invisible crisis of microplastics in the human body impossible to ignore, the team extracted microplastic residue from more than 1,000 units of donated, disposed blood — roughly 450 litres — and 3D-printed the resulting material into everyday objects: cups, straws, bottles.

The objects, alongside a supporting press and exhibition campaign, launched in São Paulo before touring Brazil and reaching COP30 in Belém. Recognised at D&AD in the Press Campaigns category, it shows how “print” thinking — turning an abstract statistic into something tangible — extends past the page into materials that carry their own uncomfortable proof.

trAPPed



Reporting an Invisible Crime by Drawing It

Bloomberg's investigative graphic novel "trAPPed" tackles a crime that resists conventional photojournalism almost by design: "digital arrest," the scam epidemic in which victims — in this case, a Delhi neurologist — are coerced through their own phone into eight days of psychological captivity, never physically restrained, never photographed, never leaving a visual trace. Reporter Natalie Obiko Pearson and journalist Suparna Sharma built the investigation; illustrator Anand RK, known for the graphic novels Blue in Green and Grafity's Wall, rendered it panel by panel, using comic-format visual storytelling to make a fraud that happens entirely inside someone's head legible and visceral on the page.

The piece won the Pulitzer Prize for Illustrated Reporting and Commentary, with judges citing its use of "visuals and narrative to illuminate the growing global menace of surveillance, online fraud, and the sophisticated psychological traps that digital scammers set." It's presented as a digital graphics feature rather than a printed object, but the case study belongs alongside the others here for what it proves about publishing craft: when a story literally cannot be photographed, illustrated long-form — the oldest trick a magazine or newspaper has — is still the format built to carry it.

VAMP by Motivate Media Group



A Publisher Betting on a New Kind of Advertising Entirely

Motivate Media Group is one of the Middle East's longest-running print publishers, best known for titles like Time Out Dubai. Rather than answering digital disruption with more print, it built VAMP: an influencer-marketing platform that connects brands directly with social media creators, running campaigns end to end — sourcing influencers, briefing them, managing delivery, and using paid media to amplify the resulting content. It's an advertising business built for a feed rather than a page, operating out of Media City, Dubai.

VAMP shows the same instinct that drives everything else in this chapter, just pointed in a different direction: finding formats that cut through and hold an audience's attention. Where most of this chapter finds that answer in ink and paper, Motivate found it in creator content — a reminder that the search for attention today can lead a publisher toward the page just as easily as away from it.

Raising a Generation of Readers



Lulu Mazzocco Skantze is the founder and creator of Storytime, a magazine that encourages children to read for pleasure. She believes paper is critical in creating and engaging with the next generation of readers.

"Reading is a big part of childhood, but the more sophisticated technology becomes, the more passive we are. I grew up surrounded by magazines because my dad was what I would call the 'ultimate subscriber'. We had so many titles at home, and one of the things I found most exciting is how you can discover new subjects so easily. They act as windows into the things we are passionate about. Even now, when I feel stuck creatively, I go to a newsstand and flick through beautiful magazines. With Storytime, we wanted kids to have access to that possibility.

I've been working in magazines most of my life, and about a decade ago, I had a sense that we were failing children. A lot of magazines for kids were quite flimsy, full of plastic toys. It was all about hooking them in with free gifts rather than content and the magazines didn't feel special. I felt I had a mission as a publisher – if we're going to have a generation of future readers, we need to get the young ones loving magazines again. And for them to love magazines, we not only have to give them awesome content but also something beautiful to engage and create memories with.

Magazines are particularly appealing for kids because they sit in that sweet spot between being a book and a toy. With books you might have to be a bit more precious, while with magazines, you can draw on them, roll them up, carry them everywhere with you – you can even tear a full page and stick to a wall if you love it. How many kids make magazines out of magazines – cutting and pasting to create their own thing? There is something magical about playing and learning at the same time.

I wanted to create something that offered that sort of playful stimulus. Storytime is highly interactive, every story has extras to encourage engaging with them, there are puzzles and games and paper playtime as well.

We had to think about the type of paper we needed for that level of interactivity. Initially, we chose matte paper with a bit of texture but after six months we realised how important colour is in childhood. We have a lot of colourful illustrations and in the first few editions, the colours were too subdued so we switched to a silkier paper that could show off the vibrance of the artwork better. We also wanted it to be durable because we imagined kids going back to the issues time and time again, not just reading it and throwing it out. There are eight levels of stories, so as they get better at reading, they can go back to an issue and delve into the harder-to-read stories. To encourage interactivity, the paper is uncoated. We wanted kids to be able to write, draw and play with it, and definitely not to tear it. We had to make the magazine feel special because we weren't relying on free gifts to get kids to buy it. That meant having high quality paper and being perfect bound.

We live in a world that's constantly buzzing, and I think there is something wonderfully quiet about paper. While digital keeps us on edge, print lets us breathe. It engages four of our senses and that's very powerful. Just the sound and feel of turning the pages can be calming. I think we are only now starting to understand the value that it provides.

Back when we started Storytime in 2014, we had to convince people there was a need for a high-quality print magazine for kids. At the time, there were a group of charities working with the government on a literacy campaign for children. The aim was to increase reading for fun, which would then help increase literacy levels by 2025. We knew we wanted to be part of increasing children's literacy and reading for pleasure, and we strongly believed that paper was the right medium for that.

A decade ago, nobody was talking about attention spans or concentration, but now that conversation is everywhere. A lot of data shows that when you read things on paper, there's a 25 percent better retention rate than when you read things digitally. And part of that is due to the sensorial experience of holding a physical object in your hand, which means you can map the information better as it sits on the page, as opposed to when it is constantly moving on a screen. Even our title Storytime comes from that idea: sitting together, reading together and creating memories around stories.

I actually have high hopes for the next generation of readers. I think, in a way, because they have grown up with digital, they will be better at knowing when to unplug and when to escape the noise. They will be able to say: I don't want to be on my phone right now. As publishers it is our responsibility to make sure that there are excellent options out there: exciting things to read and beautiful things to look at. Life is good when you have a pile of magazines to dive in right next to you, and kids need the same opportunity to dive in and discover.

As told for Daniela Walker
Photos by Jussi Puikkonen

On behalf of UPM Communication Papers
Part of UPM Communication Papers interview series *Paper to me*

UPM

Empowering members to build market-leading international businesses

FIPP is a community of consumer, specialist and B2B publishers and media owners, with members ranging from professional content creators with cross-border interests to national trade associations and industry suppliers.

We empower these members to build market-leading international businesses through events, knowledge products and networking services. Our unique position in the industry gives us privileged access to the biggest players in global media, and FIPP.com is the home of the insights, reports and intelligence we generate as a result.

This year FIPP merged with WAN-IFRA and together we now form the world's biggest alliance of media owners. For over 100 years, we've been the forum where media owners connect, learn from each other, scout out new business and collaborate to grow this industry – not just in their home markets, but worldwide. The fact we now do this alongside our news publishing colleagues at WAN-IFRA means we can have even more impact.

Our flagship event, the FIPP World Media Congress, brings together media leaders of the world's top publishing companies, offering inspiration and unrivalled networking. Our FIPP Insider events and popular webinars extend these opportunities globally, from New York to Cape Town, Berlin to Buenos Aires, Madrid to São Paulo.

FIPP Consulting leverages our global network of Associates to help companies with international expansion, product development, M&A, market research and more.

Finding the right connection can be transformative – FIPP's networking services help you reach the people and partners who make a difference.









Good journalism is good business

We help media companies innovate, embrace new digital platforms, develop bold new strategies, and create new revenue streams.

We are a global consultancy firm with a difference. We focus exclusively on the publishing business – both editorial and management. And our focus is helping our clients innovate and embrace new digital platforms, and find bold new strategies as well as new revenue streams.

We invite you to be part of the digital revolution and benefit from INNOVATION's knowledge and hands-on expertise of more than two decades advising some of the best-known media brands in the world.

How we work

We believe that change is not imposed but is negotiated and agreed upon. We take into consideration all scenarios and opinions – and only after thorough analysis, evaluation, and testing we present our final recommendations and action plans. One way to visualise our process is to think of it as a three-step effort: audit, diagnostic and implementation. We lead in-house teams to be at the heart of innovation in their firms and deliver on a new product, content or strategy. Although all projects are made-to-measure, the phases of any change process are always similar.

Editorial services

Our clients call us when they face pressing issues ranging from editorial re-organisation to a need for reinvention of their products, or the development and execution of new editorial or commercial strategies. They approach us for objective, honest, analytical, smart and experienced advice.

Management and strategy services

We believe that media companies should become new Information Engines™, and transform by shifting from readers to audiences and from audiences to communities. Our clients talk to us when they need to make decisions that will have lasting consequences for their teams, operations, revenues and brands. They approach us when they need fresh global and experienced thinking.

Magazines

We believe the genre must be reinvented to survive and thrive. We have developed ground-breaking new concepts and formats with demonstrable success. We re-organise news operations to adapt a matrix based on audiences rather than products.

1ST PHASE

The Problem

1 Audit
2 Diagnosis
3 Action plan

2ND PHASE

The Solution

4 Brainstorming
5 Market research
6 Content model
7 Design model
8 Business model
9 Multimedia model
10 Prototypes
11 Editorial & graphic style books
12 Newsroom management model
13 Working space redesign
14 Training & implementation
15 New product launch

3RD PHASE

The Implementation

16 Evaluation
17 Audience research
18 Corrections
19 Training
20 Results: increased audience, increased advertising

INNOVATION
- Media Consulting Group -

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WAN-IFRA ramps up initiatives to support publishers' ongoing transformation

"Game-changing." "Pivotal moment." "At a crossroads." "Crucial point." "Transformative time." How many times have we used those expressions to describe the news media industry over the last decades? Throw all those into one bucket and then we are closer to where we are today. The blink-of-an-eye rapid development of AI and its impact on audience behaviour, content and distribution strategies, business models, and, yes, our journalism alone is reshaping the entire business.

That is why WAN-IFRA, the global association for news publishers, continues to launch key initiatives to support our members and the industry.

AI Futures Lab

Two years after the launch of the Newsroom AI Catalyst accelerator and having supported more than 140 newsrooms worldwide in their use of AI technologies, WAN-IFRA and OpenAI partner again. Twenty four media organisations across the Asia-Pacific and Latin America regions will have the opportunity to convert existing prototypes into full product solutions over the six-month programmes.

NextGen AI Leaders

The programme, supported by the Google News Initiative, provides structured mentorship to 24 rising media managers in leadership roles who are navigating AI-driven transformation within small and mid-sized news organisations. The 12-week initiative is designed to provide young media leaders, entrepreneurs, and first-time mana-gers with the skills to drive responsible AI adoption and strengthen newsroom management.

News Creator Exchange

As part of its Future Audiences Initiative, WAN-IFRA launched the News Creator Exchange (NCX), a supportive professional community for independent news creators, digital-first media startups, and video-led journalists from traditional WAN-IFRA member newsrooms. NCX will be led by Pierre Caulliez, 23, a Gen Z media consultant and founder the agency Yoof.

World Association of News Publishers

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