

**THIS FRONT
PAGE SHOULD
HAVE BEEN
PERSONALIZED**

JUST SAYIN'

TRUST IS DOWN. ATTENTION IS SCARCE. NOW WHAT?

Streaming platforms know your taste in crime dramas better than you know it yourself. Music apps know when you need heartbreak ballads. But when it comes to news, what truly matters in our democracy, we're still mostly throwing headlines at readers and hoping something sticks.

IT'S NOT WORKING.

Readers are overwhelmed. Trust is eroding. Young audiences are tuning out, or worse, turning to TikTok for news. And as Google's AI summaries start scraping away traffic, publishers risk becoming invisible on their own beat.

The answer isn't to hand the newsroom over to the robots. It's informed personalisation. Smart, ethical algorithms guided by editorial values. A new white paper from Kilkaya (As you'll find later in the newspaper) outlines how news organisations can combine the best of two worlds: editorial judgement and data-driven relevance.

This isn't about clickbait. It's about surfacing stories that matter to each reader, without losing sight of what matters to society. When done right, informed personalisation doesn't just boost clicks (though it can, by 30–50%). It builds loyalty, reduces churn, and strengthens public trust.

In a media landscape where attention is currency, ignoring personalisation isn't just a missed opportunity. It's a strategic risk.



Written by
Tarjei Gilbrant, Kilkaya

ARE YOU STUPID?

Our experience from implementing personalisation with clients has revealed a consistent pattern: people don't want to feel stupid.

This often becomes clear in moments of uncertainty – such as when someone is asked, “What does this number mean?” or “Why is this story being shown here?” – and they're unable to answer. It's not just discomfort; it's the fear of being exposed as not understanding something they're expected to grasp.

While many may voice scepticism towards technology and algorithms, our experience suggests that this is frequently rooted in a lack of understanding. When users do comprehend how an algorithm works, their scepticism tends to diminish. Better still, when they not only understand it but are able to control it, and see the effects of their choices, they feel confident and capable – maybe even clever!

That's the standard we must aim for. We need to build technology that makes our users feel smart. To achieve that, our systems can't be black boxes. They must be transparent, understandable, and offer meaningful control. Only then does the technology become a true tool. Something that empowers us to do more and think better, rather than something that dictates or diminishes us.

Because if there's one universal truth we've observed, it's this: no one likes to feel stupid.

OPPORTUNITY COST

When discussing personalisation, the conversation often revolves around the potential risks of implementing it. It could be loss of editorial control, dependency on algorithms, or concerns about transparency. But we should also ask: **what is the risk of not doing it?**

Time and again, we've seen how introducing personalisation on a front page can significantly increase click-through rates. Sometimes by as much as 30–50%. That's not just a technical improvement; it's real audience engagement and traffic that directly impacts loyalty, revenue, and long-term sustainability.

Choosing not to personalise means missing out on that potential. And missing out is a cost. It's the **opportunity cost of inaction**, and in a competitive media environment, that becomes a strategic risk. Doing nothing might feel safer. But failing to act also means accepting a quiet decline in performance, while others move forward.

INSIGHT SHAPES NEWS

Podcast by  Kilkaya

Insight Shapes News is a podcast hosted by **Nils Ove Håland Riise**, who works at Kilkaya, a leader in analytics and informed personalization for news and publishers.

The podcast features deep-dive conversations with industry experts, covering topics such as editorial insights, audience engagement, AI-driven personalization, and the evolving relationship between technology and newsrooms.

Available to listen on:





Photo: Louise Andersen

SOMETHING FISHY IN TROMSØ

– *How Lars Adrian Giske's AI tool changed journalism in a small town*

It was an ordinary Tuesday morning at the fish processing plant at Vannøya, a small island just outside Tromsø. The sea was calm, the air crisp. Then, suddenly, the distant sound of helicopter blades broke the silence. Fast-moving boats from the Norwegian Coast Guard raced toward the docks. Officers in red uniforms hurried ashore, carrying clear plastic boxes.

Within moments, police and inspectors from Norway's white-collar crime unit, tax authorities, and Fisheries Directorate swarmed the pier. Fishermen stood watching, confused and concerned.

Documents and computers were quickly seized from inside the building. Nobody was allowed to leave.

Nearby, the Coast Guard vessel KV Barentshav loomed quietly in the bay—

an unmistakable sign that this was no ordinary inspection.

Across Norway, journalists began scrambling for details. What was going on? Who was involved? Where exactly was this happening?

But at the small newsroom of iTromsø, there was no confusion. They knew exactly where to go. A reporter was already driving fast to reach the last ferry of the day, so they could reach the island. The journalist arrived just as law enforcement had begun looking for evidence of wrong-doing, carrying out files, documents, and computers from the offices on the docks. Cameras clicked, questions flew, details emerged.

iTromsø was the only news outlet on the scene — not because they got lucky.

A year earlier, together with journalists from Sunnmørsposten and researchers at OsloMet (Oslo Metropolitan University), they had started to work on a massive database of millions of catch reports, price statistics, and delivery slips. The aim had been to chart sustainability in the Norwegian fisheries, but while applying AI and machine learning techniques to the data, red flags started to emerge.

Following the events at Vannøya, iTromsø continued to invest in AI, and last year they launched the result of that work: DJINN. We spoke with Lars Adrian Giske, who led the development together with a dedicated team of journalists and developers at iTromsø, Visito and IBM. As the public face of the project, he helped guide the newsroom into a new era of journalism powered by technology.

CREATING DJINN

At iTromsø, Lars Adrian was given the task of exploring how AI could help journalists. Together with IBM, and the IBM partner Visito, he started developing DJINN—a computer tool built specifically for journalists.

DJINN had a simple mission: it would go through thousands of public documents every day. These could be zoning applications, urban planning proposals, or emails sent between people and the city government.

DJINN's task was to

- Spot documents that might be newsworthy
- Summarize them clearly
- Send instant notifications directly to reporters.
- Suddenly, hours of painful reading turned into minutes of clear results.

The DJINN team knew they couldn't rely on technology alone. He wanted the journalists deeply involved. From day one, they joined in, giving ideas, feedback, and suggestions. DJINN wasn't just built for journalists—it was built by journalists.

IMMEDIATE SUCCESS AT ITROMSØ

DJINN started working at iTromsø in 2023. Results appeared fast. One young journalist straight out of journalism school soon wrote a front-page story with DJINN's help—something previously impossible. Before, young journalists spent days struggling to find news. Now they found strong stories right away.

Journalists now had more time. Instead of spending hours reading boring documents, they could talk to real people. Stories became more human and emotional.

Lars Adrian gives a clear example:

Before DJINN, a journalist might quickly write: "A neighbor complains about losing their view due to new buildings." Now, they had time to speak with Leif, a 60-year-old man whose living room suddenly faced a huge wall, blocking his view of the mountains surrounding Tromsø. Stories got more emotional and powerful, and readers loved them.

EXPANDING ACROSS NORWAY

After its success at iTromsø, DJINN caught the attention of Polaris Media—the large media group that owns newspapers across Norway. Polaris quickly wanted DJINN at their other newsrooms.

But scaling DJINN was not easy. Each town is different. Tromsø isn't Trondheim, and Trondheim isn't Oslo. A story important in the north, like reindeer sightings, wouldn't be news in southern cities. DJINN needed to adapt.

The solution: create two kinds of AI models. One model learned newsworthiness from all journalists across Norway.

Another learned from journalists locally. DJINN combined these two models, understanding both general and very local news. After this, journalists all over Norway quickly trusted DJINN.

A FUTURE OF STORIES WE CAN'T YET IMAGINE

But DJINN was just the start. Lars Adrian already looks to the future. He imagines AI helping journalists in many other ways.

DJINN could soon track relationships between people, places, and businesses. It might show hidden connections, revealing conflicts of interest or secret deals. Lars Adrian explained that DJINN might uncover networks that journalists would never find alone—such as politicians secretly involved in companies or hidden influences affecting city decisions.

This would help journalists tell powerful stories people couldn't imagine.

He also thinks DJINN could help journalists find hidden problems in health, crime, or sports. For example, data might reveal sudden increases in illness outbreaks, hidden crime waves, or undiscovered sports talents. With AI's help, journalists would report these stories early and effectively.

JOURNALISM STILL HUMAN

Lars Adrian never forgets something important: computers alone are not journalism. Real journalism, he says, relies on human judgment. It's journalists who decide what's ethical and what's worth telling.

Technology helps them make those decisions faster and smarter.

This is why Lars Adrian believes journalism is stronger with AI. DJINN doesn't replace reporters, it makes them better. It lets them find more interesting stories, spend more time talking to real people, and uncover truths hidden in data.

LEADING JOURNALISM INTO A NEW ERA

Journalism is changing fast. Lars Adrian thinks we must change too. But one thing never changes, he says: the importance of honest, accurate stories.

Technology doesn't threaten journalism, Lars Adrian insists. Instead, tools like DJINN give journalists new power. They help small newsrooms become stronger, faster, and more competitive.

In Tromsø, DJINN showed how a small, northern town could lead a big change.

That quiet morning, as the police raided the fish plant, something became clear: Journalism had entered a new era. And a modest philosopher-turned-journalist from Tromsø was quietly guiding the way.

FROM PHILOSOPHER TO JOURNALIST

Lars Adrian never dreamed of being a journalist. As a child, visiting Greece at age seven, he told his mother he wanted to become a philosopher. And he almost did. He studied philosophy, taught it, and felt comfortable with big questions about life and truth.

But one day, a friend encouraged him to try journalism. Lars Adrian gave it a chance and discovered something surprising: journalism felt very much like philosophy. Both required careful thinking and a sharp eye for truth.

He soon became an investigative journalist. This meant spending hours, sometimes days, going through piles of documents. Asking municipalities for reports, filing public requests, waiting, getting rejected, appealing, and finally getting piles of papers. He quickly saw this was slow and painful.



Photo: Trond Tomassen/iNord

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- DJINN is an AI tool that helps journalists quickly find important stories hidden in thousands of documents.
- The tool significantly reduced research time, allowing journalists to focus on more meaningful storytelling.
- DJINN successfully expanded to other Norwegian newspapers owned by Polaris Media.
- Lars Adrian envisions AI discovering hidden stories in health, crime, and politics in the future.

This article is based on Episode 5 of Kilkaya's podcast, Insight Shapes News



LEADING CHANGE IN A NEWS- ROOM

By Jeremy Clifford

Change is now a permanent in our newsrooms and never has it been more important to invest in equipping our leaders to navigate the headwinds that disruption blows into our working lives.

At a recent global conference, leadership and change was a dominant theme among many of the sessions - and one thing that became apparent was the best leaders had the courage to make the big decisions - even though they were probably some of the hardest decisions and situations they had faced in their lives.

In this article, I am using the User Needs lens to illustrate how a modern-day leader can use different leadership attributes to be successful.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ATTRIBUTES A MODERN-DAY NEWSROOM LEADERS NEEDS TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

DIVERT ME

Leaders need to show their human side and a different perspective to their leadership to be effective. Leaders leading through change should be full of anecdotes and examples of things that have worked and initiatives that have failed.

1. Have some great anecdotes - show your team examples of what others are doing - so they understand they are not alone
2. Use humour - inject humour into meetings, presentations or your communication style - as it builds rapport - you don't have to be a comedian though.
3. Share unexpected or interesting facts. Stats are a great example: For example, at the Wan-ifra congress we heard that 64% of Gen Z will be using voice assisted AI to access their news by 2027, compared with 51% right now.
4. Stop the long meetings: Introduce Lunch and learn drop-in sessions where other people in the team host sessions and talk about recent developments.

INSPIRE ME

1. Use Inspire Me to tap into the aspirations and a sense of possibility.
2. Share vision goals - leaders can inspire their teams by articulating a compelling vision for the future - what can be achieved and the positive impact it will have. Have passion for success to make people feel energised.
3. Highlight success stories and achievements - make sure you share stories of individual or team success, especially of those who overcame challenges or demonstrated exceptional effort
4. Connect to the wider purpose: Inspire your team by reminding

CONNECT ME

What do you expect your teams to do in the newsroom to support your leadership?

1. Foster open communication - leaders who actively encourage open communication, create opportunities for dialogue and ensure everyone feels heard: For example introduce a regular "Ask Me Anything" session where anyone can openly ask questions or voice concerns.
2. Build a sense of community and belonging: Create a culture where individuals feel valued, accepted and part of something larger than themselves.
3. Encourage teamwork and collaboration - Structure work in a way that involves people in project work and provides rewards through skills development.

KEEP ME ENGAGED

A crucial user need for leaders to address in today's fast-changing world or work. Engaged team members are more productive, creative and committed.

1. Foster autonomy and empowerment - give team members a degree of control over how they work, involve them in decisions-making processes and trust them to take ownership of projects
2. Offer regular feedback and recognition - provide timely, specific and constructive feedback, along with recognising achievements publicly
3. Create opportunities for learning and development - investing in an individual's personal growth and development is one of the best ways of improving retention of staff and their commitment to your vision and purpose.

1. COURAGE: This is not something I would normally include in those attributes, but listening to leaders who have carried out change at the WAN-IFRA congress, it is core.

Andrew Basson, of News 24, in South Africa, spoke of the courage he needed to face the fact that print was dead for his titles and he needed move to a digital-only publishing model.

Christian Broughton, of the highly successful Independent – told a similar story and how that liberated the business to expand into other continents and content formats.

And Nayla Tueni, Editor-in-Chief of An-Nahar, in Lebanon, took her entire newsroom through a radical change process while bombs and missiles were exploding all around her.

She spoke of the courage to make the change to break down the silos and barriers that were preventing change in her business.

One of the key attributes of displaying courage, came from Vibeke Furst Haugen, Director General of public service broadcaster NRK, in Norway, who said that you need courage to take yourself away from your teams and go up onto the balcony rather than stay on the dancefloor – where all your teams want you to give them unconditional support – even though that was not possible.



Jeremy Clifford is a media professional, leadership coach and User Needs expert and practitioner. He helps to bring clarity in what can be the chaos of a newsroom. Find out more about his work at www.chrysalis-leadership.com

2. CREATING A COMPELLING EDITORIAL VISION: This is rule 101, but how many leaders invest time in crafting a vision and communicating it clearly? Having a vision acts as a North Star for any news organisation. Without one, how can you lead your team to success? It defines the Why of your journalism – your mission.

What it is: It sets out your purpose – your mission – why you exist and the impact your journalism aims to have

Why it matters: It provides focus – the space that allows you to say yes to certain articles and no to others – and therefore ensures consistency of quality. Ask yourself this: What would our audience be missing if we did not exist?

How to do it: Define your core values: Campaigning, community focus, fairness. Understand your audience: Who are you trying to reach – again – what would your audience be missing if you weren't there? Set Clear Goals: What impact does your journalism need to have.

4. DELIVERING IMPACTFUL FEEDBACK: Leaders also need to be coaches – gone are the days of a top-down hierarchical management system. People want and need feedback – but it needs to be delivered well.

What it is: Feedback needs to be specific, timely and actionable. Delivered clearly and as a two-way communication as opposed to a one-way broadcast of your message. Coaching offers guidance and support to help your team members to develop and learn.

Why it matters: It helps journalists to learn and to know how they are doing. This also helps their mental wellbeing and fosters a sense of engagement.

How to do it: Be specific. “A good job” is not good enough. Point to what it was that was a good job and what impact it has had. Be timely: Do not delay – especially in giving negative feedback – the problem won't resolve itself and indeed with get worse.

Focus on behaviour not personality: Take it away from the journalist and comment on the behaviour you have seen. Forward focused: Work to find solutions rather than concentrate on what did not work.

3. BE AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR: A leader needs to be clear, timely empathetic, a great listener and someone who encourages open two-way communication

What it is: Being clear in directions. Providing constructive feedback: Facilitating discussion: Ensuring everyone feels heard and understood

Why it matters: It builds trust, fosters collaboration and ensures everyone is aligned behind the same goals and values

How to do it: Be clear and concise: Avoid jargon and corporate speak. Listen Actively: This is a great skill many don't have. Watch for body language, tone and ask clarifying questions. Choose the right format: Email, ad hoc chats, formal meetings, video messages – use a wide range. Keep the team informed: regular updates, praise and acknowledgement

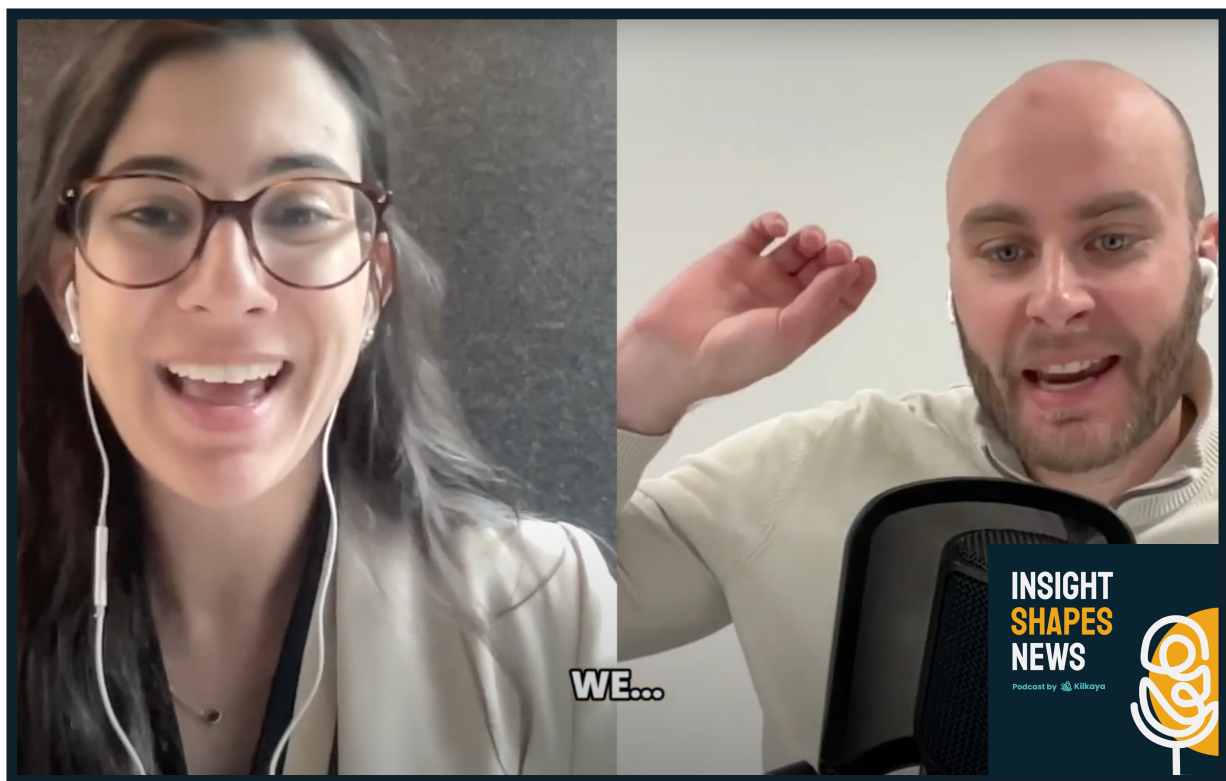
5. NAVIGATING CHANGE: Tech changes, Gen Ai, evolving audience habits.... The list goes on. And all of these need to be navigated by the modern-day leader.

What it is: Leading through change involves guiding the team through periods of transition – that may feel like revolution – with clear communication, calmness, and a focus on the future – not the disruption they are feeling now. Fostering a culture of innovation means encouraging experimentation and being ok that things might fail.

Why it matters: It ensures organisations remain relevant, competitive and able to adapt to the changing media landscape.

How to do it: Communicate clearly about change – explain the reasons – have data and examples. And address concerns openly. Involve the team: Seek input and involve team members in the change process. Champion new ideas: Encourage innovation and celebrate failures as a learning process

It's a heavy list of attributes and not an exhaustive one. But for modern-day newsroom leaders, they need to be equipped with the skills in each of these areas. And organisations need to invest in their leaders' growth and personal development if they want their businesses to be successful.



STOP CHASING AI. START **SOLVING** PROBLEMS!

How FT Strategies' Aliya Itzkowitz helps newsrooms shift from AI hype to meaningful impact.

By now, everyone's talking about AI. But in the media industry, where time is always tight and the pressure to innovate is high, the big question isn't whether you should do something with AI — it's what, why, and how.

Aliya Itzkowitz has spent the last few years helping publishers across Europe make sense of it all. As a manager at FT Strategies, the consultancy arm of the Financial Times, she's seen the AI wave up close from the first burst of excitement to the more sober realities of implementation.

And if she's learned one thing, it's this: "Stop chasing AI. Start solving problems!"

FROM HYPE TO STRUCTURE

When generative AI first took off, many newsrooms rushed into action. "There was definitely a lot of pressure," Itzkowitz says. "Everyone felt like they weren't doing enough." Some companies even made it a KPI just to use AI within the year, regardless of purpose. The result?

A lot of experimentation, and a lot of confusion.

To bring clarity, FT Strategies created the AI Launchpad, in partnership with the Google News Initiative. The goal wasn't to push AI tools, but to help news organizations take a step back and look at their actual needs.

"Forget AI for a second," Itzkowitz says. "What are the key stages in your news business?"

They boiled it down to three: news production, audience engagement, and monetization. Only once these areas were mapped did the question of AI come into play.

BUILD OR BUY? TRY FIRST.

Many publishers soon face a familiar dilemma: should we build something ourselves, or buy it from a vendor?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer. Buying usually means moving faster and with less risk. Building gives more control, especially when it comes to data and internal systems.

But Itzkowitz points out something many overlook: building can be valuable simply because it helps teams learn.

She recalls working with a financial newspaper in Bulgaria that built a summarization tool into their CMS. "The project itself was impressive," she says, "but what really stood out was how much the team learned along the way." That learning, she argues, can be just as important as the output.

This idea, that the real value of building something is the skills and insight it develops, is what journalist Uli Köppen once dubbed the Trojan unicorn. It's a phrase Itzkowitz loves.

Still, you don't have to start by building. Testing off-the-shelf tools can be a smart way to explore an idea and see how your team responds. "Trying before you buy is a very important part of the process," she says.

WHEN AI TAKES A DETOUR

Experiments rarely go exactly as planned, and that's often when they get interesting.

One newsroom began testing a voice cloning tool so that journalists could record audio versions of their opinion pieces. But along the way, the project veered into something entirely different: helping improve a system that detects fake audio — part of a fact-checking initiative called VerificAudio.

"They were two separate projects," Itzkowitz says, "but they found a way to connect the dots."

The FT's own AskFT chatbot also took unexpected turns. Built to answer professional readers' questions, it soon found fans among internal staff who used it to search the archive. Some readers even used it to track specific journalists they followed, something the team hadn't anticipated at all.

In other words: fast, light experiments can uncover value you didn't know to look for.

WHAT MATTERS NOW

After two years of pilots and prototypes, many newsrooms are shifting gears. The big question is no longer "Can we do this with AI?" but "Did it work, and is it worth scaling up?"

FT Strategies now works with publishers to audit their AI activity, evaluate impact, and identify what should become part of the core business.

In some cases, the most meaningful results aren't in audience numbers or revenue, but in how a team has evolved when it comes to the way they think, collaborate, and explore new ideas. "Sometimes the best outcome of an experiment isn't

the tool," Itzkowitz says. "It's what it teaches you."

LOOKING FORWARD

While the AI landscape keeps moving, Itzkowitz believes the next step is not necessarily to do more, but to be more deliberate. That means asking tough questions:

- What's actually changing in the business model?

- How are users engaging with journalism in new ways?

- Are you building capabilities for the future, or just chasing a trend?

There's no clear roadmap yet, and no perfect playbook. But one thing is clear: the newsrooms that ask the right questions, and build the right learning culture, will be best prepared for what comes next.

Because in the end, AI isn't just about automation or efficiency. It's about adaptation. And for that, the smartest strategy is to stay curious.

This article is based on Episode 6 of Kilkaya's podcast, Insight Shapes News.

**DRIVE UP READER REVENUE
LOWER YOUR TECH SPEND
INCREASE ENGAGEMENT
FIND INNER PEACE***

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QR codes for each app are shown below the logos.

CASE STUDY

HOW IGNORING 90% OF READERS GOT AMEDIA **MORE YOUNG** SUBSCRIBERS

Amedia's boldest experiment didn't involve new content formats or platform tricks. It simply involved measuring the right thing — and letting that change everything else.

Amedia is a dominant force in Norwegian media. With over 110 newspapers, 1,000 reporters, and 829,000 subscribers — 580,000 of them digital-only — it reaches more than two million people each day.

But for all that reach, one number stood out. Not in a good way.

They had more subscribers over 80 than under 40.

This wasn't just a quirky statistic. It was the symptom of a deeper problem: despite years of effort and digital transformation, Amedia's younger audience wasn't growing.



WE HAVE FOCUSED ON SUBSCRIBERS UNDER 40 FOR YEARS — WHY DON'T WE SUCCEED?

— Janne Rygh, Editorial Content Developer, Amedia



This simple, honest question marked the beginning of a radical shift.

STOP CHASING EVERYONE. START PLEASEING THE RIGHT SOMEONE.

At the heart of the experiment was a deceptively simple idea: instead of trying to please all subscribers equally, what if the newsroom focused only on the ones they were struggling to reach?

“What if we ignore the old folks and let solely our subscribers under 40 decide?”

This question wasn't just a provocation — it became a strategic commitment. Amedia's editorial leadership gave two newspapers, Halden Arbeiderblad and Romerikes Blad, the green light to test what would happen if they optimized exclusively for under-40 subscribers.

Everything would be built around that focus — from metrics to content selection.

FROM KPI CONFUSION TO CLARITY — POWERED BY KILKAYA

To support the experiment, Amedia turned to Kilkaya, their real-time content analytics platform. But this wasn't just about tracking more data. It was about tracking the right data — and letting that shape editorial behavior.

Most analytics tools are built around total traffic and general engagement. Kilkaya works differently.

It has a flexible data model, allowing each publisher to define what matters most:

- What events are logged

- How audiences are segmented
- What goals the dashboards visualize
- And which metrics each journalist sees on a daily basis

Kilkaya believes tools should adapt to the publisher — not the other way around.

In this case, that meant creating dashboards that showed only the behavior of readers under 40. All other signals were filtered out.

The dataset was smaller — but infinitely more valuable.

The project teams also added specific widgets to track:

- The current share of under-40 readers
- Which stories had the most young readers live
- Whether they hit their young reader targets each day

This reconfiguration made the dashboards a kind of editorial compass, pointing everyone in the same direction.



YOUNG READERS ARE IMPATIENT. THEREFORE KILKAYA IS OUR MOST IMPORTANT WHEN TRYING TO GET THEM TO READ.

— Gunnar Paulsen, Front Page Editor, Halden Arbeiderblad

THREE THINGS THEY LEARNED

1

THE NEWSROOM CHANGED DIRECTION — AND DIDN'T LOOK BACK

The biggest transformation wasn't in the data — it was in the newsroom culture.

Before, a journalist could hit their KPIs by appealing to loyal, older readers with familiar topics. But now, the “green numbers” in Kilkaya only turned green if **the under-40s were reading**.

Reporters began asking new questions: “Will this reach young people?”, “Is the headline appealing to them?”, “Are the images making it easier to connect?”

To succeed, journalists had to write with a **different mental picture of the reader**. They sought out younger people to focus stories around. They chose photos of young women rather than older men. They found language that resonated with a digital-first generation.

Even experienced writers, like **Thor Fremmerlid (59)**, saw their habits shift: **“I have had to leave old habits behind – but I can tell that it's working!”**

What had started as an external change in dashboards became an internal change in behavior.

WHAT YOU MEASURE IS WHAT YOU GET

Amedia's internal mantra is simple: **“The more you read, the less you churn.”** But they realized something more profound during this project:

What you choose to measure determines what kind of journalism you produce.

By shifting their KPIs toward young reader engagement — and by using a tool like Kilkaya to surface only those signals — the newsroom naturally began to change its instincts, priorities, and decisions.

It wasn't a gimmick. It wasn't a campaign. It was a new way of working.

And it delivered.

2

THE OLDER READERS STAYED — AND MANY APPRECIATED THE SHIFT

One of the risks going into the experiment was losing the current audience. After all, older subscribers made up the bulk of the readership.

But the opposite happened. Amedia saw no wave of cancellations. There was no backlash.

Instead, **older readers continued to read — and often enjoyed the more streamlined, visually driven, and sharply written stories** that were designed to win attention in a crowded newsfeed.

“Our subscribers over 40 do not abandon us — they love the content we provide them.”

The lesson? Making a product better for one group doesn't have to make it worse for others. In fact, editorial clarity often benefits everyone.

3

THE YOUNG AUDIENCE RESPONDED — BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

Perhaps the most exciting result came in Romerikes Blad, where the share of readers under 40 rose from **6% to 13%** — more than doubling in a short period.

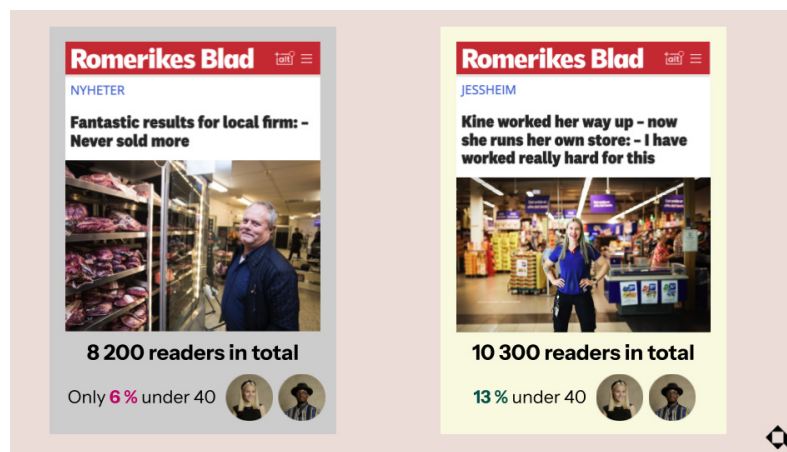
These weren't just fleeting clicks. These were engaged, returning readers, forming habits around a local newspaper that suddenly felt more relevant to them.

And while the total audience didn't explode, **the composition of the audience changed** — precisely the goal the project had set out to achieve.

“

FOCUSING ON YOUNG SUBSCRIBERS IS THE SMARTEST THING WE HAVE DONE IN A LONG TIME — IT HAS MADE OUR PRODUCT BETTER OVERALL

— Mads Yngve Storvik, Editor in Chief, Romerikets Blad



A ROADMAP FOR ANY NEWSROOM

This project proved that young readers are not unreachable. But they won't engage with a product built for someone else. To reach them, publishers need more than good intentions

They need:

- A clear editorial focus
- Tools that support that focus
- And the discipline to measure what matters

HOW DO YOU **DECIDE** WHICH ARTICLE IS FREE OR PREMIUM?

By Madeleine White, co-founder of The Audiencers & VP Marketing at Poool, on theaudiencers.com

In partnership with Atlas, the recurring revenues growth consultancy, The Audiencers recently ran a survey to find out how media companies with a paywall model decide which articles to block and which to leave open to all audiences. The findings revealed that the majority of publishers base this decision on the content alone – often its reach and conversion potential. Is this the best approach, or can new technology and customer insights help to optimize this key decision?

However, instead of considering which articles to block, which paywall model to employ, what percentage of articles should be blocked, etc., the advice given throughout this article is that publishers should be considering how to maximize the value of each individual reader, building dynamic models to adapt to more than just the content type.



HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY DECIDE WHICH ARTICLE IS FREE OR PREMIUM?

The overarching trend is that a decision to block an article with a paywall or not is based on the article itself, generally the value-level: Short articles are “free” – e.g. breaking news and service news. In-depth features are “premium” – e.g. Columnists, in-depth analysis

Mather Economic’s matrix summarizes it quite neatly, sharing KPIs for these ‘content-types’, each of which has a different business goal. In particular, mass appeal content is for advertising, whilst premium content is for subscription revenue.

Ultimately, it’s about **the reach and conversion potential of the article**. Who makes this judgment – and based on what metrics– varies for different publisher respondents.

For example, one publisher in the survey shared that whilst the above is true, they also measure velocity and engagement within the first three hours of publishing, producing a list of potential premium articles. Editorial teams then make a decision on which articles to block with a paywall from this list, post-publication.

A few in the survey specified that this freemium model has been developed to better facilitate a balance between frustration and engagement. Specifically:

- Free articles are blocked by a registration wall, allowing readers access to a set quota of articles for free per month. This also allows for data collection and increased ad revenue through targeting
- Premium articles are open for the first article, and blocked on the second, allowing the reader to see the value of subscribing

Others go even deeper in their dynamicity, often applying the above, but with some dynamic additions based on the user:

- Churned subscribers are always hardwalled (blocked on all articles by a hard paywall) because of high propensity to subscribe
- Social referrals have a registration wall and free pageview because of low likelihood to subscribe
- The paywall journey can also depend on device-type
- All articles that are also featured in print are hardwalled
- Readers that are gifted an article by a subscriber are presented with a 48h discovery pass

AOC in France employs the strategy in this final bullet point, asking for the reader’s email address in exchange. Click-through rate on this wall is at 32%, well above market averages. Another interesting criteria on when to unlock or lock articles is based on time-since-publishing. One publisher noted that they hardwall all articles for one week, unlocking them for standard metering after 7 days.

MASS APPEAL: TOP FUNNEL

Prior Content Distribution:	15%
Target Content Distribution:	50%
KPIs:	Pageviews, Registrations
Internal Stakeholder:	Head of B2B

Potential Beats: *Breaking news, Elections, Public Health, Celebrity, Retail News*

FURTHER ANALYSIS: UNDERPERFORMERS

Prior Content Distribution:	45%
Target Content Distribution:	0%
KPIs:	PVs, Paywall Hit, Sub visit
Internal Stakeholder:	N/A

Potential Beats: *Personal Finance, Visual Arts, Transportation, Music*

MISSION JOURNALISM: MANDATORY

Prior Content Distribution:	30%
Target Content Distribution:	15%
KPIs:	N/A
Internal Stakeholder:	Exec. Editor

Potential Beats: *City Desk, Community, Equity, Crime*

PREMIUM CONTENT: BOTTOM OF FUNERAL

Prior Content Distribution:	10%
Target Content Distribution:	35%
KPIs:	Paywall hits, Sub visits
Internal Stakeholder:	Head of B2C

Potential Beats: *Investigations, Sports, Real Estate, Food, Local*

BILD CASE STUDY

BILD in Germany also brought up the topic of article relevancy in a podcast, giving the example of an article covering the news of a player transferring teams.

Whilst it's still breaking news, this is valuable information for subscribers to be able to access before other readers, so at this time it's premium.

Then, as Daniel Mussinghoff, Premium Director at BILDplus shared, "at some point it just doesn't make sense to leave this article behind a paywall as it's all over other news portals too.

But then we also know that we can follow up relatively quickly and try to get more information. In other words, the first photos

of the medical check, the first interview, the first details about the contract, how much he'll be earning, the transfer fee, what the agent is getting...

We're of course interested in being able to follow up and also follow up with more plus articles."

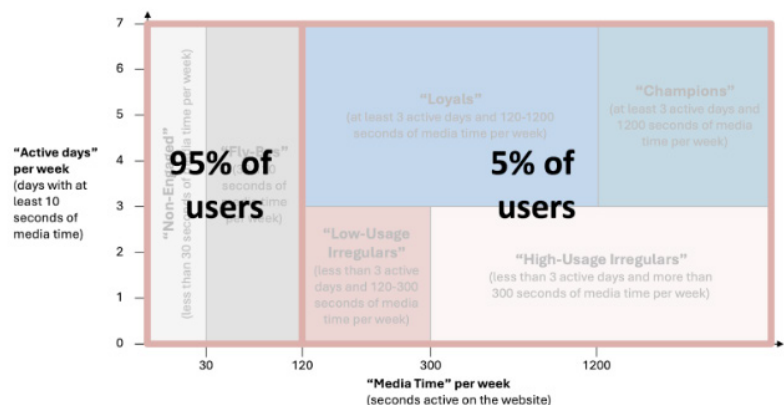
DEVELOPING FROM A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL PAYWALL MODEL

In this model, you have 4 contexts to build a conversion journey for:

- Less engaged, on a 'free article' -> goal of engaging, maybe through a newsletter wall or leaving the article open
- Highly engaged, on a 'free article' -> goal of frustrating slightly and increasing value, maybe through registration
- Less engaged, on a 'premium article' -> goal of showing the value of subscribing
- Highly engaged, on a 'premium article' -> goal of converting to subscription

You can then develop this model by adding more layers of dynamicity to adapt to more than just level of engagement, such as:

- Device type
- Content tags (e.g. topic, author, etc.)
- Reader location
- User status (e.g. ex-subscriber, registered member, event attendee)
- Source of traffic (e.g. social media, newsletter)



GOING BEYOND A DECISION MADE ON CONTENT TYPE ALONE

For the most part, respondents' focus was on using the content type (as detailed above) to define whether the reader would be blocked by a paywall or not.

However, this proves to be limited in its value for publishers given the wide variety of reader profiles visiting a publisher's site. In particular, with different reader profiles comes different levels of engagement, so a blanket

approach is rarely going to apply for all of them.

DRIVE research reveals that 95% of users fall into the 'unengaged' category, with less than 120 seconds active on the website per month.

As a result, the best solution does appear to be taking the 'freemium' base, and adding on layers of dynamicity based on the user's level of engagement.

IS THIS DECISION MANUAL OR AUTOMATED?

The majority of respondents chose manual, making the decision based on their overall business model - advertiser value from all customers versus higher value from paid or registered subscribers.

The decision of whether the article will be free or premium is usually made before the article has even been written, but this is situation dependent. For instance, some publishers note that article performance is tracked post-publication and that teams might decide to

add a paywall to a free article if it has particularly high traffic with the goal of maximizing its value for conversions.

But some note that it's rare that the reverse change is made: i.e. that they remove the paywall to make it free to read.

For another, they barely ever change their mind post-publication for SEO reasons.

We were curious on what these SEO reasons may involve, so we turned to the WTF is SEO? Team who shared that it "depends on how Google sees it. Nowadays, since everything has a paywall it tends to say ok as long as

this still meets intent, but if there's an unlocked version of the same intent it may favor that or knock the story after the bounce rate increases from people hitting the wall. We've seen it both ways and experimented with it with little effect though so I wouldn't be too worried."

"The decision is automated"

For those who shared that the decision is automated, it's based on predefined metrics like author name, section, etc. One publisher in South America mentioned an engagement scoring system that we'd never encountered before:

UVS (User Value Score) - a number between 1 and 100 that determines how much content a user gets access to. 0 is fully premium, 100 is free. UVS is determined by frequency of visits and how many articles a non-subscriber user reads a month. The more they read, the less content they will have for free (paywalled articles).

But another publisher who shared that the decision is automated highlighted that top editors can choose to exempt articles with limits.

THE CASE OF BUSINESS INSIDER

In a recent Digiday article, Business Insider announced their move to an automated 'smart' paywall model:

Instead of the manual free vs premium split, the new smart paywall instead determines the content that individual users are most likely to pay to access based on their previous reading habits, which platform they come to the website from and the propensity that each genre of content has for converting readers. Using those insights and Google Analytics data, the AI's algorithm decides whether users meet a paywall, registration wall or nothing upon entering the website.

By the end of the testing period, which spanned December to April, the team said that 60% of new conversions happened on "non-premium" stories, meaning stories that never would have been paywalled in the previous model.

This is a big challenge to all of those publishers who are making manual decisions – is it the right strategy to follow?

Ultimately, manual-only decision-making tends to be the first step in a journey towards highly dynamic, machine-learned models. It is, however, an important step that allows teams to understand the processes behind automating, better train and inform editorial teams on what successful articles (for conversion and advertising) look like and ensure machines are being used effectively.

If you're thinking about automating your decision-making, perhaps consider these key questions from Lars K. Jensen – they were written about automating tagging for user needs, but fit equally well in this context:

- What are you trying to automate?
- Why do you want to automate that?
- What are the scenarios – what do we risk losing in terms of skills and knowledge?
- How will the machine decide or suggest? How is the algorithm built?
- What data is it trained on?
- Can it be trained on our content and data?
- What is the definition of success in this particular automation and/or implementation?

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR CONTENT IS CURRENTLY BEHIND A PAYWALL?

Respondents to this survey shared a range from 10-99%, but average is 60-70%.

Importantly, however, a key metric to measure is the percentage of traffic visiting premium content. Because, of course (and particularly in the interest of doing more with less) there's no point producing a huge amount of premium content if no one visits it.

As a benchmark, Pool data reveals an average of 68% of total traffic on premium (compared to free) content for Q2 2024.

DO YOU BLOCK WITH ANY OTHER TYPES OF WALLS?

Cookie walls are mentioned by Europeans, where tightening regulations on cookie consent are leading to falling consent rates. This type of wall is shown to readers who decline cookies on the CMP banner – they'll be asked to either change their mind (i.e. accept cookies) or support the media in another way, such as by paying to subscribe. Importantly though, in countries such as Germany and France, the alternative option must only involve data collection that's considered 'essential' in order to be legal (see France's online data privacy regulation board, the CNIL's response to Cookie Walls) .

Publishers in France and Germany have been employing this strategy for a few years now, and the UK has recently followed, leading to increasingly more cookie walls being used across the continent.

But registration walls were the most common in this survey – typically being displayed after 1-3 articles allowing

the reader access to another 2-3 more articles.

An interesting precision by one: registration walls are used for commenting on articles and account creation is required to read articles gifted by subscribers.

TESTS TO INFORM THE 'FREE VS PREMIUM' DECISION

-> Tests on registration walls and the number of free articles.

"We used a hard reg wall (first page view of all content) for a 6 month trial- while we saw an expected increase in registrations, we saw a severe decrease in traffic, engaged time and returning visitors. We moved to a second page view reg wall to capture people who are more engaged than flyby visitors."

Nikkei Asia ran similar tests, finding that just a single article for free, compared to 10, was optimal for conversion rate to subscription. More on their experiment here.

-> Tests on which content to block.

"We have analyses on which topics, authors, and themes fall into the average audience quadrant that most commonly convert subscriptions. Some subjects always convert. These were recommended to be published with a hard paywall."

Another notes that they often test blocking/unblocking a journalist's work or certain topic area to see which is more valuable for that context.

- Tests to find out the average page views per topic, and per reader-type to be able to develop dynamic models.
- Tests on conversion "assists", i.e. the last article read before a conversion

HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF YOUR PREMIUM ARTICLES?

- Last-click conversion and assists (ie articles read in the run-up to a conversion)
- First click conversion (working on last click), subscriber page views, time on page
- Last click conversion and engagement
- Premium content visibility rate
- Subscriber engagement
- Paywall stop rate
- Media Time

Cut cost. Boost Journalism.

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INFORMED PERSONALISATION

“In this edition of The Kilkaya Insight, we publish the full text of our new white paper on personalisation in the news industry – why it matters, why the time is now, and what publishers need to know.”

News media face increased competition for attention and subscription revenue from streaming services, influencers and creators. Personalisation can be a powerful competitive advantage to help convert and retain subscribers.

Research has found that 71 percent of consumers expect personalisation, and 76 percent become frustrated when they don't find it, according to McKinsey. However, research at the Wharton School of Business has found that customers don't feel good when decisions are outsourced completely to algorithms, even when those decisions benefit them – they want to know that a person was involved.

Informed personalisation allows news organisations to deliver personalisation while maintaining their editorial values. It provides the experience audiences expect and maintains trust by keeping journalists and editors involved

“

**INFORMED PERSONALISATION KEEPS
AUDIENCES ENGAGED AND IS ESSENTIAL
TO BUILDING HABITS AND LOYALTY.**

WHY NEWS MEDIA NEEDS PERSONALISATION

The past two decades have been turbulent ones for the UK news industry. The emergence and rapid acceleration of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s heralded an unprecedented era of online change – one of social conversations and connections, audience fragmentation, and a mass commercial shift to digital platforms. In 2019, the Competition and Market Authority in the UK estimated that Google and Facebook captured 80 percent of the £14 bn digital advertising market.

Amid this, publishers with audience development and business models founded on platform ownership, and consumer and advertiser choice, have found themselves buffeted by wave after wave of disruptive innovation. The latest is Google's genAI summaries, which are cannibalising traffic from the very sites from which it is drawing information. The Media Leader reports that some "publishers have seen 5–10 percent decreases in traffic from search since AI Overviews were launched."

Across the news publishing spectrum, media companies must grapple with complex challenges, including intense competition for audience attention and the growing phenomenon of news

avoidance and mistrust of the media.

The UK has one of the lowest levels of trust in news and one of the highest levels of news avoidance: a 2024 UK Government report into the state of the media found trust in news had fallen by 15 percentage points since 2015, while the number of people interested in news fell by 32 percent over the same period. Moreover, the UK has one of the lowest levels of paying audiences in the world, with only 8 percent having paid for online news in the past year, according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report.

Meanwhile, in the United States, studies indicate this loss of trust has led to shifts away from legacy mainstream news providers – especially around political content – and younger audiences in particular are turning to social media for their information.

Publishers have seen a continuing collapse in traffic from social media over the last several years. According to the Press Gazette, referrals to "news and media sites" from Facebook had "plunged by 58% in the last six years from 1.3 billion in March 2018 to 561 million" in April 2024. "Traffic from Facebook fell by 50% in the last 12 months alone as the decline shows little sign of slowing." Political news sites

have been particularly affected, as Meta has taken active steps to reduce the amount of political content on Facebook.

X/Twitter has always been a smaller source of traffic, but INMA found that its referrals had also "dropped significantly" over the last few years.

And whilst traffic from Google Discover, has increased, organic traffic from the search engine fell after Google's recent algorithm updates. All but 15 of the 70 news publishers monitored by Press Gazette saw a decrease in visibility, with almost half seeing "declines in the double-digits". Furthermore, recent research by the Ahrefs blog found that Google's new AI Overviews are sapping referrals, with "the presence of an AI Overview in the search results correlated with a 34.5% lower average clickthrough rate (CTR) for the top-ranking page".

Social media companies have for years penalised posts with external links, and Meta in particular has become hostile to political content. Elon Musk's X/Twitter not only throttles posts that include links, it has delayed load times for publications such as The New York Times and Reuters.

In contrast to the last decade of social media firehoses, readers now expect content to be tailored to their interests, habits and preferences and publishers must deliver if they expect to drive meaningful engagement. Companies like Netflix and Spotify have set the benchmark by curating content based on individual behaviour, and the news industry can and must offer the same tailored and personal experience.

Newsrooms are also shrinking in size. The 2024 Digital News Report found a combination of rising costs and lower than expected advertising revenues have seen hundreds of editorial jobs lost in the past 12 months at a national and regional level, but doing more with less is not an effective strategy. Despite this, more content is produced now than at any time in the industry's history – MailOnline alone publishes 1,500 articles per day, on average, and Reach plc's AI-created articles drove 1.8bn page views in 2024.

In this time of information deluge, target audiences can easily feel overwhelmed. Whether through text, audio, video, live streaming, push notifications, newsletters or social media posts, news brands are clamouring for a reader's attention every minute of the day.

A further challenge for publishers is that while they view AI as an opportunity for their businesses – especially with regard to content curation and distribution – there remains something of a prickliness towards it from audiences who are suspicious about its use in content generation, according to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Moreover, Reuters Institute research found that only 8 percent of people “think that news produced by AI will be more worth paying for compared to news

RECOMMENDATIONS ARE A KEY FOCUS FOR PUBLISHERS

Eighty percent of those surveyed highlighted the importance of personalisation

Back-end automation



Distribution and recommendations



Content creation



Newsgathering



Coding and product development



Commercial uses



Strongly agree Agree

Source: “Journalism, Media and Technology Trends and Predictions 2025”, Reuters Institute, University of Oxford

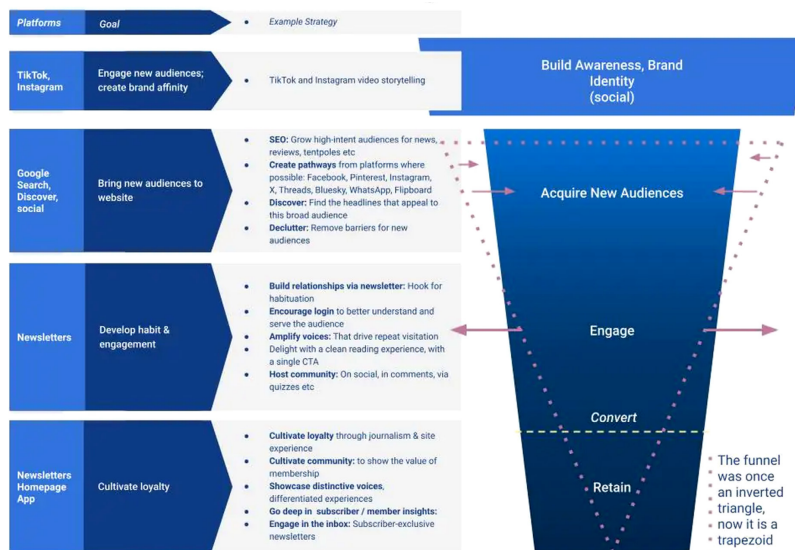
However, the same study found that people are more comfortable with news organisations using AI for “back-end tasks” such as spell-checking, grammar and translation, and 80 percent felt that it was important for distribution and recommendations. In 2024, 87 percent of publishers identified AI and automation as top investment areas in the World Press Trends report from WAN-IFRA.

At present, AI is being leveraged across the industry, from dynamic paywalls and automated audio articles to newsroom efficiencies and content personalisation. This focus is closely followed by data analytics (86 percent), reflecting a broader shift toward audience-centric and data-driven publishing strategies.

Media companies are no strangers to disruptive innovation, and so a wide range of new business models have emerged in recent years, including membership options, subscription and paywall strategies, and metered and premium access for digital content.

Innovation and opportunity are not limited to the major players and there has been a slow but steady growth of independent and hyperlocal news providers, from the likes of The New European to investigative news site The Ferret.

These brands have engaged, supportive audiences who are willing to pay to support journalism and newsroom standards they believe in.



WHY AUDIENCES EXPECT PERSONALISATION

To address the challenge of increasing revenue, common advice is to diversify customer acquisition – to develop a broader range of content types across a wider selection of channels. But increased acquisition is not enough.

Writing for Neiman Lab, Sarah Marshall suggests that the wide brim of the conversion funnel has contracted, with “many news outlets struggling for scale”. She suggests that gains can be made in the “flabby middle” of the audience funnel through a focus on engagement and retention:

“To drive value to consumers and the revenue that follows (both commercial or consumer), audience teams must focus on engagement. This is the step where we hook, where we drive habituation.”

The FT found that “retention efforts have 15 times the value of acquisition”, that “a recognised reader – anyone the brand had basic demographic information about – is worth almost twice the value of what an anonymous user is to them”, and “if a user is willing to give the brand some information about themselves, they are three times more likely to become subscribers”.

Commercially, many publishers are now

focusing on increasing customer lifetime value, and retention is key to achieving this goal. Frederick Reichheld of Bain & Company, who invented the net promoter score, found that an increase in retention of 5 percent increases revenue by anywhere from 25 percent to 95 percent.

It's time to get to know your users. And that means moving away from third-party cookies and gathering first-party data, such as “first-party behavioral

data like consumers' preferences, purchase intent, and any frustration they experience along the customer journey, [which] can make customers feel valued and understood, encouraging repeat purchases, and even increasing customer lifetime value,” according to Gary Drenik on Forbes.

TACKLING NEWS AVOIDANCE AND NEWS OVERWHELM PERSONALISATION

Research from the Reuters Institution and the University of Oxford found that engagement with online news is either stagnant or in decline.

News avoidance “may have negative implications for democratic participation and for combating misinformation, among other things”, particularly as weekly engagement with news “has fallen at sharper rates among younger people and those without a university degree”.

Being overwhelmed by news is not simply a function of how media outlets choose stories or the volume of news that's published, according to the Scientific American, it's a deliberate tactic by right wing political operatives to “flood the zone” with bad news.

“This approach is reminiscent of the ‘Gish gallop’ tactic that Trump has used during debates to barrage opponents

and fact-checkers with so many lies and half-truths that it becomes impossible to adequately address them all. [...]”

“But it's not just the volume of headlines and the intellectual difficulty of understanding what's happening that make current news overwhelming. The key, psychologists say, is the emotional weight of those headlines' content – especially for people who find what's happening in the U.S. today to be genuinely frightening.”

Personalisation may be one way to tackle news avoidance says the Reuters Institute:

“Personalisation, at least in principle, provides further opportunities. Loyal

returning users may be perfectly happy with incremental updates on ongoing stories they are assumed to be following. But that is not the right starting point for everyone. In the future personalisation might offer not just different story selections, but stories matched to individual users' interests and prior levels of background knowledge. (After all, Spotify does not offer the same front page of their app to all users; most news organizations still do.)”

DEVELOPING LOYALTY THROUGH PERSONALISATION

McKinsey's Next In Personalisation 2021 Report outlined the growing importance of personalisation to revenue growth. They found that 71 percent "of consumers expect companies to deliver personalized interactions. And 76 percent get frustrated when this doesn't happen."

Moreover, "Personalization drives performance and better customer outcomes. Companies that grow faster drive 40 percent more of their revenue from personalization than their slower-growing counterparts."

The majority, 72 percent, of consumers want to feel that companies have taken the time to "recognize them as individuals and know their interests", and they will jump ship if they feel ignored. To develop customer loyalty, companies need to "demonstrate their investment in the relationship, not just the transaction".

Personalisation has a huge impact on consumers' decisions to buy (or subscribe), and drives increased "engagement and loyalty over time", which leads to a 10 to 15 percent increase in revenue, with "digitally native" companies, such as direct-to-consumer brands, seeing a 25 percent increase.

The most successful companies do not view personalisation "solely as a marketing or analytics problem, they view it as an organization-wide opportunity. Rather than focusing solely on short-term wins, they look for long-term drivers of growth and emphasize customer lifetime value."

71%

OF CONSUMERS EXPECT
PERSONALISED INTERACTIONS

76%

OF CONSUMERS ARE FRUSTRATED BY
A LACK OF PERSONALISATION

TRANSPARENCY & TRUST

However, INMA also warns that whilst “data-driven insights are essential for understanding audience behaviour in a fragmented media landscape”, allowing tracking across platforms, “ethical considerations around data privacy must remain a priority to maintain trust.”

A recent report from marketing experts Blaze warns that “advanced personalisation relies on openness and trust to succeed.” Indeed, they found that 99 percent of marketing executives “say plans to use advanced personalization have been impacted by data privacy concerns.”

Companies need to build trust, by prioritising “customer consent to deliver real value from data collection”. As Blaze

says, it’s not just about adhering to the law, “it’s about understanding what customers have agreed to and making sure data use benefits both the customer and the brand”.

Key to this is ensuring that users understand and are comfortable with the ways in which their data is being used, and making sure that it “adds value to their experience”.

It’s also essential to understand how users feel about algorithms. A new study from Wharton marketing professor Stefano Puntoni and his colleagues discovered that people don’t like decisions made by algorithms, even when that decision goes their way.

“What’s interesting is that if you talk to companies, they’ll often tell you that they’re reluctant to let algorithms make decisions because they are worried about what would happen to customers when things go wrong. But we don’t actually find that. The negative consequences of using algorithms for companies seem to be, in fact, when the news is good,” Puntoni says.

This may be due to our inherent psychological need to believe that when someone makes a decision in our favour it’s because we behaved well, or have a high social status. Neither algorithms nor AI have a capacity to judge us as superior, so we feel less positive about the decisions they make.

HOW INFORMED PERSONALISATION ANSWERS THE CHALLENGE

Media brands are now in a position where they have to balance competing needs: They need to increase engagement and feelings of intimacy with users in order to increase lifetime value and reduce churn, whilst also increasing trust, respecting concerns about privacy and meeting users’ expectations of personalisation in both products and communications.

At the same time, they need to maintain editorial control to ensure that the most important stories get the attention they deserve, comply with legal and privacy requirements, whilst avoiding impersonal algorithmic decisions which might discourage users.

Yet most personalisation software are click-based black boxes that promote the most popular stories, (which are not always the most important), leading to a race to the bottom.

The answer, according to Killkaya’s Tarjei Gilbrant, is informed personalisation, which he describes as “a transparent, ethical approach to content personalization in news media, where algorithms are built in close collaboration with editorial teams to maintain journalistic integrity, foster diverse perspectives, and avoid echo chambers. It discards the ‘black box’, offering an open, controlled system that strengthens audience trust.”

The ability to mix curated content and personalised content allows publishers to maintain and demonstrate their values.

By ensuring that top stories are genuinely the most important stories of the day, editors can use their expertise and judgement to give readers the option to see the news that really matters.

But it also allows the algorithm, tuned in collaboration with the newsroom, to surface content that meets the user’s needs, whether those are evergreen stories, ongoing coverage, or simply based on a user’s preferences.

At the same time, the user can enjoy the human touch that editors bring, knowing that they aren’t being spoon-fed content by an unfeeling AI, alongside benefiting from the level of personalisation that they’ve come to expect.

“Striking the right balance between algorithm-driven personalisation and editorial judgement is crucial for maintaining the integrity and reach of public interest journalism,” Laura Gartry said in a Reuters Institute report, “Personalised news: how to balance technology and editorial integrity”.

Informed personalisation can help news organisations achieve this delicate balance. It helps businesses align their personalisation work with both editorial and consumer needs, and can be easily adjusted as circumstances change to ensure that the engagement levels hit that sweet spot that will turn drive-by users into subscribers and subscribers into loyal fans.

A capacity to judge us as superior, so we feel less positive about the decisions they make.

THE ROLE OF PERSONALISATION IN THE MEDIA

In her review of The Atlantic's 2021/2022 redesign, product designer Victoria Sgarro discussed how she and audience researcher Mollie Leavitt developed an understanding of how readers wanted to find their next story: "curation, customization and personalization".

Curation.

Editors choose the most important stories to highlight, shaping the reading experience and readers trust their selections.

Customisation.

The reader chooses their own experience to meet their own need, like following a favorite writer

Personalisation.

An algorithm tailors their experience to anticipated needs. Example: Suggesting a writer based on their follows

The Atlantic was keen not to replace curation but to augment it with customisation and personalisation. Sgarro wrote, "The last thing we want to do is lose readers' trust by creating an echo chamber solely optimized for engagement."

This combination of curation and customisation/ personalisation allows news organisations to use their editorial judgement to surface the most important stories whilst allowing the reader to choose their areas of interest and using data to ensure that readers are served relevant information.

INMA found that personalisation is a critical feature to "not only enhance user satisfaction but also deepen people's loyalty by making them feel understood. Personalisation is especially critical in targeting younger generations like Gen Z and Millennials, which expect immediacy and relevance. These audiences are accustomed to algorithms shaping their experiences on platforms like Spotify and Netflix, and they bring the same expectations to news consumption."

CONCLUSIONS.

In this paper we have considered how personalisation could benefit news publishers, looking to build loyalty with existing audiences and attract new ones, along with journalists and readers.

The evidence supporting arguments for personalisation are myriad, as are the opportunities; however, economic development involves a dynamic process of innovation and technological change, which can be challenging.

The process of managing innovation is often described in four steps:

1. Find opportunities for innovation
2. Decide a course of action and understand why it is being taken
3. Agree the steps needed to shift from idea to reality
4. Consider how the benefits of the innovation are harnessed

The opportunity for innovation, as outlined above, is that of personalisation with the aim of consolidating reader loyalty, turning frequent readers into habitual advocates, casual readers into loyal ones, and reaching previously untapped audiences.

To combat reader mistrust of AI-served content, the Harvard Business Review found that news brands must build trust by being transparent in their use of personal data and personalisation, giving users meaningful control over data sharing and personalisation and explaining the purpose

and benefits of data collection.

Informed personalisation allows editorial teams a deep understanding not only of the strategic direction but the how and why of those steps, providing deeper insights for user behaviour and patterns, and enabling them to make agile, data-driven decisions.

In an industry buffeted by Schumpeter's 'perennial gale', innovation can be a gamble but when it comes to personalisation there are clear advantages for those considering expanding their audience offering, not least with the rapid development of AI tools and expert companies to support their strategic goals.

But as with any innovation, there are potential risks, including the loss of editorial control, dependency on algorithms, or concerns about transparency. But inaction also carries a risk.

Kilkaya has found that introducing personalisation on a front page can significantly increase click-through rates, sometimes by as much as 30 – 50 percent. This growth is driven by increased audience engagement and traffic, which directly impacts loyalty, revenue and long-term sustainability.

Choosing not to use personalisation comes with an opportunity cost: the loss of potential growth. In a competitive media environment, that becomes a strategic risk. Doing nothing may feel safer, but it also means accepting a quiet decline in performance whilst competitors move

forward.

Incorporating newsroom decision-making with AI personalisation tools leads to a richer user experience and adds a level of editorial control and connection – this is not an algorithm making choices, it's journalists putting journalism and the reader at the heart of their operation.

At the same time, the user can enjoy the human touch that editors bring, knowing that they aren't being spoon-fed content by an unfeeling AI, alongside benefiting from the level of personalisation that they've come to expect.

"Striking the right balance between algorithm-driven personalisation and editorial judgement is crucial for maintaining the integrity and reach of public interest journalism," Laura Gartry said in a Reuters Institute report, "Personalised news: how to balance technology and editorial integrity".

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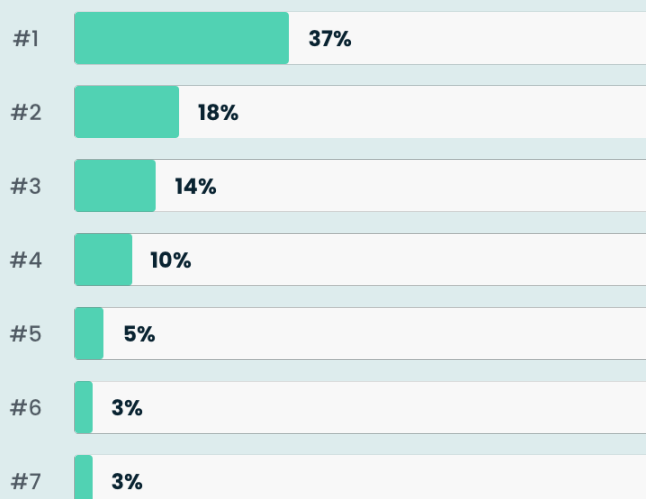
a capacity to judge us as superior, so we feel less positive about the decisions they make.

A NEW ERA IN FULL-PAGE PERSONALISATION FOR NEWS PUBLISHERS

By Tarjei Gilbrant, Kilkaya

DISTRIBUTION OF CLICKS ACROSS ROWS

Row Clicks per row



Imagine a front page that knows what your readers have already seen, and what they haven't. One that offers substance over clickbait, responds to editorial priorities, and still delivers significantly better results.

This isn't a trade-off between control and performance. It's a shift in how we think about personalization for newspapers altogether. In fact, it's such a shift that we can no longer simply call it personalization. What we're enabling is something more deliberate, more transparent, and far more aligned with editorial strategy: informed personalization.

At Kilkaya, we've developed Front Studio to help editors shape dynamic, personalized front pages without giving up their core values. But before diving into the results, let's take a closer look at what Front Studio actually is, why we need it, and how it works.

WHY PERSONALISATION MUST START AT THE TOP

Many publishers claim to offer personalisation, but in practice it often means adding a few recommended stories in a handful of fixed positions. In some cases, these recommendations only appear from row 10 and downward. The top of the front page stays the same for everyone.

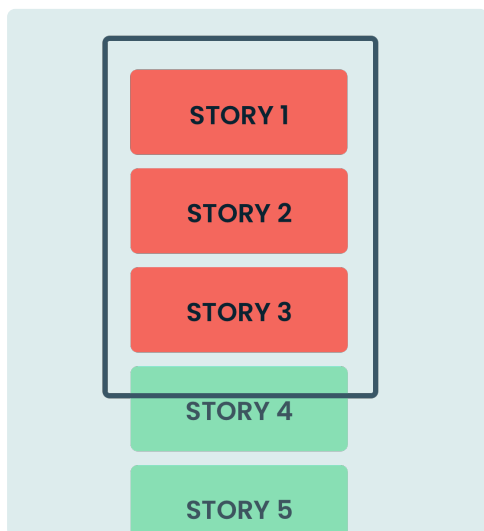
That's a missed opportunity.

We typically see that around 80% of front page traffic is concentrated in the first four rows. If personalization doesn't happen there, most readers won't even notice it. Real impact requires personalization from the very first row.

FUN FACT

WHAT REALLY DETERMINES HOW WELL ROW 10 PERFORMS?

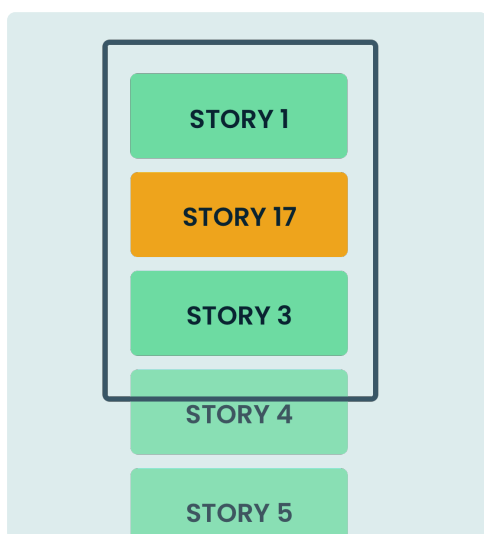
How well lower rows perform depends mostly on the top of the page. If the top shows old or poorly chosen stories, readers scroll to find something better. That can make weak content further down appear successful, while the real reason is that the top is underperforming.



A READER'S JOURNEY: 5 MINUTES LATER

Imagine a reader visits the front page, reads the top three stories, and comes back five minutes later. If nothing has changed, there's no reason to engage again.

With Front Studio, the layout updates. Unread stories remain, others are repositioned or replaced. However, editors can pin important articles, keeping them visible even if already read. The result is a relevant, refreshed page without compromising editorial judgment.



A READER'S JOURNEY: 8 HOURS LATER

Now imagine a user returning after eight hours. A high-quality story published earlier in the day has now dropped to position 17. Without personalization, it's unlikely the user will find it.

With Front Studio, the system can recognize that this story is still highly relevant. It moves it up to the visible area, while deprioritizing less impactful stories.

This is the power of personalization where it matters most: right at the top.

Sky first reported President Trump's assassination attempt in 2024.

"Our live blog partner, Norkon, is super smooth – it was just a case of writing a hello post outlining the story, filling three boxes, putting on a photo, and pressing publish. Less than five minutes and the story was up."

– Live News Editor, SKY News

**News Move Fast.
So Can You.
Here Is How:**





WHAT IS FRONT STUDIO?

Front Studio is Kilkaya's editorial front page engine. It lets publishers create personalized front pages that are still driven by editorial judgment. Instead of static layouts or opaque

recommendation systems, Front Studio gives editors full control over what readers see, while adapting the experience for each user.

The solution consists of three integrated parts:

I. SELECTION

This is where the personalization logic begins. Editors define how articles are selected:

Editorial priorities: Editors decide which KPIs and rules to use. These can be combined in any number of ways, and the results are always transparent. Editors can understand and refine how their decisions shape the outcome.

Segmentation rules: User groups can have distinct Streams tailored to their needs. Subscribers might get in-depth or premium content, while flyby users see broader, more accessible stories to spark engagement. This makes it possible to reach different groups effectively without losing editorial integrity.

2. ORCHESTRATION

This is the editorial interface where Streams are previewed and edited. Editors can:

- Pin articles to specific positions
- Change the order (drag and drop) or remove irrelevant stories
- Edit headlines, images, tags, or presentation style
- Drag in articles from search to complement the algorithm

Here, editors see the outcome of the algorithm they designed and can apply the final human touch. For example, a story may not perform best in the metrics, but it's the most important for the brand right now and must appear at the top. That judgment is always up to the editor.

3. DISTRIBUTION

Editors define high-level rules for groups, and Front Studio handles fine-grained personalization:

- Each user gets a mix of articles based on their interests
- Unimportant sections can be de-emphasized, while breaking news remains visible to all
- The algorithm may prioritize high-converting articles, or increase the number of premium articles shown to encourage conversion

This is where Front Studio blends relevance with editorial strategy, ensuring that every visitor sees something new and meaningful, while still supporting business goals like subscriptions and engagement.

CASE 1

HAMBURGER MORGENPOST, A SMARTER FRONT PAGE THAT KEEPS READERS COMING BACK

The biggest challenge in personalizing the front page isn't building the algorithm. It's getting the newsroom on board. At Hamburger Morgenpost, editorial buy-in was crucial. With Kilkaya's approach, journalists felt they were in control of the algorithm—not the other way around. That made all the difference.

Editors report that their work has become more rewarding. They feel freer to experiment and express editorial judgment. And when you make a change and see the results spike in real time—it fuels motivation!

And the results were truly outstanding.



CASE 2

FINANSVISEN, TAILORING FRONT PAGES TO SPECIFIC USER GROUPS

With Front Studio, the team created two tailored versions of the front page. One for logged-in subscribers and one for casual visitors. Each version remained under full editorial control. Editors chose the stories, the tone, and the structure, Front Studio just made sure the right user saw the right version.

“With different front pages for subscribers and non-subscribers, we’ve increased front page CTR, saved editorial time, reduced churn, and grown subscriptions. We’re never going back.”

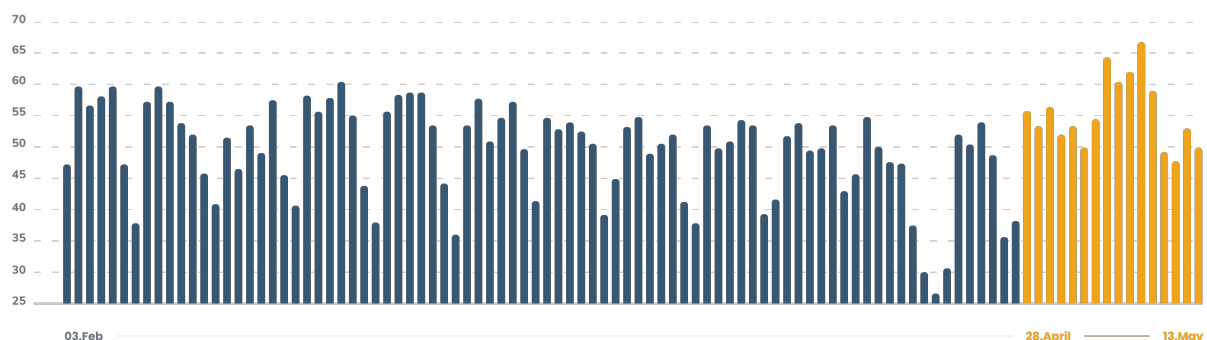
— Jon Trygve Hegnar, Finansavisen

CASE 3

ITAVISEN.NO, THE ALGORITHM NEVER SLEEPS

The site is primarily run by a single journalist. One of the most important effects they saw with Front Studio was that during periods when he wasn't working or publishing new stories, the site previously experienced major drops in CTR. With Front Studio in place, personalization ensures that the top of the page always features something new and interesting. Older articles are automatically recycled and re-ranked for returning visitors, so each visit feels fresh.

This has led to a significantly higher baseline, more stable traffic throughout the week, and an overall higher average CTR (19,6% increase) leading to a jump in daily article pageviews from 34,192 to 43,824.



LEARNING FROM SOCIAL MEDIA, AVOIDING ITS PITFALLS

Social media platforms have trained us to expect one thing above all: relevance. Every time users open Facebook, TikTok, or Instagram, there's always something new to consume. That's not an accident—it's the result of deeply personalised, behavior-driven feeds designed to reward attention and build habits.

But for news publishers, blindly copying these mechanics comes at a cost.

THE PITFALLS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Blackbox systems weaken journalism:

- Eroded editorial control: Journalists lose influence when algorithms choose what's shown.
- Reduced reader trust: If readers believe the front page only follows popularity, credibility suffers.

Echo chambers undermine diversity:

- Narrowed coverage: Feeds reflect user bias, not editorial judgment.
- Weakened public discourse: Journalism should challenge assumptions—not just reinforce them.

ENTER INFORMED PERSONALISATION

What publishers need is a different kind of AI—one that's transparent, explainable, and aligned with editorial goals.

Informed personalisation integrates human expertise with rule-based automation. Editors shape the front page using their values and insights, while the system adapts the structure in real time to match individual reader behavior.

It's not just better personalisation. It's smarter, safer, and built for journalism.

Personalised front pages used to mean giving up control. Not anymore. With Front Studio, newsrooms can create smarter, more engaging front pages that deliver both editorial impact and measurable results.

INMA CONFERENCE HOROSCOPE

*The stars have seen your LinkedIn posts.
They are not impressed.*



ARIES

Mar 21 – Apr 19

You'll interrupt a panel to share your "quick thought" that lasts 4 minutes. Robert Whitehead will halt you with such elegant precision that you immediately realize you've overstepped, while the rest of the room enjoys a hearty laugh. Your aura attracts both thought leaders and lost interns. Avoid eye contact with anyone holding a QR code.



TAURUS

Apr 20 – May 20

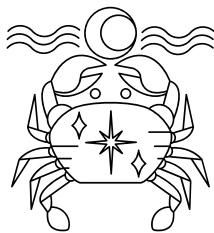
You'll make deep eye contact with a canapé and call it lunch. You look calm, but inside you're still trying to understand what "audience-led product transformation" really means. You'll be approached by three salespeople today. One of them will open with "Are you the decision-maker?" Say no and vanish like mist.



GEMINI

May 21 – Jun 20

You'll passionately agree with two opposing opinions within the same conversation. At one point, you'll try to attend three sessions at once using only optimism and a hallway pass. Mercury warns: your phone battery will abandon you during the most "networky" moment.



CANCER

Jun 21 – Jul 22

You drift through sessions, doodling headlines in your notebook while Greg Piechota's insights spark your imagination. You bond with a speaker over shared love for print nostalgia, but your dreamy question about "vibes-based journalism" puzzles the room. Your empathy wins hearts at the afterparty. Avoid signing up for follow-up webinars.



LEO

Jul 23 – Aug 22

You'll find a quiet spot to recharge – both mentally and with a power outlet. But just as you settle in, someone will pitch you a revolutionary CMS "built by journalists, for journalists." You'll nod politely while planning your escape route through the coffee station.



VIRGO

Aug 23 – Sep 22

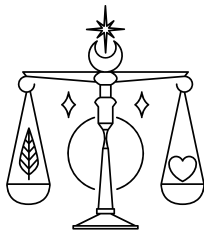
You corner Earl J. Wilkinson during the break and nod gravely as he links AI, newsroom change, and brand innovation. It feels profound. Then a B2B rep pitches a "strategic pilot" mid-burger. Your sharp LinkedIn post gets 60 likes, but you trip over green stress balls that say "Labrador CMS. No stress." You mediate a subscription debate, but make no promises before dessert.

Welcome to the media event of the season, where sponsors pretend they are not trying to sell, journalists pretend they are not judging anyone, and you pretend you love early breakfasts with strangers.

Whether you are here to network, name-drop or accidentally ask a keynote speaker where

the toilets are, the universe has a few thoughts. Love may or may not blossom near the coffee station, but awkward small talk definitely will.

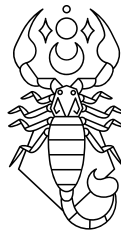
Read on to discover what the cosmos has planned for you.



LIBRA

Sep 23 – Oct 22

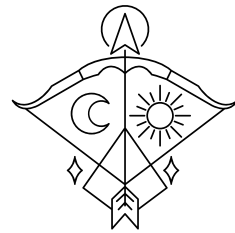
You're charming as ever, Libra. People flock to your lunch table like strategists to a post-it wall. You'll politely feign interest in everyone's media journey while ranking the snacks. A B2B rep tries "Can I steal you?", but your smooth escape leaves them thanking you. You'll find balance between the free prosecco, a tense AI panel, and the closing keynote.



SCORPIO

Oct 23 – Nov 21

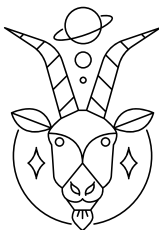
You're on a mission. Eyes on the prize. But somehow, you end up at karaoke with Birger from Norkon. It wasn't supposed to be like this. One minute you're networking over a quiet beer – the next, you're belting out "Total Eclipse of the Heart" in a shaky duet. Will you charm the bartender? Scare off the competition? Or just become known as "Birger's backing vocalist"? Either way: unforgettable.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov 22 – Dec 21

You've got a spreadsheet for congress ROI and a draft LinkedIn post summarizing the day before breakfast. At the sponsored dinner, a B2B salesperson pitches "real-time analytics" like it's revolutionary. Your LinkedIn views skyrocket, but a coffee spill ruins your notes. You ask Robert Whitehead if he wants to go cycling in the morning. To your horror, he says yes.



CAPRICORN

Dec 22 – Jan 19

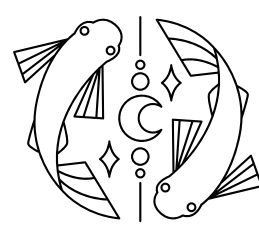
The professional. You've highlighted the agenda, colour-coded meetings, even brought printed business cards. But the universe has other plans. Your laptop updates mid-panel, and someone steals your reserved seat with a flat "sorry, didn't see the sign." Stay calm. You recover like only you can. Hijacking the Q&A, correcting the moderator, and somehow ending up on the next panel.



AQUARIUS

Jan 20 – Feb 18

You're the visionary. Before lunch, you'll pitch three new content models, outline a monetization strategy, and start a Slack group called "Radical CMS Reform (No Gatekeepers)." Someone from PR will gently suggest you slow down or "loop in leadership." Politely ignore them. Your ideas are five quarters ahead. Also: drink some water. Seriously, you keep forgetting.



PISCES

Feb 19 – Mar 20

You have no idea why you're here. Someone cc'ed you by accident, and now you're wearing a badge and applauding panels. You network like a ghost in a branded hoodie, Googling what INMA means. Suddenly: a man offers a tiny cocktail and asks what you think. You panic. Three hours later, you're debating paywalls with Lars, the Swede, and somehow agreed to drinks, dinner, and a "follow-up sync."



BACK PAGE REFLECTIONS

By Nils Ove Håland Riise

Forty days ago, this newspaper didn't exist.

The idea came during a conversation between Tarjei, our CEO, and me. At Kilkaya, we're all about the future—digital-first, AI-powered, and helping newsrooms personalize content in ways that actually make sense. But we also believe in remembering where we come from. Sometimes, the best way to look forward is to hold something real in your hands.

So we decided to make a newspaper.

The plan was to print it in Norway—until we did the math. Over 1000 copies? That would've added 220 kilos to our luggage. Let's just say: not ideal for the overhead bin. Thankfully, we found a fantastic print partner right here in New York. Crisis averted. Our backs are grateful.

The paper you're holding is the result of late nights, many Slack threads, a few wrong turns, and a lot of passion. We packed it with ideas and lessons from years of working in editorial analytics. Things we've learned about building loyal audiences, designing smarter front pages, and using AI without losing the human touch. But we also made space for fun—because that's part of who we are. We don't take ourselves too seriously, even when the work is serious.

THANK YOU

This project wouldn't have happened without a whole crew of brilliant people:

Tarjei, who not only shared the spark of this idea with me, but also pushed the content to be sharper, more relevant, and way more fun to read. Without your energy and instincts, this paper wouldn't exist.

Cecce, our designer and layout wizard. You took on every last-minute change from both me and Tarjei (and there were many—we accept the blame, mostly due to poor planning). You pulled it all together, beautifully.

The Kilkaya team, for stepping up, weighing in, and making this more than an idea. You brought it to life.

Our partners:

Norkon, Labrador, Pooool, Jeremy Clifford, The Audiencers, and Puggpig—thank you for believing in the same things we do. Together, we're building a future for news where loyalty matters and innovation isn't just a buzzword.

And the INMA team, for not only saying yes to the idea, but cheering it on. Thank you for giving it a home at this conference.

If you're at INMA in New York, come say hi. And if something in these pages speaks to you, or if you just want to talk about what's next in news, reach out. We'd love to hear from you!

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Tarjei Gilbrant, CEO
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