

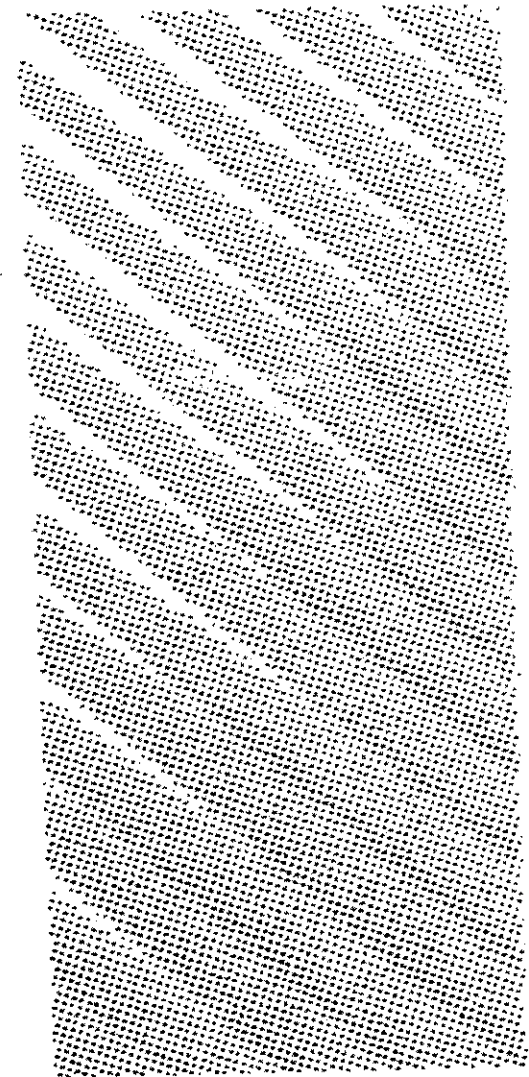
WSJ DXS

WSJ ●

# The Content Review: A Guide to Great Journalism

CONTENT REVIEW JULY 2020

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## About This Report

# Great Journalism Connects With Audiences.

Earlier this year, a group at The Wall Street Journal looked at our What's News newsletter, offered to new audiences and nonsubscribers. It is free and available to nonsubscribers, and it is regularly promoted to new readers who land on our site. But it only has 266,000 subscribers. Why?

We posited that something fresher, more personable and driven more by general audience interests of the moment—rather than print front-page or web site placement—might resonate. Some editors worried we would alienate the existing readership.

We did some user research. And what we learned is striking: More than one-third of the newsletter's recipients are already WSJ subscribers, and 43% of the people who replied to our survey are over the age of 70.

We held back on tearing up What's News, for the time being<sup>1</sup>, because of those readers.

In a nutshell, that exchange, captures the imperative we face in fully charting a digital strategy and future, fearful of giving up ground on existing success and thus risk-averse in seeking more. But that's a false tradeoff. At a time of great change in our industry and in society, our culture has to be nimble, closely following audiences and willing to use data to point us in the direction of greater product improvements and engagement.

We know the potential audience for what we do is much greater than our existing audience. To grow, we need to pay close attention to all our audiences—especially prospects and readers who are currently less engaged with us. Paying attention to our audiences, especially future audiences, is essential for our digital success and growth.

<sup>1</sup> Please note: Our opening example is not meant to be a criticism of any person or persons at The Wall Street Journal. But we have a broad cultural fear of change and we overweight the possibility of alienating some readers, compared to our opportunity cost of not changing and growing. And after this report was circulated, we did end up overhauling that newsletter to good result.

## About This Report

# **The Wall Street Journal must become an audience-focused newsroom. And we must prioritize our future audiences, rather than catering so much to our most traditional groups.**

Stepping back, the news industry has long found its place in the world deciding what people needed to know that day, and then providing that. Most readers had few other regular sources at their fingertips. They read the newspaper, and then threw it away. Digging deeper on something required a trip to the library.

But over the past 20 years, the world has moved from an era of information scarcity into an era of information overload. That has fundamentally changed the way people consume news and information. It has also fundamentally changed the way many content companies operate. Crucially, it has opened the doors to technology companies becoming a main channel for people to get the news.

Despite good intentions, an early paywall model and progress in recent years, The Wall Street Journal has not done enough to adjust to changing audience habits. The Journal remains too print-oriented—in some sections, our focus and workflow remains print-first,

despite the long-term trajectory for print; it should be digital-first, where the growing audience is.

And, we are too limited to the tastes of editors. We don't define every bit of the news—it is what it is. Becoming a digital organization means, by definition, listening to your readers. That's one of the main differences between print and digital. In digital, you get feedback on the tastes of your audiences. There is no real digital-product company that succeeds without listening to its audiences.

At the Journal, when readers' tastes have been taken into account, it's been primarily focused on traditional, loyal audiences. On its face, of course, it's a laudable instinct to care about loyal readers. But our extensive research yielded a surprising and important insight: Pageviews of our articles are so dominated by "heavy" readers that they overlook the tastes of our "light" readers, who are also paying subscribers. The heavy readers—those who visit us more than 10 days per month—are primarily our traditional audiences who, in general, aren't unsubscribing.

## About This Report

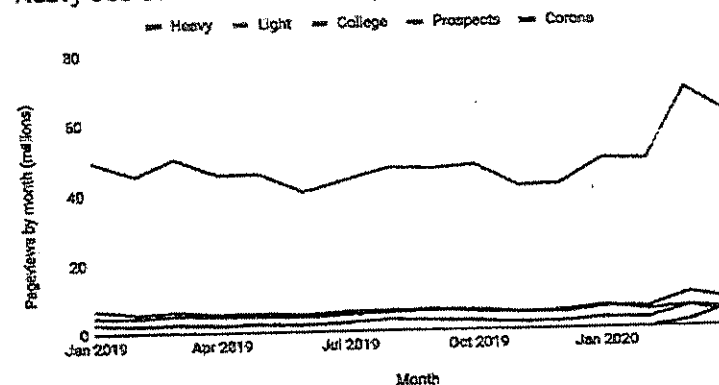
This means that when we look at subscriber pageviews as a metric of success, we overinvest in a group that isn't powering our growth. Worse, we've taken the wrong lesson from data that told us an area of coverage was read by just our heavy readers. A central recommendation we will make in this report is that we have to look around the corner and focus more on the groups of people who read us, but who aren't our "heavy" readers. Remarkably, this shift will likely benefit heavy readers, as well. It turns out heavy readers also read the pieces that light users and nonsubscribers do—and that heavy readers spend just as much time, often more, with those pieces.

**You'll see once you have digested all of this is that this report lays out an all-audience strategy. And, it's a strategy that can help us grow.**

We know it's early in the report for a line chart, but the one to the right is essential. It's one of our favorites... It shows the pageviews we get from our readers, and see the top green line for our "heavy" readers. The "heavy" readers dominate our pageviews, even though there aren't all that many of them.

Pause if you're thinking: "How do we get the rest of our readers to be like those heavy readers?" We can't! We can't make people change their interests or get them to do things they don't want to do. Editors don't change consumer behavior. What we need to do, instead, is adapt our own behavior and our content to better fit broader audience interests. We won't leave long-time WSJ readers behind—we have found data that suggests a strong pathway forward for all readers. And, as we put out the news report, we won't leave reporters' and editors' judgment behind—the ability to look around the corner in a news story remains important—but we'll more regularly learn from audience data to

Heavy Users Account for the Majority of WSJ Traffic



help us in our journalism. As Clarence W. Barron, an early owner of our company, said, "Everything can be Improved." Barron grew The Wall Street Journal's audience from 7,000 to 50,000 subscribers.

We aren't starting from scratch—we have already made moves in this direction, committed resources towards it and there is widespread excitement to grow. We will build on all this and evolve together.

## About This Report

### The Bottom Line:

1. Our primary focus is on serving digital audiences.
2. Digital growth and delivery should be at the forefront of news decisions. Print considerations should be left to the print desk, which is downstream and at the end of the workflow.
3. Audience data must be central to our decision making. And we shouldn't let our department structures fragment our coverage in ways that don't serve our readers, and not our department structure.
4. We should elevate the needs of light-reading users as well as those of prospects. That includes a wider variety of topics and storytelling formats including more evergreen service-oriented content and news explainers.
5. An important finding in our data analysis is that readers of all types—nonsubscribers, light-reading subscribers and heavy-reading subscribers—are interested in our corporate coverage. This finding reconfirms our identity as a business-work-money focused publication. We must remain a must-read on business for business readers and also consistently prioritize accessible, utility-oriented business stories for general readers.

## About This Report

**In this report, we will make specific recommendations in four main areas that all drive at broadening our audience reach and engagement:**

1. How We Listen to Audiences
2. What We Cover
3. How We Cover Things
4. How We Work

Before we get to those recommendations, we will establish some baseline knowledge.  
And we will end with next steps.

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## About This Report

**The content review is meant to begin an ongoing dialogue—and not merely be a one-off analysis. But the information shows the urgency of becoming an audience-focused news company.**

We have created a framework and tools for setting and evaluating coverage strategy that we are confident the strategy editors can use to iterate with reporters and editors around the newsroom to drive toward digital growth and improved relevancy. With this framework and the tools, we can all drive toward faster digital growth and greater relevancy.

As we move forward, we need the support and the will to be bold. We have to create an environment where people are confident enough and secure enough to question and change what we do. We need to have honest, ongoing self-assessment of what's working and what's not. We can reach quality at scale by working together and listening to our audiences.

## About This Report

**This report was created by WSJ staffers who care about the Journal and its public mission, and are helping to steward it into the future.**

We are members of the WSJ's Digital Experience and Strategy unit. The team, known as DXS, is a cross-functional group that spans all areas of the WSJ and follows a data-driven, audience-focused approach.

## About This Report

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## About This Report

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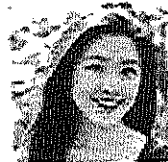
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## About This Report

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A special thanks to folks in our Design team for laying out the report:

DXS also thanks **Maria Petersen, Kerry Lancaster, Rupert Thurlow** and the other talented folks of Dow Jones Customer Intelligence for their excellent research, and also **John Wiley** and **Jon Buckley** from Membership for their helpful data and research.

DXS first delivered the content review to Editor in Chief **Matt Murray** on July 4. In the July 4 report, there were some sample findings and recommendations for each coverage area. We have removed those from this wider distribution, so that we can discuss them with the relevant newsroom partners, and have made updates to the report based on feedback from newsroom leaders.

## About This Report

### Newsroom Contributors

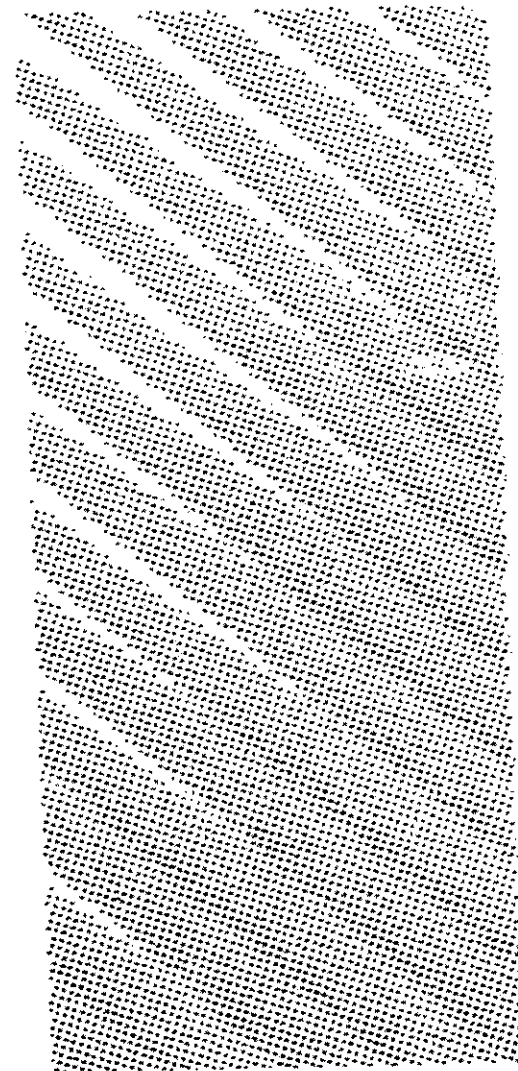
The following people provided helpful information for this report via interviews, surveys or other methods. They were critical to our work and we deeply appreciate their frank insight. (Note: There were additional newsroom contributors who requested anonymity.)

Jason Anders	Jamie Heller	McGasa Korn	James Graff	Nico Gendron	Jeff McCutley	Carlos Wotara	Dennie Fitzgerald	Phillip Izzo
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# Section 1: Baseline Knowledge

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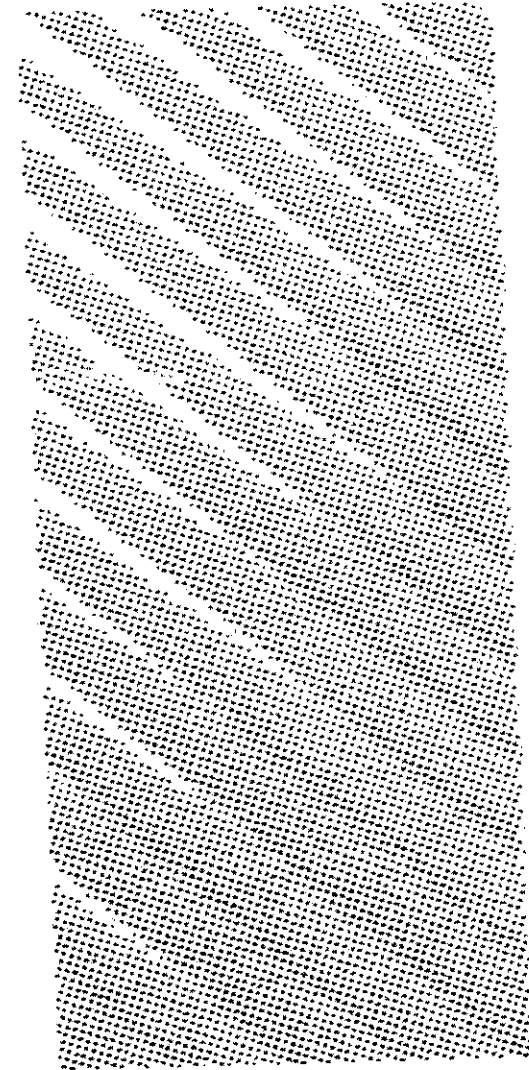


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# **Chapter 1: Mission, Vision, Strategy and Goals**

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## Chapter 1: Mission, Vision, Strategy and Goals

### DJ Mission

To be the definitive source of news and insight for decision-makers around the world.

### WSJ Mission

We believe that trusted, factual journalism is right for the world and good for business.

### Strategy

To understand the things that most distinguish our journalism and to pair that news mission with a thorough understanding of the value we provide our members—current and future.

### Vision

To be known for our down-the-middle journalism as well as our openness, accessibility, resonating experiences and awesome innovation.

## Chapter 1: Mission, Vision, Strategy and Goals

The newsroom is always on deadline and doesn't often stop and talk about our mission, strategy and vision. But it's important to reflect on what we've set forward as we go about our work. A vision represents the place we want to go—it's an acknowledgment that we aren't there yet, but it's a dream we can see ahead. As you read this report, we urge you to consider how the findings and recommendations can help us achieve WSJ's vision.

The work we've carried out in this report is the essence of our **strategy**. We have examined the landscape, our audience data and discussed with colleagues what distinguishes our journalism.

As Editor in Chief Matt Murray describes our approach to news:

*"We are the definitive source of news and information through the lens of business, finance, economics and money, global forces that shape the world and are key to understanding it. Our audience is anyone who wants or has a job, a career or an ambition; who seeks money, makes money, spends money and saves money, who desires an edge as an investor, an employee, a manager or an entrepreneur; or who simply wants to better understand how the world works.*

*We provide facts, data and information, not assertions or opinions. We believe in full separation between News and Opinion. We pursue exclusive stories, with the goal of breaking all important scoops in our core areas; deep insight and analysis, and actionable intelligence—being the first read and the last word. We have a unique, trusted responsibility as a watchdog*

*and custodian. Across coverage, we seek a genuinely diverse set of voices and experiences with every story striving to speak to as wide an audience as possible.*

*As journalists, we are humble, curious, empathetic, informed and open-minded. Our work is plain, direct, concise and accessible, but not simplistic. Trust in our news, information and authority is the currency we seek to earn with all we produce.*

*We have an important social purpose. Society benefits from a common set of verifiable facts and a broad set of voices that reflect our world, even in times of stress and division—indeed, especially in such times. Providing those facts informs debate and contributes to the greater good."*

Here, you will see that approach paired with evidence of what resonates with our audiences. We'll focus throughout on both current and future members, and we'll highlight where there are trade-offs.

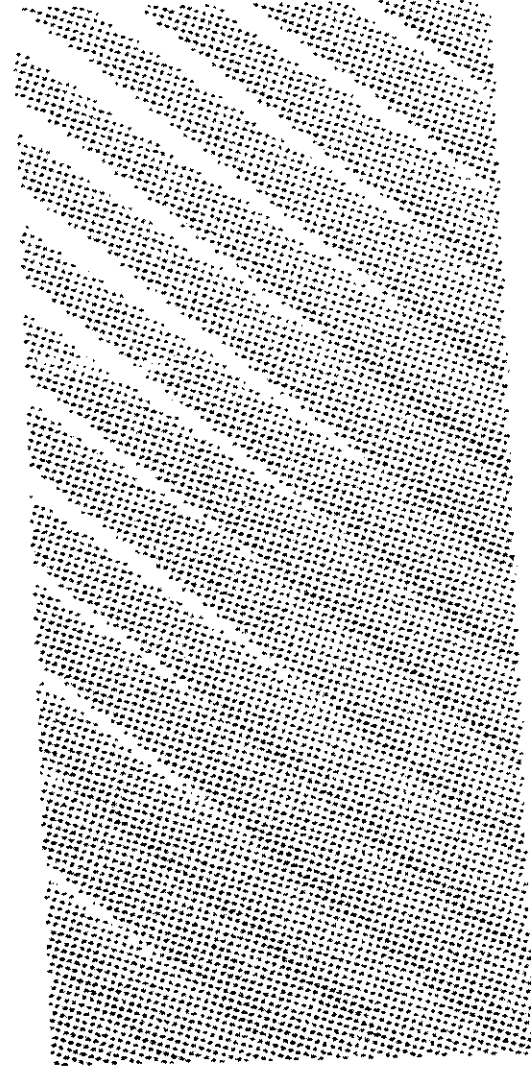
And the mission, as stated here, is for the entirety of The Wall Street Journal. It's the same mission for our colleagues in Membership. The mission gives us all a common touchpoint on what we don't want to lose sight of, even as we reinvent. And as we pursue **goals**—the WSJ's goals center on reach and engagement—we keep our mission in mind.



## **Chapter 2: Great Journalism Connects with Audiences**

**Establish a common lexicon about what makes  
great, impactful journalism in 2020.**

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## Chapter 2: Great Journalism Connects with Audiences

In the earliest days of the Journal, there was a close connection to its audience and a focus on utility. Originally, the company hand-delivered short news briefs throughout the day to traders on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. From those briefs, the Journal began in 1889 as a four-page afternoon paper. It was, in Matt Murray's words, "intended to fill a growing need for objective business and financial news in an emerging market where industry was growing but was hampered by opaque and unreliable information."

The need for reliable information has remained important ever since, and the Journal has expanded into many areas beyond business and markets. Indeed, today the newsroom has eight main coverage areas: World, U.S., Corporate, Finance, D.C., Life & Arts, Health & Science and Investigations and many separate feature sections. Each month, the WSJ produces more than 3,500 written stories, 90 videos plus an additional 168 for Twitter, 175 podcasts, scores of live journalism events, 15,000 social media posts and about 475 editions of newsletters. We also create news experiences for around a dozen different WSJ technologies and off-site platforms. And six days a week, we put out a newspaper.

Amid all that content production, it can be easy to lose sight of what truly distinguishes us in the eyes of our audiences, what's working and resonating, what's bringing and keeping people with us. Too much attention goes to the flow of information parceled out each day and then forgotten, like a print edition that lands in the recycling bin. Not enough attention goes to the living news product that we are adding onto every day. We can be more than a daily edition. We can be a library of expertise.

Consider how NerdWallet approaches its desktop homepage: with a clear "Why are you here?" question that emphasizes reader value. While we wouldn't suggest replacing all of the latest news on WSJ's homepage, imagine how choices like these—perhaps even as an alternate point of entry—would welcome new and casual users, helping them mine our wealth of expertise and knowledge. There's a host of guided journeys and useful adventures we could build using our existing content, attracting entirely new audiences to the Journal. (It's worth noting that value is also passively exchanged in NerdWallet's interaction. Readers volunteer a need or curiosity, and publishers can leverage that first-party data to tailor experiences, recommend more relevant content, etc.)

### Make all the right money moves

Need expert money advice, helpful tools and tailored insights to answer your money questions? Turn to the Nerds.

Easily explore your best money options

Credit Cards   Investing   Insurance   Student Loans   Mortgage   Personal Loan   Savings

## Chapter 2: Great Journalism Connects with Audiences

We also fail to sufficiently understand whether we are having impact by connecting and resonating with broader audiences. A news scoop is a great thing, as is a beautifully written narrative or ground-breaking investigation, but we need to do more than just get the scoop—we need to get those great scoops to audiences. It's central to both the Dow Jones and WSJ mission statements to provide wide-scale trusted information. Indeed, **how can we have wide-spread and well-known impact without meaningfully reaching and engaging broad audiences?** Achieving impact takes focus on distribution but also on the very way we tell stories, the topics we cover, the voices we feature and the messages we send the world about who we are

As we continue in our job as stewards of this great news organization, we must translate The Journal for the new world. In order to do that, it's essential that our newsroom recognizes that. **Great journalism connects with audiences.**

What does this mean? **Finding out new information and effectively communicating it.**

## **Chapter 2: Great Journalism Connects with Audiences**

# **What is Great Journalism?**

**Finding out new information and effectively communicating it.**

**What sort of information?**

- Breaks news, explains a complex world and holds power to account
- Drives action, helps you make decisions
- Introduces new perspectives and educates

**What does it mean to effectively communicate it?**

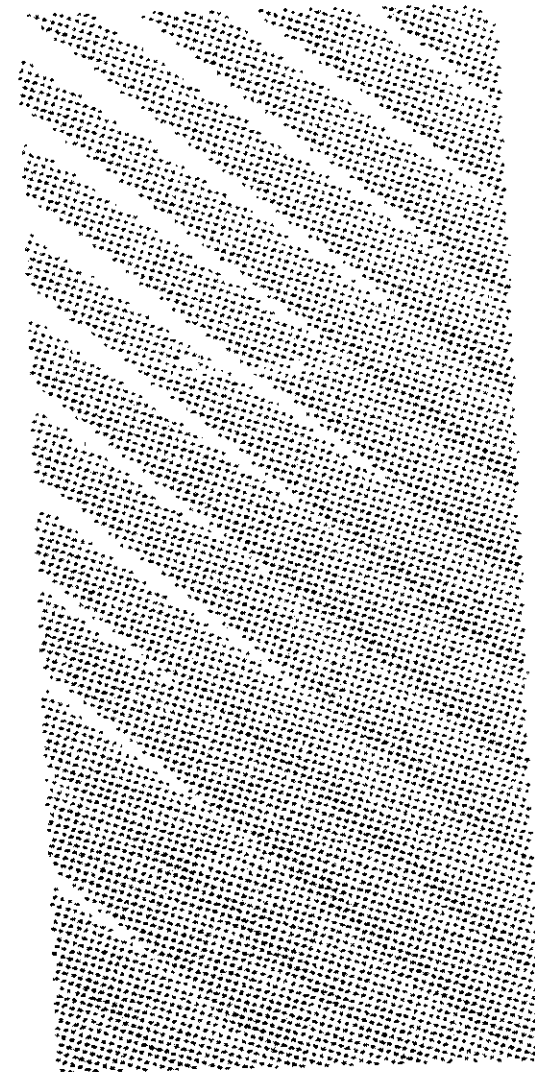
- Resonates with its audience
- Runs in correct format, storytelling that works for the audience
- Distribution and delivery help stories reach their largest interested audience



## Chapter 3: Our Growth

Establish a common understanding of  
our growth trajectory.

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## Chapter 3: Our Growth

Too often, we still think of a WSJ reader as a decades-long subscriber deeply imbued with our traditions and legacies.

The problem is, there are only so many of these hard-core WSJ readers. And there are only so many long-term WSJ readers. Unlike print, where people stick around, digital readers are more fickle. They come and go. And they don't religiously read everything we do—far from it.

The Newsroom and Membership teams have agreed to new ambitious goals that are driven by the desire for our journalism to have impact and relevance, as well as financial realities. A key goal is to increase the unique visitors to our platforms each month. This metric—often referred to as “our reach” is important both journalistically in terms of the impact of our work and commercially in terms of introducing what we do to potential new subscribers. We will be talking about these goals around the newsroom. Meeting them requires work from all parts of the company.

It will be hard but necessary work.

Here are some numbers and concepts we should all keep in mind:



## Chapter 3: Our Growth

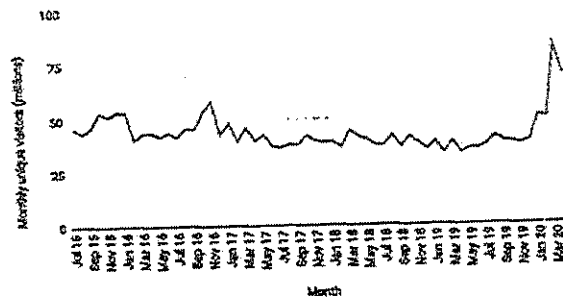
### 1. The 50 Million Ceiling

We have never sustained traffic of more than 50 million monthly unique visitors for more than a few months. In fact, we hovered just under 39 million for three years before the Covid-19 pandemic.

*What does this mean?* Our biggest traffic gains have been tied to large news stories, rather than an ability to create lasting loyalty with a news report of interest to the broader public.

We often talk about pageviews on our stories, but we will be shifting to focusing on unique visitors because, ultimately, our success and growth depends on having more people enjoy our journalism. From a membership perspective, more visitors to our site means that we have the opportunity to impress and welcome more people as subscribers.

WSJ Monthly Unique Visitors Since July 2015



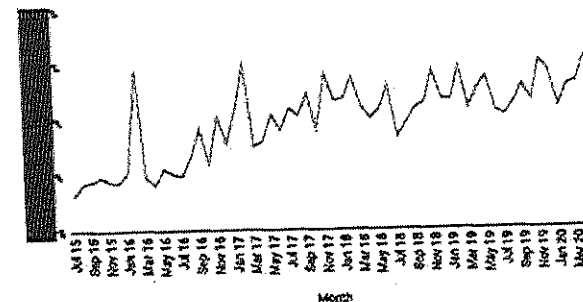
This is the monthly on-site sales divided by our monthly unique visitors. Note that there are other sales, like corporate sales and sales in the college park, and also a small amount of sales. But those aren't driven by traffic to our site in the way as our monthly on-site sales so don't make sense to compare to our traffic.

### 2. It's Not Easy Converting People

Our average conversion rate<sup>2</sup> ranges between 0.5% and 0.6% and hasn't moved much since early 2017.

*What does this mean?* Even when we've had huge spikes in traffic, as we did during coronavirus, we haven't materially improved our lasting, ongoing ability to convert visitors to become members. To move the needle significantly in our total digital subscriber base over time, we will need to sustain a far higher number of unique visitors. And, since our conversion rate is largely flat, we can't bank on news spikes to grow and sustain our subscriber base. We have to create content and product experiences that can attract and retain larger audiences.

Conversion Rate by Month



## Chapter 3: Our Growth

### 3. The Constant Trial

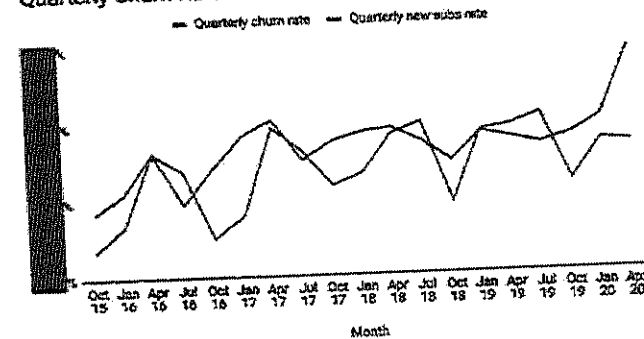
Quarterly churn and quarterly new subscriber growth are too often too close to each other.

*What does this mean?* Even as we celebrate conversions each day in the news meeting, we are losing people—often, almost as many people as we are gaining. In fact, since the summer of 2015, our average individual, on-site digital subscriber growth rate (excluding student and corporate memberships) has been **1.1%** per quarter, but our average churn rate per quarter has been **1.1%**. And without the extra-strong uptick we saw during the initial coronavirus story, our growth rate would average to **0.0%** over that period.

We are hopeful that our improved churn rate in fiscal year 2020 will continue to improve, and we can all do our part in that by focusing on journalism that works with our audiences.

In sum, we can't think we've got a comfy base of digital subscribers who will be satisfied if we just keep doing what we're doing. Instead, we must realize that we are on a constant trial with our audiences, even our subscribers.

Quarterly Churn Rate and New Subscriptions Rate



## Chapter 3: Growth

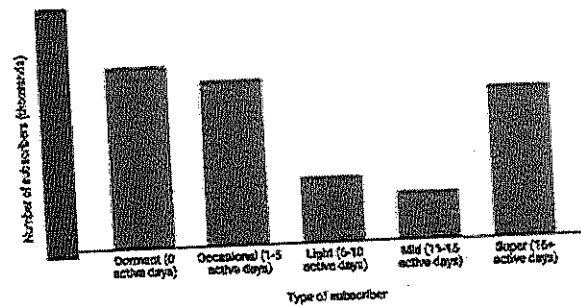
### 4. Many Subscribers Have Low Active Days

Central to our challenge is that many of our subscribers don't come to us very often.

*What does this mean?* Not surprisingly, our less active subscribers are more likely to unsubscribe. We're focusing far too much on keeping our super users when they're the least likely to churn.

As you'll hear in this report, our clearest opportunity is to focus more on these occasional and light readers to keep them around.

Wall Street Journal Subscribers, by Active Days



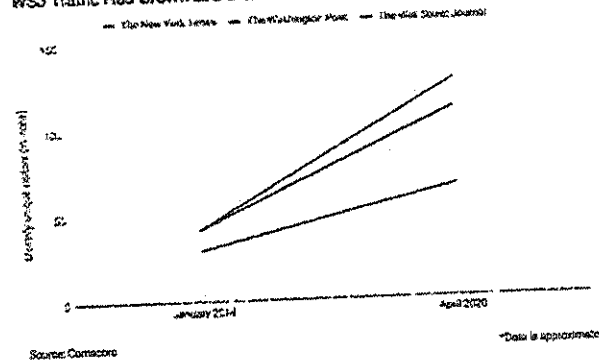
Data from June 2020

### 5. Not in the Conversation

Meantime, our overall audience reach—and its rate of growth—lag behind our traditional competitors, who made jumps in traffic about four years ago that we did not.

*What does this mean?* Most digital growth in media today is tied to subscriber growth. It's hard for us to pursue subscriber growth when we have generally been reaching just 15% of the adult news consuming population. We need to grow the top of our audience funnel, even as we improve conversion rates.

WSJ Traffic Has Grown at a Slower Rate Compared with Competitors



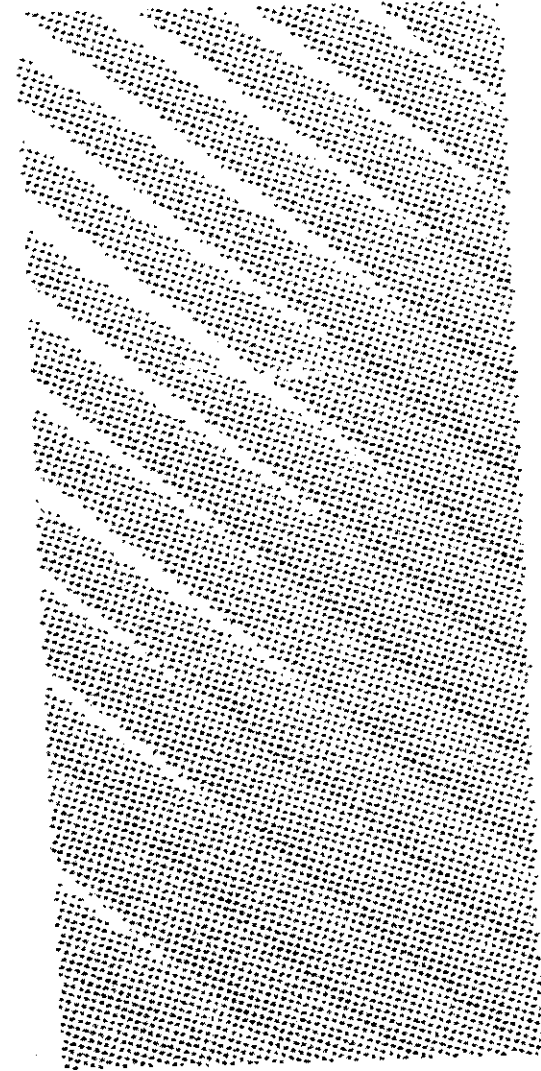
### Chapter 3: Growth

**From all these points, here's the bottom line: If we want to grow to 5.5 million digital subscribers, and if we continue with churn, traffic and digital growth about where they are today—it will take us on the order of 22 years.**

WSJ ●

## **Chapter 4: Focus on what our audiences do on our platforms.**

CONTENT REVIEW: JULY 2020



## Chapter 4: Focus on what our audiences do on our platforms

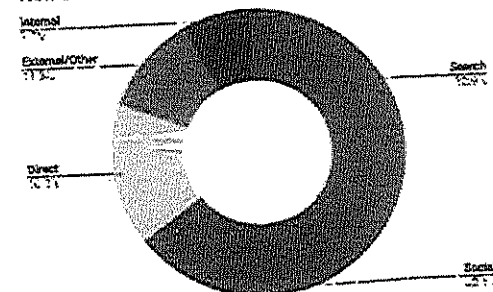
Whereas the newspaper is a daily and often expiring flow of news, our digital platforms are more akin to a constantly expanding library. The new releases are up at the front, but the stacks are filled with far more material that builds upon itself every day. It's organized in many ways with many different access points. And there are nooks where other visitors have left comments, and places they might even meet for conversation.

If we were building our digital platforms from scratch, with the benefit of hindsight, we'd probably structure them more like Wikipedia: capturing our expertise and knowledge in always-evolving pages that intentionally link to each other. More on this in Chapter 10.

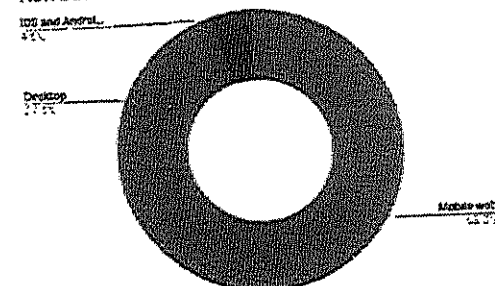
Since we are focusing on growth throughout a lot of this report, let's look at the points of entry for our nonsubscribers. They come to us mainly on mobile web and desktop web, with very little app usage, and they reach us largely via search, social media and other external sources. When they come to us from places like search and social, they land on our article pages, not our home page.

In the graphic below, we show where nonsubscriber traffic comes from and how it enters our site. The darker the shade of green, the bigger the number. We will hold info sessions to walk the newsroom through this in greater detail.

Non-Subscriber Views By Source\*



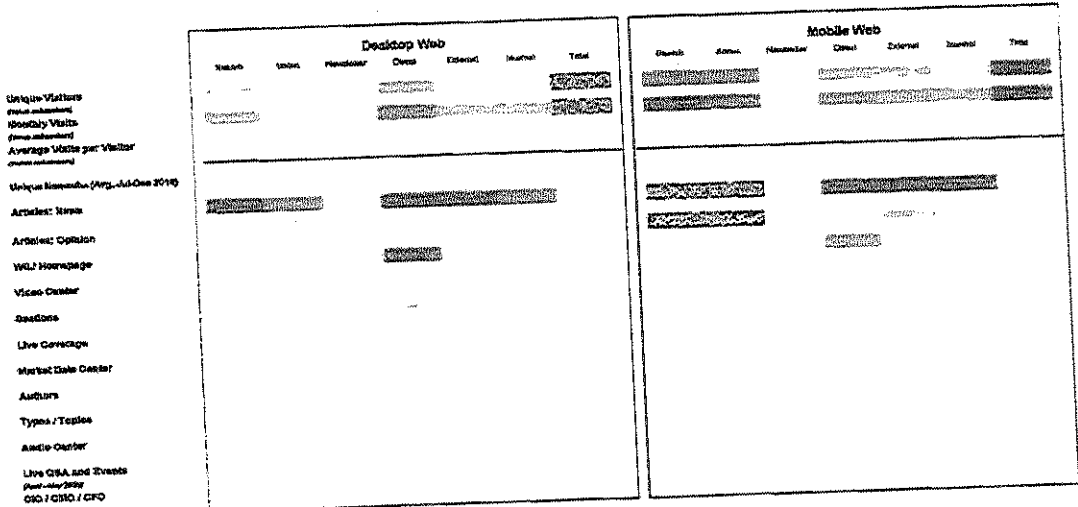
Non-Subscriber Uniques By Device



Data from May 18-24, 2020  
Source: Adobe Analytics

Chapter 4: Focus on what our audiences do on our platforms

The Audience Growth Goal Grid



As we are driving toward WSJ's goal of reaching many more people, DXS has created a framework to better-understand where we have the largest opportunities to grow, and to ensure that our product and content priorities align with these areas. We call it the Goal Grid.

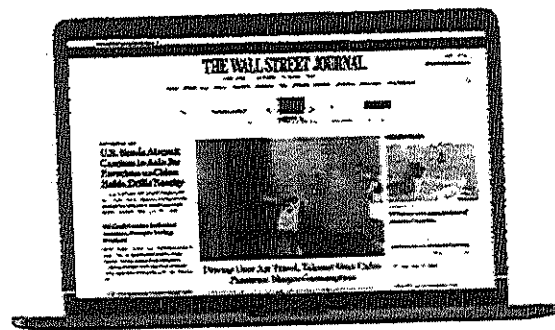
For nonsubscribers, it focuses on mobile web and desktop web, since that is where 95% of our nonsubscriber unique visitors come each month.

We will return to the Goal Grid at the end of this report as we provide more detail on coverage areas. For now, as a baseline, notice the entry points of nonsubscribers are different from where our newsroom focuses.

For instance: The homepage, where many people inside our newsroom spend lots of attention, gets 1.5 million unique nonsubscribers per month while our articles get far more visitors 1.5 million different nonsubscribers per month. (And notice how much larger the portion is going to mobile web rather than desktop, yet few people in our newsroom focus on mobile web.)

## Chapter 4: Focus on what our audiences do on our platforms

In other words, much of our audience is coming in a side door, while we tend to the garden out front.



Desktop Homepage: far fewer  
monthly nonsubscriber visitors



Mobile web  
articles:  
far more  
monthly  
nonsubscriber  
visitors

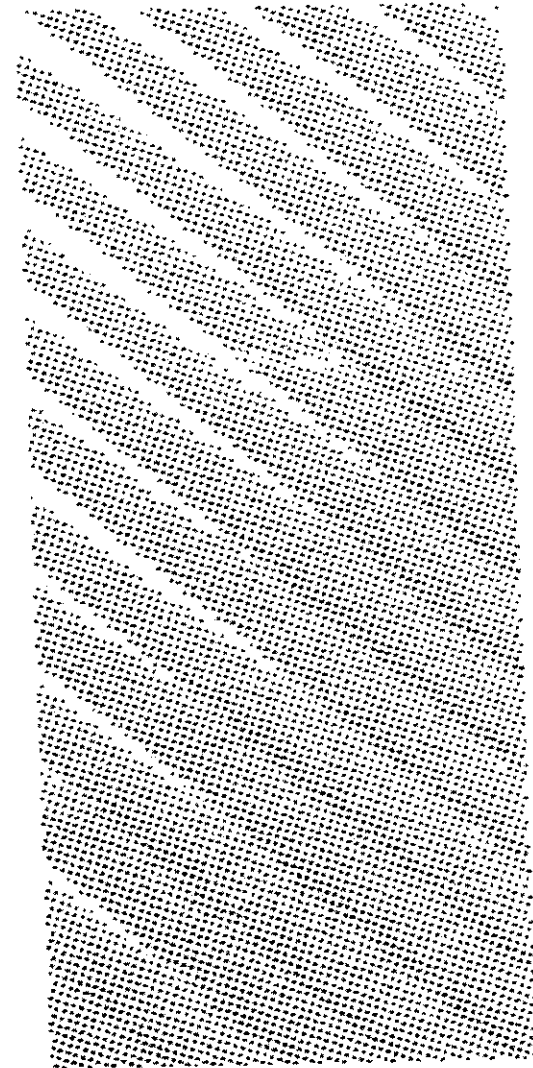


WSJ ●

## Chapter 5: Who Are Our Audiences?

CONTENT REVIEW: JULY 2020

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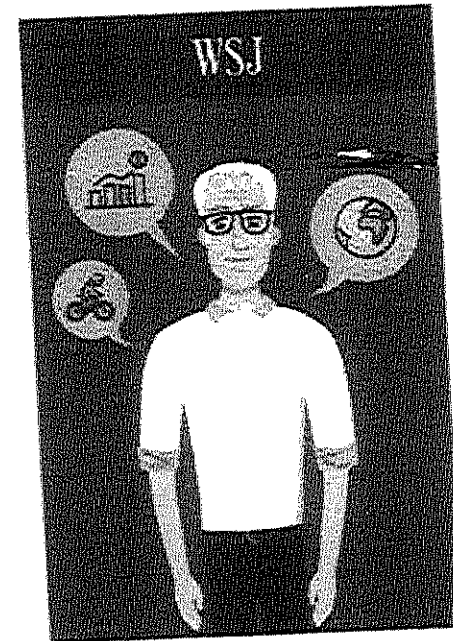


## Chapter 5: Who Are Our Audiences?

**We used to talk about “our audience.”  
Now we increasingly talk about “our  
audiences.”**

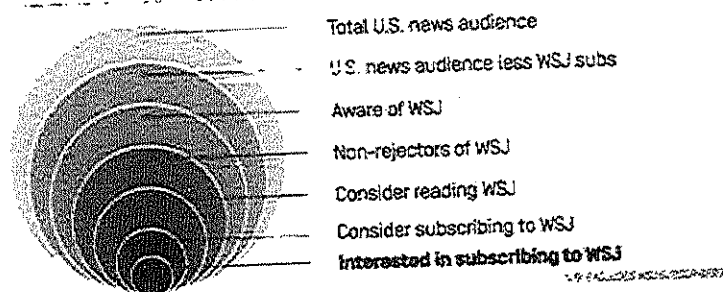
We don't just have one homogenous, loyal group that reads us, and to grow, we need to find ways to meet different needs of different audiences. To the right is the stereotypical image of “the WSJ reader” that we're told many readers associate with us.

Indeed, among our subscribers, more than a majority are male and the average age is 49 (down from 56 just four years ago). We also have information about many of our members' occupations. The largest concentration of our members work in a finance role, the second largest concentration are retired and financial advisors come in third. We are happy these readers are among our subscribers—indeed, we are committed to remaining a must-read on finance, for instance—but this is a finite set of people and we are interested in providing news to a broad set of decision makers.



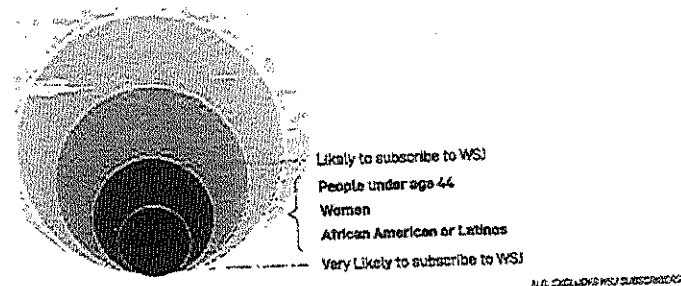
## Chapter 5: Who Are Our Audiences?

Headroom Funnel for WSJ in USA



Market research by the WSJ offers us important lessons<sup>9</sup> about the news-consuming public, and people who are interested in spending time with our coverage. There are 12 million people now who are likely or very likely to subscribe to the WSJ.

Headroom Funnel for WSJ in USA



It's important to note that a sizeable portion of the audiences within these innermost blue circles are people of color, young people and women.

To be precise, within the two innermost circles, where people are most seriously considering subscribing to the WSJ, are shown above.

\* These numbers are from the end of 2018 but still highly relevant and directionally helpful in thinking about how our growth audience are changing

## Chapter 5: Who Are Our Audiences?

In interviews, many newsroom leaders confirmed they believe growing with new audiences is essential to our future.

*"It is the single most important element of our future," said Mike Siconolfi, our investigations editor.  
"To be able to attract more diverse readers, younger readers, readers across the political spectrum is absolutely essential. We've made strides, but that is the core franchise question for us."*

We will return in our recommendations to how we can pivot toward and embrace these audiences.

For now, in our baseline knowledge, we want to outline another way to look at our audiences—by their subscription group or pack and by how often they use our products. This method, frequently used by our colleagues in Membership, is the most reliable way to look at audiences and predict whether or not they will remain members. It turns out that readers' behavior on our platforms is hugely predictive of whether they stay with us.

## Chapter 5: Who Are Our Audiences?

### Our recommendations will be framed around these cohorts.

They are:

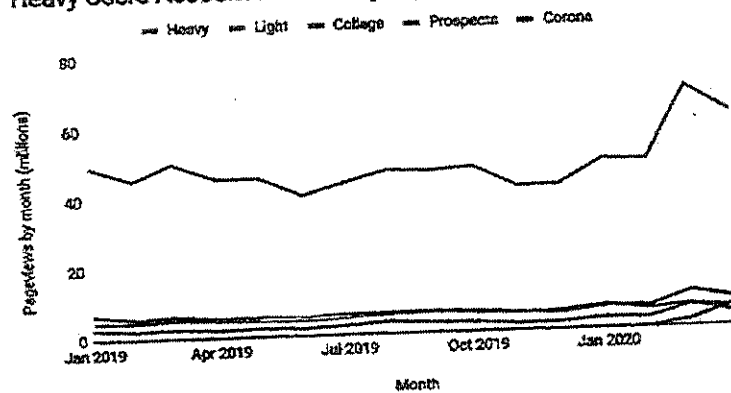
1. **Other Nonsubscribers**—These are nonsubscribers who are coming to us occasionally or in many cases, just once.
2. **Nonsubscriber Prospects**—These are nonsubscribers who are coming to us frequently.
3. **College**—These are subscribers who are in university packs. About half of these pay for their subscription, at a reduced rate, and about half are people who have activated an account paid for by their university.
4. **Light**<sup>4</sup>—These are subscribers who visit us only a few times per month. They have one to 10 active days.
5. **Heavy**<sup>4</sup>—These are the subscribers who read us a lot. They have more than 10 active days visiting our platforms per month.
6. **Corona**—These are the new subscribers who joined during the peak of the coronavirus coverage. NOTE: The reason they have no pageviews until March in the diagram is they were not members before then. Within this Corona cohort of readers there are both "light" and "heavy" readers.

<sup>4</sup> For the content review, we have defined "light" as being the two lightest cohorts that Membership looks at. Membership breaks what we call the "Light" cohort into two groups—one group with one to five active days per month and another group with six to 10 active days. Our "Light" group includes readers with one to 10 active days, combining those two groups.

<sup>4</sup> For the content review, we have defined "heavy" as being the two heaviest cohorts that Membership looks at. Membership looks at a "Mid" group with readers who are active 11 to 15 days per month and a "Super" group of readers who are active 16+ days per month. Our "Heavy" group includes people with 11+ days, combining those two groups.

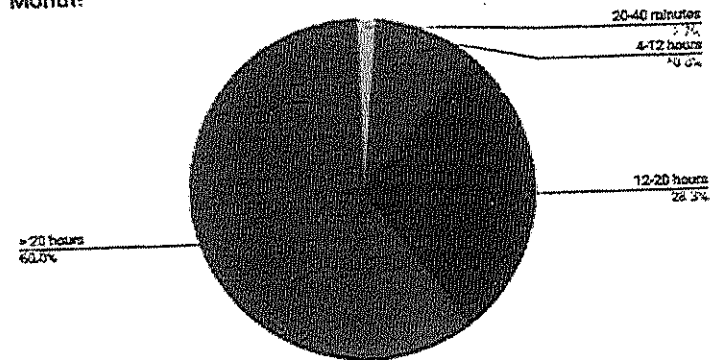
## Chapter 5: Who Are Our Audiences?

Heavy Users Account for the Majority of WSJ Traffic



As noted in the introduction to this report, heavy subscribers make up the vast majority of our pageviews.

How Much Time do You Spend Consuming WSJ Journalism Each Month?



And, as a side note, we need to keep in mind that WSJ journalists tend to be heavy readers. The above demonstrates what members of the newsroom said in our survey about their time spent per month.

Keep in mind: When you think of your own tastes and predilections, you are most likely a "heavy" reader!

## Chapter 5: Who Are Our Audiences?

**Given that heavy readers make up the vast majority of our pageviews, you might ask: Why do the other readers matter?**

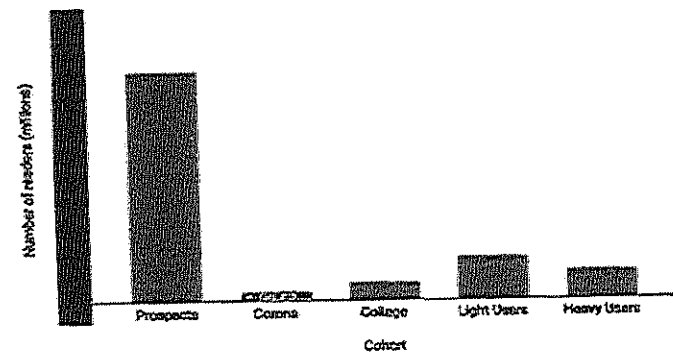
Here are several reasons:

1. There are only so many "heavy"<sup>6</sup> readers—making up a fraction of our subscriber base. From a financial standpoint, their subscriptions alone do not support all of our business. (Recall from Chapter 3 that the churn rate is extremely high for our light readers.)
2. We have a clear opportunity to improve our retention by adjusting our content and experience to improve engagement among our "light" readers.
3. Our most loyal base of heavy readers tends to be older. We need to think about new and different audiences to plan for the future.
4. The tastes of heavy readers can diverge from the tastes of light readers, and we find in this report that following the tastes of light readers can help sort through what heavy readers spend the most time reading.
5. To have greater impact with our work, it needs to be part of the broader societal conversation. In the internet era, that means our journalism needs to generate attention from more than our heavy readers.

<sup>6</sup> In this report, as explained earlier, we are considering "heavy readers" to be the two Membership categories of "super" plus "mid" users.

Take a look at the breakdown of how many readers are in each of these cohorts:

**Wall Street Journal Readers, by Cohort**



Date from January 2019 - May 2020

## **Chapter 5: Who Are Our Audiences?**

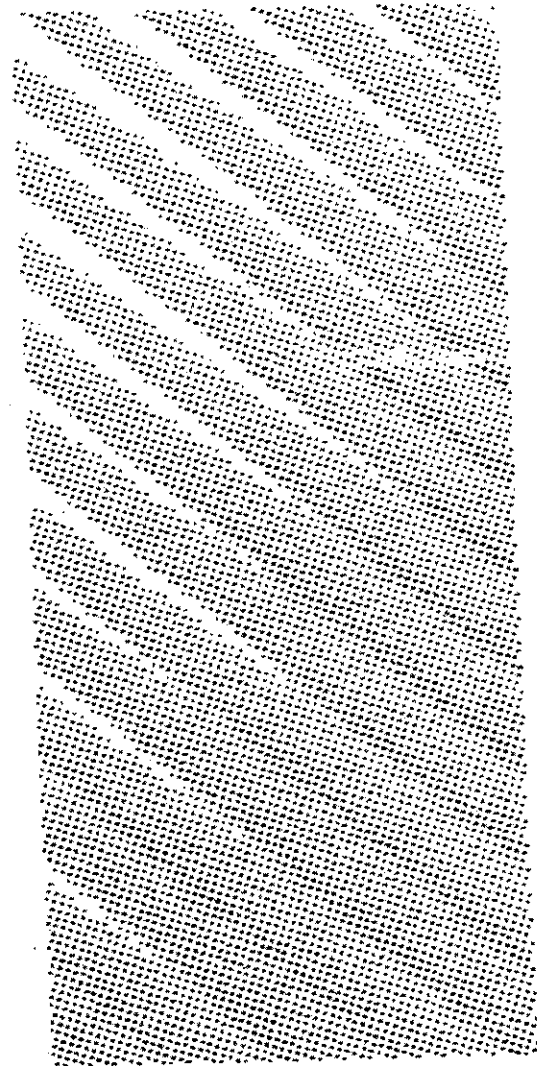
**To reach a large audience, we need to look beyond heavy users.**





## Section 2: Recommendations

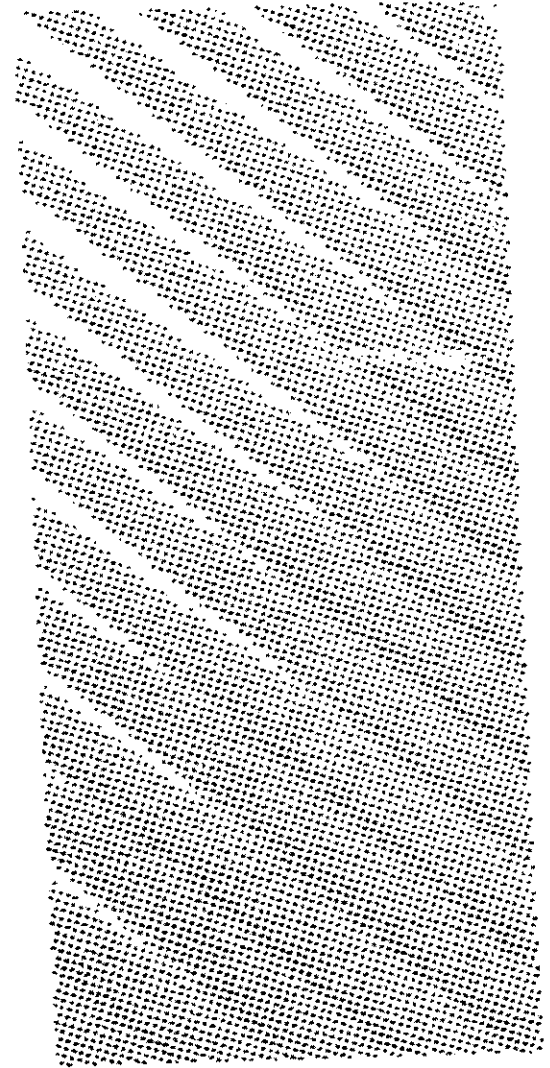
CONTENT REVIEW: JULY 2020



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# Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

CONTENT REVIEW JULY 2020



## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

It's all too easy, for newsrooms and any other business, to assume that audiences will eat whatever we want to serve them. In fact, the most conversations around digital journalism tend to center on how to get "our great journalism to more people." But, remember, it isn't actually "great journalism" if it doesn't resonate widely with audiences.

**In designing our menu, we shouldn't serve whatever we want to make—we need to know what audiences are hungry for and how they want it served.**

In this chapter, we will discuss some areas that we have traditionally thought of as promotional add-ons, that in fact can be powerful ways of improving our storytelling and drawing in larger audiences.

This idea—the importance of listening to audiences for our ongoing content creation—is central to the coverage-strategy framework we will be presenting in the next chapter. It's only by paying attention to what information people seek on the Internet—not just what they read on WSJ.com—that we can resonate with large audiences and grow our reach and impact.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

We need to use our most powerful engagement tools, search, newsletters and social media to bring new audiences closer to us and to learn from them to make our content more valuable and more relevant to audiences.

We need to think of our journalism as being connected to communities, creating not just content but also experiences and ways for our readers to gather with us and each other. Even in our site navigation, we need to think about a person's visit as a conversation, where they tell us what they are interested in—and maybe volunteer a bit about themselves—and, then, we help them find what they want and we keep in touch with them. Otherwise, without cultivating a relationship, it's just too easy for people to click on the next thing and not come back.

The newsroom has already earnestly started building the foundation for this new, digital-first mindset. Our work must be consistently driven by user research and data—essential ways of listening to our audience—and we need to work together to create mechanisms for all of us to listen better.

During the first months of the pandemic, as one example, we launched the Reader Feedback form. This form has been embedded in 23 stories and has received 22,786 questions and submissions from readers. It has led to many stories, and not surprisingly, stories generated from reader questions tend to perform well.

Examples abound, and they keep generating traffic in several cases. For instance, [Is It Safe To Travel Again? Your Coronavirus Questions Answered](#) is still, months after publication,

driving thousands of daily search referrals. In the past month, it drove 113,000 referrals via search alone. In total, this travel piece has generated 608,000 search referrals and 1.44 million total pageviews, 83% coming from nonsubscribers. Other examples include pieces like Ruth Simons' [small business piece at the start of the pandemic](#), where main subjects of the story came in via our Reader Feedback form.

To learn more about using the Reader Feedback form, reach out to Ebony Reed, who leads the Audience Voice and Community team that has been helping improve our outreach to audiences in the comments section and beyond.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

### Community

Eighteen months ago, there was a heated huddle in the newsroom. It was just before the 2018 midterm election and reader comments had gotten so toxic that some people in the newsroom wanted to simply turn all comments off.

Instead, we dug into user research about what to do to engage with our audience in a more productive way.

We found it wasn't just people in the newsroom who felt alienated by some of the postings in the comments. Members of our audience did, also, and it was cited as a reason people didn't want to become WSJ members.

We created a team to focus on elevating the conversation in comments, reserved commenting privileges for members and made other technology tweaks, such as changing the filter. What we've seen since is better engagement in comments and even some conversions of people who like the experience and want to participate.

It's important that we continue to find ways to listen to our audiences and include them in dialogues around public issues of the day.

Even on challenging stories, the Audience Voices and Community team, which upholds the community standards in comments, has helped us maintain openness. For example, in recent months, WSJ's audiences have weighed in on racial injustice, police brutality and systematic racism as those topics have become a major part of the public discourse after a police officer killed George Floyd.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

In addition to conversations and the aforementioned reader feedback form attached to stories, there are other ways to engage audiences.

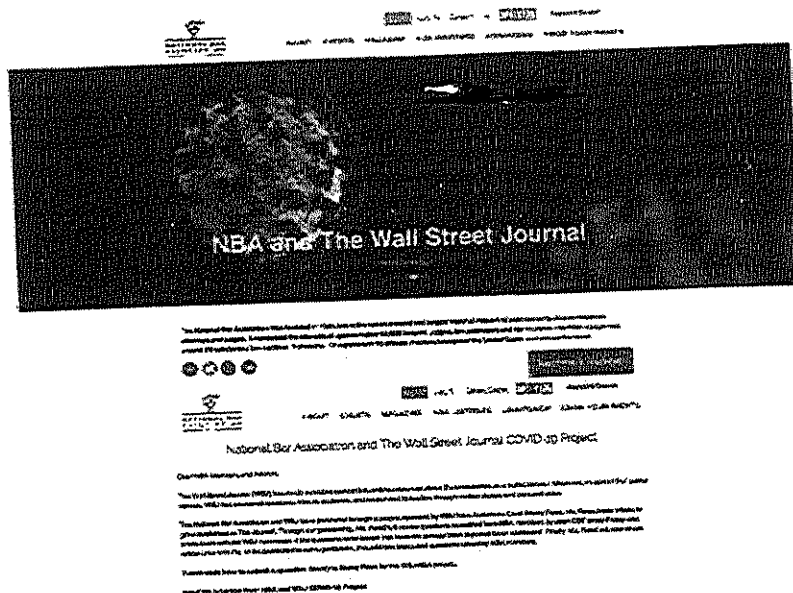
One example is a two-way journalism model, where we reach out to existing communities about issues of the day. New Audiences Chief Ebony Reed followed this model in a spring 2020 project with the National Bar Association, the largest group of Black legal professionals in the U.S. She sent the group articles from WSJ's free coronavirus coverage. In return, members of this group shared questions they wanted answered. When these questions were already addressed by WSJ's reporting, Ebony responded with story links. When these questions and ideas were not already reflected in our coverage, Ebony shared them with WSJ editors. NBA-suggested story ideas ranged from Black Americans dying at a higher rate from coronavirus to questions about how vaping would affect those who contracted Covid-19. Ebony sent these ideas to WSJ coverage editors weeks before similar stories appeared in other news outlets, but none were acted on.

### **NBA members welcomed dialog and interaction with WSJ. But unfortunately, we did not turn any of these Black professionals' questions into stories.**

Part of listening to our audience, growing community and practicing two-way journalism means editors will have to act on audience feedback, which ranges from assigning a story to asking a reporter to include specific audience questions in their reporting. It is not enough to find the audience's questions interesting. We must incorporate them into our reporting.

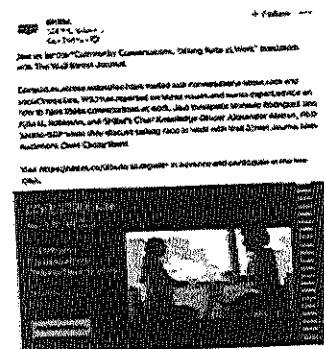
## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

Here are screenshots from the National Bar Association website, which continues encouraging members to connect with Ebony for the two-way journalism project.



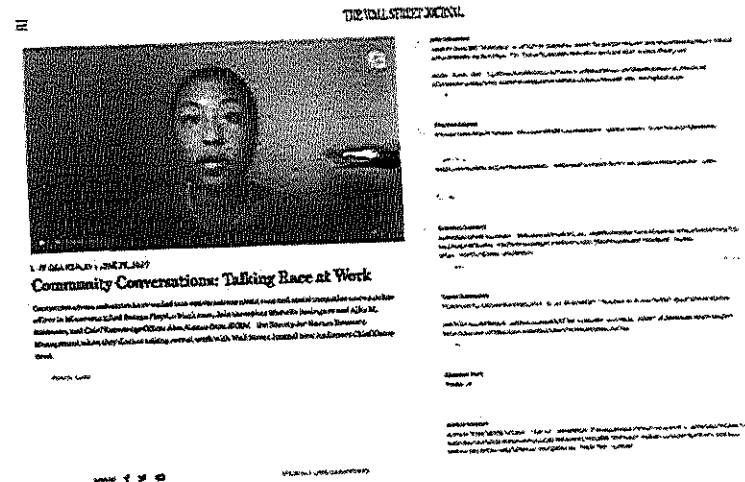
This is free promotion of the WSJ brand with well-educated professional readers who WSJ leadership says they would like to reach.

Another recent example of community-building has been the creation of Community Conversations, a live experience on our website exploring issues that led to protests after Floyd's death. Ebony looks for diverse and knowledgeable guests who are experts on these issues and connects with outside groups, inviting their members into the discussion. Those who are not WSJ members can register (for free) to participate, expanding participation in the conversation and generating leads for WSJ's subscription acquisition team. So far, the National Bar Association, SHRM—the Society for Human Resource Management—and the Association of Black Psychologists have been invited guests. These groups have amplified our live events and WSJ brand to hundreds of thousands of their members and followers, as seen here:



## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

Community Conversations is helping WSJ gather real-time insights into questions on new audiences' minds. The first community conversation had 300 people register for its discussion about policing during protests and more than 20,000 watch the simulstream on Twitter. This audience was included in the seed audience for the new Diversity+Business newsletter, allowing its debut issue to reach 2,000 readers. Audience members have posed more questions than are possible to answer during the time allotted. 'Ebony' then funnels those questions back to coverage editors, so they can be included in newsroom planning and brainstorming meetings. Addressing these questions is a powerful new tool for editors and reporters in our fight to attract and retain new audiences. We had similar audience involvement in our WSJ Jobs summit recently.



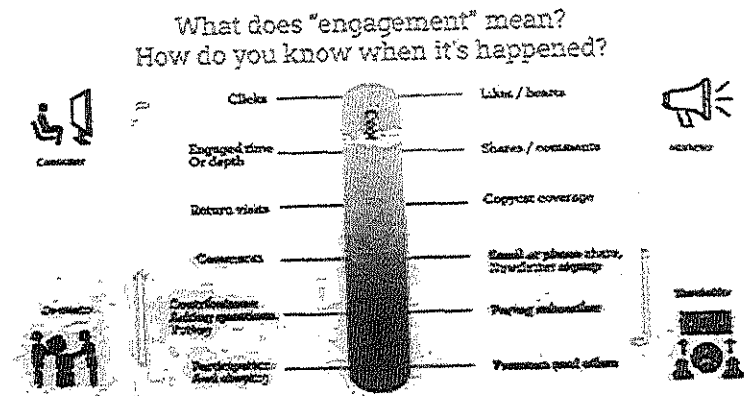


## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

Our Live Journalism team runs scores of virtual events (and will one day run in-person events). Sometimes those panels yield one-off stories or videos based on what speakers at those events say. But there's more to tap there, especially around the questions our audiences submit. We need formal workflows and a common expectation in our newsroom that these sorts of questions should feed back to help inform our thinking and reporting. Not only will it make our journalism better, it also creates opportunities—in a product sense—for us to ping audience members from these events and point out that their ideas led to stories: a fact they will likely celebrate to their friends, colleagues and families, spreading good will about the Journal.

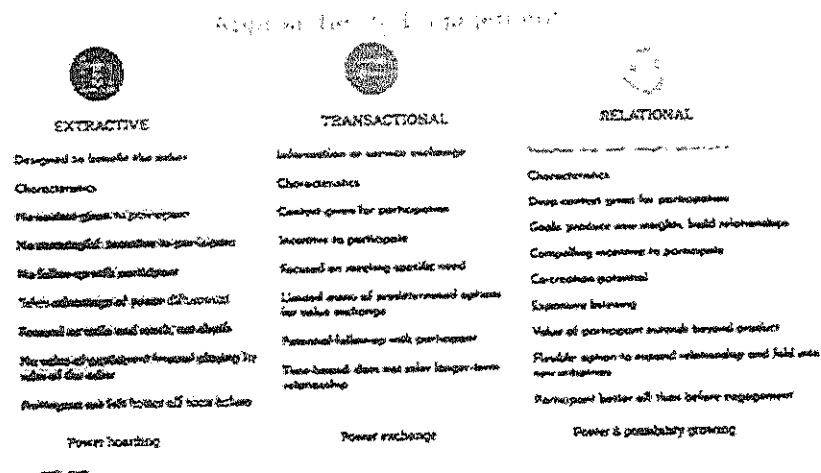
Broadly speaking, our new Live Q&A tool, which is used by a number of teams, can help with this feedback loop, but there's also a gap we need to close in terms of reporters and editors expecting to hear from our audiences in these ways and us showing the audience that we take the time to listen and adjust our journalism based on their interests.

Hearken, an audience-engagement company that trains journalists and provides consulting services, prescribes an audience approach to engagement that empowers people to contribute to journalists' work by explaining what is most important to them. The framework for this approach is what Hearken calls "The Citizen's Agenda." This Hearken slide shows how we can achieve deeper engagement by asking questions and obtaining information directly from our audience. It is also a strategy that reveals opportunities for premium features that support WSJ's revenue goals.



## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

Hearken's approach essentially levels the playing field between the newsroom and its audience, casting the community as co-creators.



As WSJ targets specific audiences and encourages them to ask questions and share personal narratives, it can supercharge the rest of the engagement funnel. In this process, we will become more welcoming to new audiences. We should continue to use news judgment, of course, but we must also embrace the idea of readers as partners in our journalism.

## **Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences**

### **WSJ Community and Our Young Audiences: WSJ Noted**

One very large new audience that The Wall Street Journal invests in heavily is college students. Our Membership team has put years of effort into building relationships on university campuses and has had success in getting hundreds of thousands of students to activate their university-provided WSJ subscriptions, or to pay for the WSJ themselves at a reduced rate.

But the problem we've had is that these students aren't very active users of the WSJ and don't often transition out of the college pack into our core pack. We need to focus on readers in college and beyond into their twenties and thirties as they start out in their lives and are building their brand allegiances.

People under 35 have the highest churn rate of WSJ subscribers—on the order of 70%.

One way we're trying to improve engagement and retention of this key audience is tailoring content, building communities and listening to this audience closely through both community outreach and data.

WSJ Noted, which just launched, is not a distinct product. Rather, it is an alternative point of entry into the core WSJ product, it's a community and it's a listening mechanism.

We know that when people who find our content on social media platforms like Snap arrive at WSJ.com, they often do not see things that resemble the look and feel of our off-platform content. WSJ Noted's landing page has a look and feel that's more in line with youth-oriented social media. In some ways, we are borrowing a page from streaming giants like Netflix, which leverage customized user interfaces.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

For the first time, we are testing alternative curation with WSJ Noted. Traditionally, our readers all see the same top of the home page. Now, logged-in student members are seeing WSJ Noted stories promoted above the day's top headlines. This improves our signal-to-noise ratio and offers more actionable intelligence on what works for our younger readers. In general, this project will allow us to test various WSJ content with younger audiences and continue feeding back insights about how they engage, not just in topics but also in medium and formats.

It's essential to our future that we look at what young audiences are actually reading, watching and listening to. There's been a common assumption in the newsroom that the WSJ's lifestyle coverage is what will appeal to new and younger audiences. However, in this content review, we have found that our current Life & Arts stories are actually favored by our heavy readers.

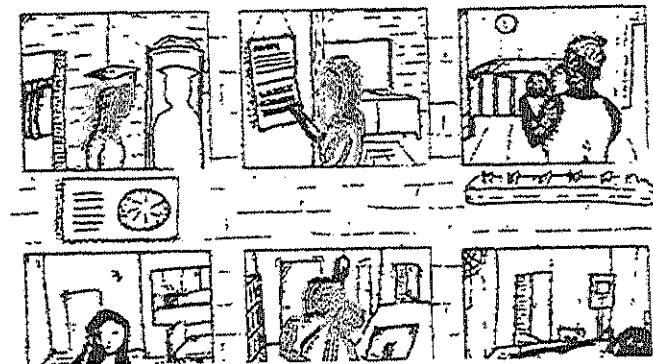
We need to move beyond perceptions and embrace actual data about younger audiences, and that is what WSJ Noted will be providing over the next few months. The Noted team will do daily curation of WSJ stories and look at how those stories resonate with young audiences to learn how we can gain traction. Our data shows that readers in our college subscription group read across many of our topics, but they have been less engaged and come less frequently than our other members. We will begin circulating data in the newsroom on what young audiences are interested in to help our coverage areas keep them in mind.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NOTED

### Portrait of a Pandemic

How the coronavirus rippled through eight young lives.

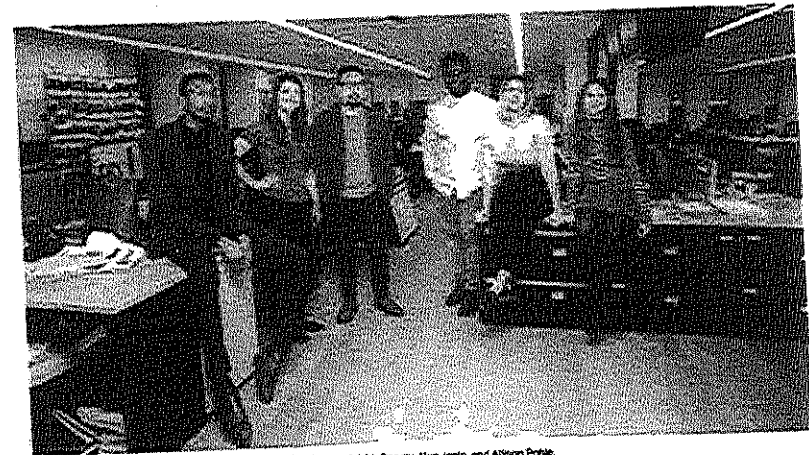
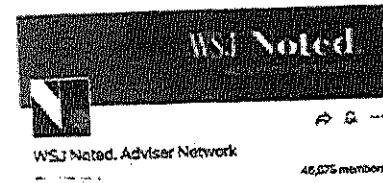


## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

WSJ Noted is also being created in partnership with young readers. The team has created a community group on LinkedIn called Noted Advisors, with more than 46,000 members as of July 1. This group is made up of young readers, and we give them a heads up on some things the WSJ is doing and invite them to Live Q&As and other community gatherings. We also are regularly running essays written by young people, bringing more diverse voices to the WSJ through this initiative. The first one was written by a Black Harvard Business School student who wrote about how he became the only one of eight brothers who didn't end up in jail, deceased or in a minimum-wage job.

WSJ Noted is the only content team that is purely digital<sup>7</sup> at the WSJ. That's a unique and important space for experimentation for reporters on and off the team. And it's an important opportunity to let digital feedback inform more of what we do. WSJ Noted covers all the topics at the heart of the Journal: its first issue featured first-time home buyers, a series on how people's budgets are changing, and so on.

Last but certainly not least, it's important to note that we've been able to hire great diverse talent for The Wall Street Journal in the WSJ Noted reporters, who were attracted to the Journal because of the mission of Noted.



From left, Tyler Benavente, Deborah Acosta, Alex Chang, J.J. McDermott, Alex Jerni, and Allison Poth.

<sup>7</sup> This has also been the team that's been positioned to first see our new CMS as we're building it—most teams wouldn't have the privilege or bandwidth to sit through some of the bugs in the system that the Noted team has weathered, all to the benefit of the broader newsroom when we fully roll out the new system.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

### Newsletters

Our newsletter portfolio presents a series of opportunities for drawing in nonsubscriber prospects, retaining subscribers and driving unique visitors to our site. A May 2020 survey of 10-Point subscribers found 59% of respondents indicated access to the newsletter was an important factor in renewing their subscriptions. Our flagship newsletters have continued strong growth, which may suggest paths to further expanding the top of the funnel.

Now, as we focus more on reach, we need to pivot our newsletter strategy to focus more on driving traffic back to site and to signing up more nonsubscribers to our newsletters. This will help us in our push to grow our audiences.

Here are five recommendations we'd suggest to further enhance the newsletter experience and drive toward our overarching digital growth strategy:

#### 1. Increase on-site traffic from newsletters.

Thoughtful, targeted calls to action within our newsletters, such as to participate in live Q&As or to join a conversation on particular articles, should help newsletters boost our goals of higher monthly uniques and more frequent site visits.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

### 2. Add a newsletter publishing desk.

A dedicated newsletter editor has already made tremendous strides, including dramatically improved quality, consistency and list sizes. Still, newsletter curation, production and publishing remains scattered across teams, workflows and formats, leading to wide variation in strategy. We should consider further centralizing newsletter editing to accelerate strategic change. A small team of newsletter editor-strategists would give each newsletter a final read, coordinate among newsletters, and analyze audience insights to drive adaptation and innovation among our newsletter writers and wider newsroom.

### 3. Add the 10-Point and What's News as optional default home screens for our apps.

Our newsletters are a daily walk through our coverage that's highly curated, digestible and completable. We should consider offering this alternate content navigation as a view in our apps, with the option to make one of these daily briefings the first thing you see when you load the app any given day.

### 4. Don't publish newsletters as standalone content on the web.

Current evidence doesn't support increasing web-publishing of newsletter content without a significant shift in promotion. Daily Shot, Real Time Economics and Wealth Adviser all publish to the web, with occasional web-publishing of content from Markets, Capital Journal and Election+Business. Those pieces reach some of the smallest audiences of any of our published work. Low promotion—close to zero home-page surfacing, for example—is among the factors in negligible pageviews. But relative engaged time is also low. We need to stop web-publishing across newsletters until we have the focus to dramatically change our publishing strategy to increase engagement and attract search, social and internal traffic. (We would want to inquire about impact on newswires customers.)

### 5. Become more focused.

Staff resources should be dedicated to fewer, higher-quality curated newsletters alongside more choices for automated updates from columnists and other trusted journalists. This may best serve goals for attracting and retaining subscribers and boosting site traffic. We have 20 daily newsletters and 19 others that publish on other schedules, such as weekly, twice weekly or when a new type of content is published.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

### Here are some of our newsletters (full list here):

- The 10-Point
- What's News
- Markets
- Health
- Future of Everything
- In Today's Paper
- The Daily Shot
- Capital Journal
- Technology
- Real Time Economics
- Books
- WSJ. Magazine
- Grapevine
- Real Estate
- Making It Work
- Energy Journal
- Sports
- Heard on the Street
- 2020 Election+Business
- The Middle Seat
- Women In



## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

### Social Media

We have collected lots of data about social media, and think it's helpful context to have it in one place. Feel free to follow up with us to discuss what's happening on each platform. Here are some basic facts:

- Traffic from social media accounts for 10 to 15% of our overall traffic
- We post roughly 100 times a day on Facebook, 35 times a day on LinkedIn, 400 times a day on Twitter and twice a day on Instagram. We also publish a minimum of eight Snaps per day
- On any given day, we share 40% of our total stories on Twitter and 20% on Facebook (excluding re-shares and updates to existing stories)
- May 2020 was our best month ever on social.
- Facebook drives far more traffic than Twitter

Our data around social media is right now very disjointed — we need to bring the analysis of it into our centralized News Insights team (and they need the bandwidth to handle it).

It won't just be "nice to have" to bring in the data. Without looking at it on an ongoing basis, we are missing opportunities to connect with more readers strategically off-platform, learn from them and bring them closer to us on our platforms. One finding we'll explain later in the report is that our mix of content — mainly fleeting news stories — underserves WSJ.com visitors as well as social media audiences. On these platforms, we've seen more success connecting with readers using content that helps them understand things and inspires them. Our stand-alone highly ambitious visual projects, for example, are great at bringing audiences to our site, and so is explainer news content and service journalism content.

Our audiences on social platforms are far more diverse than our regular visitors to our site.

## **Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences**

### **Top Line Data**

- WSJ Facebook Page: 6.57M followers
  - 40% of followers between 25-34 years old; 21% between 35-44; 17% between 18-24
  - 62% men vs. 37% women
- WSJ Twitter account: 17.8M followers
- WSJ LinkedIn account: 7.87M followers
- WSJ Instagram account: 2.9M followers
  - 41% of followers between 25-34 years old; 21% between 35-44; 20% between 18-24
  - 60% men vs. 40% women
- WSJ Snapchat Discover: 1.16M subscribers
  - 45% of followers between 18-24 years old; 27% between 25-34; 8% are 35+ and 7% between 13-17
  - 71% male vs. 29% female

### **Apple News**

- 52.13% of WSJ Apple News readers are female
- 26.9% of WSJ Apple News readers are 34 or younger

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

While we do fairly well getting visitors from our social media followers, we haven't effectively or consistently used the channel to surface stories and reporting leads. We need to be more actively seeking ways to use these platforms—and the communities that exist on them—to our advantage as we try to do more in the community space: for product engagement, reach and the creation of virtual events.

A few ideas:

### Social reporting

We should create a small social news gathering team to keep the newsroom aware of emerging trends or news that is beginning to appear through social media. Often Twitter is the place where a story will first be reported, before any professional news source picks it up. We need people trained in being able to surface this type of news and understand how to verify it and advance it to the proper people in the newsroom to decide how we should move forward. Another important value these social news gatherers can add to the newsroom is being part of larger Visual Investigation projects, which often involve a good deal of digital forensics work. We currently lean on Storyful for some of this work, but they are changing their model and not providing as much. We should either embed some people from Storyful directly into the newsroom or develop our own personnel with the skills to be involved in these important projects. The New York Times has done a good deal of this work, with the help of Malachy Browne, formerly of Storyful. While we don't plan to regularly report on things like celebrity Twitter wars, there is substantial primary source material on important topics and investigations that we could obtain in social media with an ongoing focus on social media reporting.

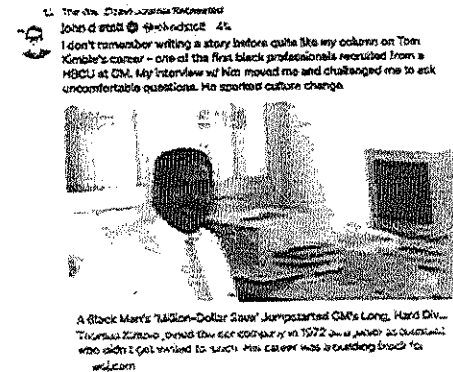
## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

### Community managers and social ambassadors

We should seek to make more people aware of how they can follow our journalists on social platforms. We should consider sharing their Twitter handles when we share their stories on the main WSJ account, and occasionally we might look to retweet them sharing their stories rather than just share the story on the main WSJ account. Promotion through individual journalists helps build trust and influence for us across a number of coverage areas. People like and trust news from other people more than they trust brands, which can be perceived as either pushy or bland. Over time these journalists can be seen as the “go to” people to understand and stay updated on different stories, which creates a halo effect for WSJ and brings more people back to our platforms.

### Improve our insights on social media engagement

We should be delivering insight reports on our social media and Apple News activity on a regular basis so the newsroom understands how well their articles are performing and what actionable insights we can provide based on the trends we’re seeing there. This will build familiarity with the platforms and what works well, and give us a good feedback loop to continue building on our successes. As you’ll see in the next chapter, our framework for coverage success looks at diversifying our readers—and that can only happen with more insights being circulated about what works and what doesn’t on social media. Again, we need to listen to what’s going on with social media—not simply push our content there. Listening makes us better.



## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

### SEO

On June 18, The Wall Street Journal published an excerpt from former national security adviser John Bolton's memoirs. As the outlet that Bolton selected to publish his piece, WSJ was positioned to win, including on Google Search.

But we didn't do as well as we could. What got in the way?

Here is a debrief of that story, as a lead in to a longer section about the success we have had in improving in SEO and where we need to go next to keep improving.

On Bolton, the WSJ published four articles including the excerpt:

- [John Bolton: The Scandal of Trump's China Policy](#)
- ['He Is a Liar': Trump Pushes Back on Bolton Book](#)
- [Trump Put Re-Election Prospects Ahead of National Interest, Bolton Alleges](#)
- [Trump Books Give Simon & Schuster's New Chief a Trial by Fire](#)

**Problem 1:** Only one of those articles was sent to the SEO team for consultation. As we have widely publicized, we have a Slack channel and dedicated email for the SEO team to help on headlines and SEO optimization of big stories. They would have provided helpful advice like pointing out that it is generally not helpful to start a headline with a quote and that the stories would perform better under a Politics tag, rather than Life & Arts (despite what section was producing the stories).

**Problem 2:** Senior editors suggested that the WSJ publish more stories related to the book excerpt, as well as President Trump's response to it. But those senior editors were told not to, because it would "amp up" the public reaction to the story and the WSJ "doesn't want to amp things up." So while the WSJ published four articles (including the excerpt), the NYT published nine (plus three wire stories) and the Washington Post published 21.

**Problem 3:** In the following days, there were no follow up articles—even as competitors kept publishing.

**Problem 4:** Another way to succeed in SEO on this story was to run a book review and to run it right away when the news was hot. But the WSJ's book review didn't run for five days after the excerpt. While the WSJ newsroom has structural separation from reviews, it's relevant from an audience growth perspective to look at these factors.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

The WSJ has made a tremendous amount of progress in SEO in the past year, which we will recap below. Search referrals generated 26% of our site visits and drove 30% of membership sales in May. (For reference, social media generated 25% of our visits and drove 10% of our sales.) That's remarkable when you think about the fact that we have only two people dedicated to news SEO—it was one person until a month ago—whereas our competitors field large and still-growing teams.

Nonetheless, more change is needed to increase our focus on SEO. It's really not something that can be done solely by the "SEO editors." It's for our whole newsroom, because SEO, like the other areas in this chapter, is for listening and learning—even as we share our stories.

### First, the progress we have made on SEO

Our search and AMP<sup>a</sup> traffic began going up last summer—a direction they had not been going before—and we had increasing search traffic all fall and heading into 2020. This was due to close collaboration between Membership and DXS, and work we did together to improve things like our AMP integrations, page speed, markets/quotes experiences and other technical improvements, as well as work on the live coverage API, which allowed

our live coverage pages to be crawled by Google much more efficiently. To give context on the scale of doing well on things like AMP: 37% of WSJ's mobile web article traffic is now delivered through Accelerated Mobile Pages. A huge portion of our new audiences come to us this way.

We also created workflows and channels for editors to check headlines with Ed Hyatt, our senior SEO editor, and regular communications in the newsroom about what people are searching for. One example: Enterprise Editor Matthew Rose recently began including Ed in the individual Slack channel set up for each enterprise story, allowing for headline and visuals strategy to happen earlier in the process. This has led to SEO wins including "[How Exactly Do You Catch Covid-19?](#)" which has had seven million pageviews to date. We need the Enterprise desk to keep up their SEO focus and do it consistently.

All of this work paid off immensely during the coronavirus story and beyond—search has brought in a huge share of the nonsubscriber traffic. Improvements on pages like our live coverage page were essential in this, as was our step into the living guides evergreen content initially kicked off by Ed in conversation with U.S. News editor Emily Nelson.

Recognizing how essential search referrals are to our audience growth goals, our Coverage Strategy Mapper—introduced in the next chapter—takes the percent of referral traffic each coverage area gets from search as one of the four main metrics we should be tracking and improving, and makes it part of the primary filter we use to look at content performance.

<sup>a</sup> AMP is "Accelerated Mobile Pages," an open source HTML framework optimized for mobile browsing and meant to help web pages load faster. Google prioritizes these pages in its organic search results.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

Indeed, to go further we need to all understand:

**To achieve our goals of reaching far more unique users on our platforms we must keep improving substantially in search.**

The only way to reach our traffic goals is to use search as one of our main tools to reach more nonsubscribers. Given that we have approached this report with our goals in mind, many of the recommendations we have made throughout this report are actions that will help us in search.

The coming months are critical for SEO in our newsroom, and here are additional recommendations:

- We need editors to more actively take into account Google Trends and Google Suggestions in story assigning and encourage people to do so within their beats and columns. Harkening back to where we began this chapter—along the lines of How We Listen to Our Audiences—search is an important way to listen to our audience. The newsroom SEO team has just begun a process where it works directly with bureau chiefs to get one to two SEO-driven articles each day. Our Juneteenth article—which brought in 78,000 readers from search—was one result of that process. We need to keep up the support for this approach and expand it. We need to create an atmosphere where people feel supported in listening to our audiences and not nervous that they'll be criticized for doing a story that "The Wall Street Journal wouldn't do"—after all, the whole point of looking at information like search data is to find audience-focused stories we weren't doing, and then do them.
- We need to create a workflow where we distribute information about what people are searching for on WSJ.com to inform coverage. Ed's and Eleanore Park's daily SEO emails are just a beginning.
- We need to develop a strategy to be more active on Reddit. This is a social platform the WSJ doesn't do much with, but it is a major source of links to other media companies, and having these sorts of external links to WSJ.com would greatly help our ranking on Google.
- The projects we have recommended that we do around evergreen contextual stories and service-oriented journalism must be done through an SEO-first lens.
- We need to keep expanding workflows around newsroom check-ins with our SEO team, so we avoid missing other big moments, as we did in the case of the Bolton book.
- All coverage areas must be using Newsgrid and every piece of content should be logged in there, without exception. That will help our Programming Strategy Team, where SEO sits, can best partner with them and cover the SEO angles, as well as all other angles of developing great journalism.
- Editors in coverage areas must keep their strategy editors apprised ahead of time of all stories, with a special emphasis on large stories that have the potential to appeal to large audiences.
- As our newsroom is shifting toward search in order to reach larger audiences, we need to assign SEO-savvy pub editors in London and Hong Kong to help implement the new strategy and approach all our coverage through the search lens. These editors will work very closely with Ed's team during the overnight U.S. hours.

## Chapter 6: How We Listen to Audiences

### Audience Data

## **Audience data is an essential way that we listen to our readers.**

We are fortunate to have a world-class data science team working with us in news and product work, and Membership also has an awesome team that has led industry thinking on Membership work and growth. We all partner well via these teams with Guthrie Collins' team at the Dow Jones Customer Data Platform and see the great value we can continue to build on from that shared platform.

In the newsroom, coming soon are two critical things:

1. Expansion of the regular emailed reports about what our audiences are doing with our coverage and in our product, moving into coverage area by coverage area.
2. The introduction of Archimedes, new dashboards that will help news editors and programmers see what's going on with our stories in real time, using good metrics, to make smart decisions to maximize reach and engagement.

Coming out of this report, the strategy editors will be able to work with the new coverage-strategy framework you'll be reading about in the next chapter. The framework translates our data into usable insights that are tied to our goals around great journalism and growth.

Importantly, the framework pushes us to focus on stories that broaden our audiences from places like social and search. One of the parameters we have set as an essential measurement of success is Google search traffic. Why? Is it because we're simply trying to drive traffic? No. Is it because we're trying to game Google's algorithm? No. It's because learning how to do well on social media and on search gets us closer to what the broader public is interested in. They help us listen.

We are coming out of an era in journalism where editors decided everything that was the news. The audiences not only want us to have more relevant content, many also want to see us putting effort into including them.

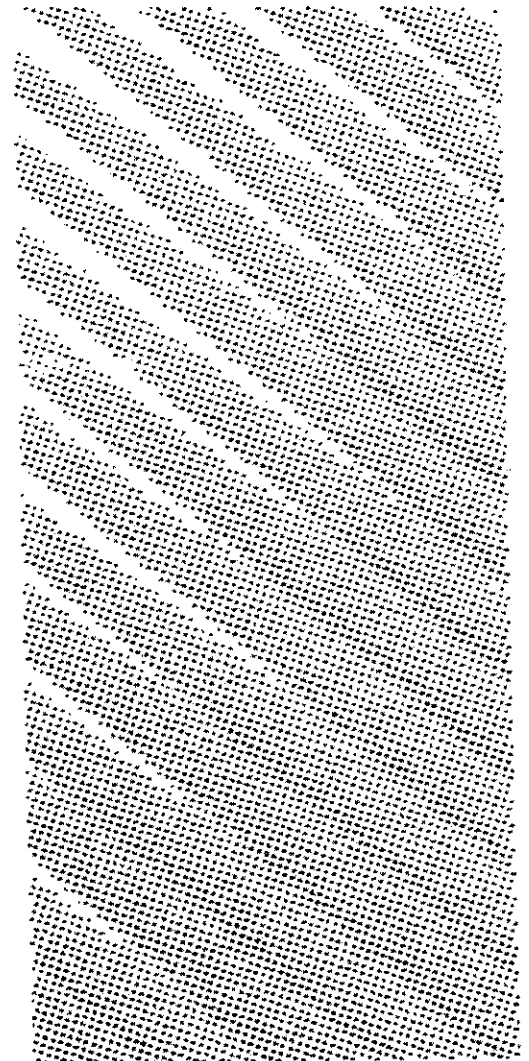
**It will be at our own peril if we don't pay more attention to the signals we can pick up from audiences on our platforms and off.**



WSJ ●

# Chapter 7: What We Cover

CONTENT REVIEW JULY 2020



## Chapter 7: What We Cover

### Competitors' Content Pivots

Plenty of competitors have adjusted their content focus and adapted their digital product experiences to meet audience needs and expand the reach of their stories. Well-known was The New York Times' Innovation and 2020 reports, which led to shifts in the way that newsroom uses data in news and product strategy as well as the introduction of Smarter Living (ongoing evergreen service journalism) and the creation of the Express Desk (a central team of reporters writing audience data-driven quick stories, often tied to search and social goals).

Please see the Appendix at the end of this report for an industry survey of other competitors' content pivots. These provide helpful context to our journey and path ahead.

## Chapter 7: What We Cover

### So, What Should We Do? Part 1

To answer that, first, we took inventory of what we produce.

#### **Data: What We Did**

During the first phase of this content review, the strategy team partnered with the newsroom data science team led by Ross Fadely to lead exploratory work and understand both our current data organization and tagging scheme. The strategy editors as well as a large part of the DXS team went through an intense two-day SQL bootcamp and a series of data-training sessions to be able to work directly with our data tools and understand our raw data. This allowed the team to identify limitations in our ability to segment and label the content we produce.

During the second phase, we established a scope for data analysis and took on a two-pronged approach:

#### **Approach 1: Macro Recategorization**

We extracted data for all the content published from January 2019 through May 10, 2020, more than 40,000 articles. We looked at those stories based on how they are organized on our site, from sections to subsections to article types. This gave us a broad understanding of how we are performing and what our audiences engage with most. We then looked at those stories based on the main coverage areas as defined in the newsroom: U.S., World, D.C. Corporate, Finance and Life & Arts, plus Enterprise,

Investigations and Visuals. We discovered we couldn't rely on how content was tagged on our site to offer insights back to those newsroom teams because there was no reliable way to know which coverage area was responsible for producing each piece of content. For example, Krista Schmidt, the strategy editor for Finance, had no way to accurately tell Charles Forelle how the content produced by the Finance team currently resonates with our audiences. Strategy editors and the data science team did extensive work to build a new dataset for each coverage area, so that we could marry our tagging scheme with who's working in each coverage area. This required going through hundreds of author names and HR structures to identify how our coverage areas are organized and evolving. This is the best way we found to be able to understand what we produce and how our audiences engage with content coming out of these coverage areas.

Note: There are four areas of content that we did not include:

- Wires
- Pro and C-Suite
- Opinion content (other than arts and book reviews, which were included because they run on our platforms fairly mixed in with coverage from Life & Arts)
- Live Coverage

*If desired, we are happy to share our approach and findings with any of the people in those areas in case they want to pursue something similar.*

## Chapter 7: What We Cover

### Approach 2: Annotating a Sample

We also decided to manually classify a random sample of 7,000 articles, which is the equivalent of two months of content, based on a list of new tags we created.

- Audience needs
- Evergreen vs. fleeting news
- "Real people"
- Industry
- Geography

This approach allowed the strategy team to segment our content in a novel, audience-focused way. As a team and based on previous industry, Dow Jones Customer Intelligence and WSJ user research, strategy editors created six "audience need" tags as detailed below:

- **Update Me:** Keeps me up-to-date with the latest news and trends
- **Give Me an Edge:** Helps me to stay one step ahead of others
- **Connect Me:** Connects me with people around ideas or experiences
- **Entertain Me:** Is entertaining and fun, brightening the world around me
- **Help Me Understand:** Helps me understand, improve and learn
- **Inspire Me:** Provides ideas for new things to try or do

Our manual tagging exercise also allowed us to quantify how much evergreen versus fleeting news content we were producing. We were also better able to understand whether and how we were representing the "real people" affected by the issues we covered. (Did we only quote experts or did we also talk to people who were directly affected by the issues we wrote about?) Finally, we applied tags to measure which industries we were covering and which countries and states we wrote most and least about.

While this process was manual and time-consuming, it had the advantage of making the strategy editors intimately aware of the depth and breadth of our content.

HEADLINE	URL	PRIMARY AUDIENCE NEED
For Candidates, Coronavirus Prompts More Digital Appeals for DoI	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/For-Candidates-Coronavirus-Prompts-More-Digital-Appeals-for-DoI.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/For-Candidates-Coronavirus-Prompts-More-Digital-Appeals-for-DoI.html</a>	Help me understand
Recession Blue-Chips' Led the Way in Another Turbulent Week in	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Recession-Blue-Chips-Led-the-Way-in-Another-Turbulent-Week-in.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Recession-Blue-Chips-Led-the-Way-in-Another-Turbulent-Week-in.html</a>	Help me understand
Teenager Charged in Texas Shooting Declared Incompetent, Alton	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Teenager-Charged-in-Texas-Shooting-Declared-Incompetent-Alton.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Teenager-Charged-in-Texas-Shooting-Declared-Incompetent-Alton.html</a>	Update me
New York MTA Approves Coronavirus Death Benefits Program	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/New-York-MTA-Approves-Coronavirus-Death-Benefits-Program.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/New-York-MTA-Approves-Coronavirus-Death-Benefits-Program.html</a>	Update me
Florida Senate Officially Removes Broward County Sheriff Scott	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Florida-Senate-Officially-Removes-Broward-County-Sheriff-Scott.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Florida-Senate-Officially-Removes-Broward-County-Sheriff-Scott.html</a>	Update me
A Timeline on Ukraine	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/A-Timeline-on-Ukraine.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/A-Timeline-on-Ukraine.html</a>	Help me understand
It's Like Nothing I've Seen: Democrats Woo Iowa's Ahead of Cau	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/It-s-Like-Nothing-I-ve-Seen-Democrats-Woo-Iowa-s-Ahead-of-Cau.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/It-s-Like-Nothing-I-ve-Seen-Democrats-Woo-Iowa-s-Ahead-of-Cau.html</a>	Update me
MTA to Shut New York City Subway Between 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. Dur	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/MTA-to-Shut-New-York-City-Subway-Between-1-a.m.-to-5-a.m.-Dur.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/MTA-to-Shut-New-York-City-Subway-Between-1-a.m.-to-5-a.m.-Dur.html</a>	Update me
The Six Best-Designed Items of the Month	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/The-Six-Best-Designed-Items-of-the-Month.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/The-Six-Best-Designed-Items-of-the-Month.html</a>	Inspire me
U.K. Companies Brace for Bumps on Brexit Homestretch	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/U.K.-Companies-Brace-for-Bumps-on-Brexit-Homestretch.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/U.K.-Companies-Brace-for-Bumps-on-Brexit-Homestretch.html</a>	Help me understand
MTA Says Reduced Subway Service Is Possible Under Coronavi	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/MTA-Says-Reduced-Subway-Service-Is-Possible-Under-Coronavi.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/MTA-Says-Reduced-Subway-Service-Is-Possible-Under-Coronavi.html</a>	Update me
Pakistan Court Overturns Murder Conviction in Killing of Wall Stre	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Pakistan-Court-Overturns-Murder-Conviction-in-Killing-of-Wall-Stre.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Pakistan-Court-Overturns-Murder-Conviction-in-Killing-of-Wall-Stre.html</a>	Update me
AI Software Gets Mixed Reviews for Tackling Coronavirus	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/AI-Software-Gets-Mixed-Reviews-for-Tackling-Coronavirus.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/AI-Software-Gets-Mixed-Reviews-for-Tackling-Coronavirus.html</a>	Help me understand
Seattle-Area Election Puts Mobile Voting to a Test	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Seattle-Area-Election-Puts-Mobile-Voting-to-a-Test.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Seattle-Area-Election-Puts-Mobile-Voting-to-a-Test.html</a>	Update me
Why Iowa and New Hampshire Matter	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Why-Iowa-and-New-Hampshire-Matter.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Why-Iowa-and-New-Hampshire-Matter.html</a>	Help me understand
EBay Posts Higher Quarterly Profit Boosted in Part by Surge in De	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/EBay-Posts-Higher-Quarterly-Profit-Boosted-in-Part-by-Surge-in-De.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/EBay-Posts-Higher-Quarterly-Profit-Boosted-in-Part-by-Surge-in-De.html</a>	Update me
Trump Administration Expands Remain in Mexico Program to Inclu	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Trump-Administration-Expands-Remain-in-Mexico-Program-to-Inclu.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Trump-Administration-Expands-Remain-in-Mexico-Program-to-Inclu.html</a>	Update me
Finding Your Balance in a Topay-Turvy Market	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Finding-Your-Balance-in-a-Topay-Turvy-Market.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Finding-Your-Balance-in-a-Topay-Turvy-Market.html</a>	Give me an edge
Vietnam's Coronavirus Recovery Is as Good as It Gets for Emergi	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Vietnam-s-Coronavirus-Recovery-Is-as-Good-as-It-Gets-for-Emergi.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Vietnam-s-Coronavirus-Recovery-Is-as-Good-as-It-Gets-for-Emergi.html</a>	Help me understand
Top-Tier Malls Are Latest Victim of Retail Headwinds	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/article/Top-Tier-Malls-Are-Latest-Victim-of-Retail-Headwinds.html">https://www.wsj.com/article/Top-Tier-Malls-Are-Latest-Victim-of-Retail-Headwinds.html</a>	Help me understand

## Chapter 7: What We Cover

### So, What Should We Do? Part 2

Second, we took a look at how our members vary by what topics they read and how that differs between heavy and light reading members.

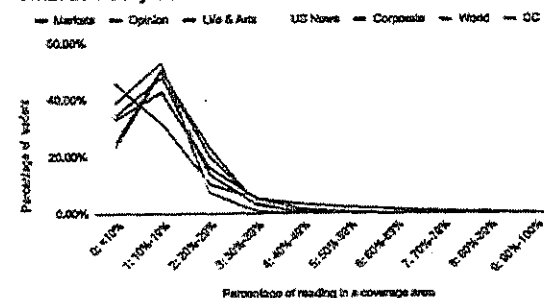
To start, here is an overview of how our heavy-reading members distribute their reading among our topics. What you see to the right is that there are very few of our heavy-reading members who read any one topic for most of their coverage. The colored lines here are coverage areas and you'll see the only one that has a "fat tail" going out beyond the 50% to 59% mark is Opinion. That tail shows that there is a somewhat sizable group that reads more than half of their coverage in Opinion.

This being a Newsroom Content Review, the main point we want to make is there really isn't a sizable group reading more than half their content in any other area. In other words, heavy readers read across our product.

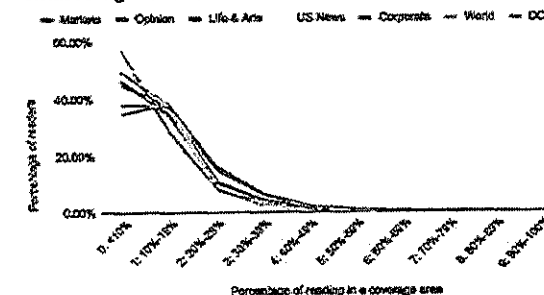
The following is the same chart for members who are light readers. A main point to see here is that they read across all areas as well, but also that there is an area where readers across-the-board tend to spend more of their reading time—Corporate. Compared to other coverage areas, Corporate tends to have more users whose reading of Corporate is above 10% of the areas they read. This speaks to the WSJ's identity for many of our readers as a business publication, something that notably comes through with many of our light readers as well.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> We have the data available coverage area by coverage area to share if of interest.

What do Heavy Users Read?



What do Light Users Read?



## Chapter 7: What We Cover

### So, What Should We Do? Part 3

Third, in tandem with our inventory, we talked with WSJ leaders about how to think about what we should be producing, and who we should care about reaching. We picked up on a fundamental divide that is worth noting:

**1. Some editors think writing for elite leaders is enough, and they don't think size of readership should be a main driver.** A masthead editor said, "We can't just look at pageviews. For example, central banking, the numbers aren't great, but we aren't going to stop covering central banking. It's the halo thing, it's core to our brand." And as another editor explained, "We might do a story that will get 2,000 to 3,000 pageviews, but they're the right 2,000 to 3,000. When I was a reporter, I would much rather get two emails about a piece from two really smart hedge fund managers, than 200 emails from random readers."

**2. Others think we need to challenge our assumptions and traditions, prioritizing quality journalism that is moving us toward our reach and engagement goals.** For instance, another masthead editor said, "If we aren't doing something to retain or grow our audience, we shouldn't do it."

We see both points of view; however, we side more with the second. We have new things we need to do, including covering new areas in new ways. We will not transform as an organization if we do not free up some bandwidth and refocus on meeting broader audiences' needs. We need to make strategic trade-offs.

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**Our All-Audience Coverage Strategy:** The trade-off that The Wall Street Journal should make is a move away from favoring the coverage that only heavy readers prefer in favor of coverage that appeals to all audiences. As noted above, the Journal has been leaning in too heavily on heavy readers' preferences, in part because our journalists' habits align with heavy readers' and in part because the data paints a story of success driven by lots of heavy readers.

Over the years, leaders have coached the newsroom to understand what members are reading, and do more of that. However, the data used for such analysis didn't distinguish between heavy-reading members and light-reading members.

Remember: both heavy-reading members and light-reading members are paying subscribers. But when we look at subscriber pageviews, they favor the heavy-reading members.

We need to look at all audiences, even those who are less engaged with us.

Is there risk in our recommendation to focus on new and more casual audiences? Yes, there's risk in every strategy, but the risk here is low. Consider these points:

1. Most heavy readers consume content in many different areas across our products. So if we reduce or eliminate a feature they read, it stands to be perhaps one of only 20 things they like to read. In contrast, if we reduced or eliminated something light readers enjoy, it might be one of only two things they read.

2. Heavy readers are not leaving WSJ at the same rate as light readers and aren't as likely to cancel their membership if there's a nip or tuck in some areas—because they read so many different things. This strategy does not mean that we will end everything heavy

## Chapter 7: What We Cover

readers consume, just that we'll cut some underperformers that are striking out with other audiences. Much of what will remain and will be added will also do well with heavy readers, our data has shown.

3. Heavy readers' preferences have, in the past, been measured by their pageviews. A page view, of course, isn't the same as a valued deep read of a story. We find that many pageviews have short engaged time and our strategy we explain below will help us prioritize reading that has strong engaged time for both heavy and light readers.

4. We simply can't grow if we keep over indexing on stories of interest only to heavy readers. And, in general, we find that stories that do well with wider audiences are the very ones that heavy readers spend more time on. To repeat: **all audiences stand to benefit from a careful, constant look at what wider audiences read as well as what they spend time on.**

On a practical level, we know the strategy editors and news leadership will spend the next several months working hand in hand with coverage editors and reporters to make this shift. It's important we have a clear and consistent framework, measurement and tools that will drive everyone toward the same goals.

Based on wide feedback from many people in many roles within the newsroom, we think our journalists will appreciate a framework and guidance in using it. As one person wrote in our newsroom survey:

"We have a lot of data. What we don't have as much is analysis and guidance, not only on what went right but just as important what didn't go as well as it could have and what we could do differently in the future."

And so, we have developed:

### **The Coverage Strategy Mapper**

## Chapter 7: What We Cover

### **Important Note:**

One note before we jump into the coverage areas: This tool is only as strong as the data it analyzes. For it to be most effective in helping us evaluate coverage, we need to be more rigorous with which subsection and article type we assign to each story. We need to stop assigning stories to useless section-subsection-article type combinations—such as US, US, U.S. News; World, World, World News; Markets, Markets, Markets Main; Business, Business, Business—and create new ones where needed for clarity so that stories on similar topics are grouped together. Creating a guide with input from coverage editors will be one of the first steps we take.

**Recommendation:** We have identified where our taxonomy and metadata—including tagging—fall short in enabling the strategy editors to dig deeper into our user behaviors when interacting with our text, videos, graphics and interactives. The strategy editors will lay out particular guidance on tagging in each of their areas and we must require strict adherence to their guidance. We also need a newsroom-wide point person who dedicates substantial time to be our tagging librarian.



## Chapter 7: What We Cover

# The Coverage Strategy Mapper

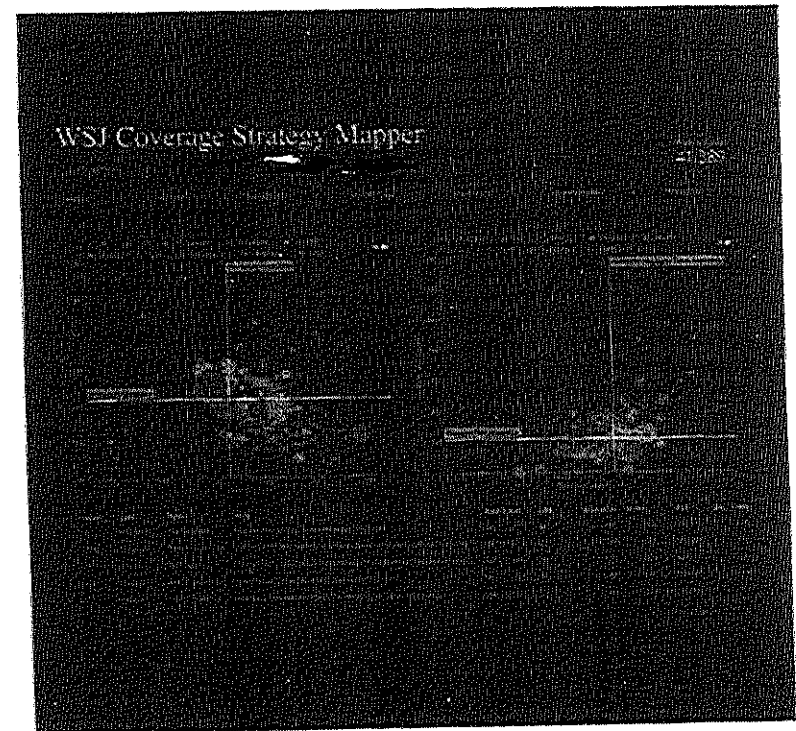
### Overview:

The Coverage Strategy Mapper is a tool to identify which groups of stories are meeting our growth goals—and which need our intervention.

We created it as we realized we needed a way to quickly evaluate clusters of coverage. Which sections, subsections and article types, broken down by coverage area, are most likely to be read almost exclusively by our heavy readers? And when you drill down, which articles stand out in those clusters?

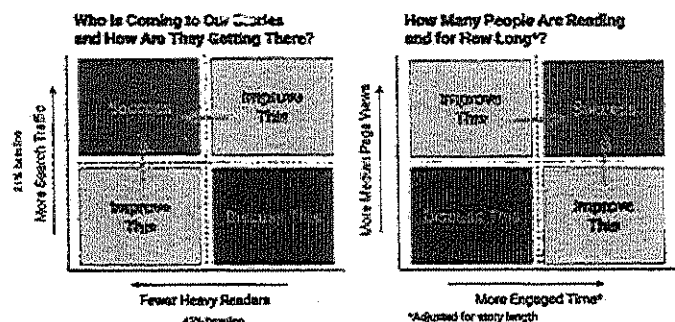
The rigorous data work by our News Insights team for the content review allowed us to connect a reliable dataset to an interactive frontend in Google's Data Studio, a web platform for creating custom reports and dashboards. Our initial version provides a quick-and-dirty but deeply revealing look at everything we choose to create.

To the right is what it looks like in practice.



## Chapter 7: What We Cover

Below is a diagram of the good and bad zones. For example, if stories fall in the Success zone, we are happy. If they fall in Improve This, we work to Improve it, and the coverage areas that fall in Discuss This should be ended or put on a focused improvement plan that has an end date, when we would do another assessment.



The way we read the Coverage Strategy Mapper: We start on the left graphic. And we examine what content is falling where. If something falls in Discuss This, we then look to the right graphic to see if it's highly engaging content that we should prioritize for trying to improve.

To go into more detail, let's look more closely here at the table to the left.

We begin our analysis with a look at who is coming to our stories, and how they're getting there. We ask whether the people who are coming to our work are primarily heavy readers, and whether we're getting that same work in front of an audience beyond our own platforms and subscribers. So this chart shows the percentage of pageviews from heavy users, and the percentage of pageviews from search, which has a strong correlation with nonsubscribers' interest.

The axes on this chart are set as baselines. Our average story has 43% of its pageviews from heavy readers, so the baseline for heavy readers is set there. And our average story has 21.7% of pageviews from search, so that is the baseline there.

The chart on the right allows us to consider the context for those percentages, showing us the median number of pageviews for those groups of stories along one axis and how long readers spent with them along the other. (Our data science team provided us with an adjusted look at active or engaged time that takes into account article length, making for meaningful comparisons across coverage types, i.e., not penalizing shorter stories.)

So the chart on the right is the second step, allowing us to go deeper on what our readers enjoyed, which helps us prioritize which content from the first chart's improvement or discussion zones we should work to save (and which to simply end).

## Chapter 7: What We Cover

So, on the overall Mapper, which has both graphics, here's how the strategy editors are interpreting where coverage bubbles fall on the map:

- The top outer zones we call **Success**
- The bottom inner zones we call **Discuss This**
- For all other zones, we say, **Improve This**

To translate our growth strategy encourages work that receives a low percentage of its pageviews from heavy users and a high percentage of pageviews from search, alongside high total pageviews and engaged time. If it falls below our medians in any of those areas, we want to work to improve it—we want those medians to move!

Here's how that shakes out:

- Coverage that receives a low percentage of its pageviews from heavy users, a high percentage of views from search, high median pageviews and high relative engaged time is our goal. We want to encourage more work like it. This is how we win. (**Success + Success = Success**)
- Coverage that receives most of its views from heavy users, doesn't bring in an outside audience via search, gets median pageviews below our baseline and only briefly engages people is in our trouble zone. We want to discourage work like this. It's an investment with poor return. This is what holds us back. (**Discuss This + Discuss This = Discourage This**)

- Any combination of qualities that leads to landing in an "Improve This" quadrant means exactly that: We need to work to improve something about that coverage. Maybe it gets great pageviews but they're all from heavy users. Maybe it's got impressive engaged time but didn't find a large audience. Strategy editors will work with reporters and editors to find the right buttons to push to shift those results. (**Improve This + Anything = Improve This** and **Anything + Improve This = Improve This**)

Then there's the slightly more complicated world of coverage that lands in different places on each side of the map.

- If a type of coverage receives a low percentage of its pageviews from heavy users and a high percentage of its pageviews from search, but gets very low total pageviews and engaged time, we would discourage doing more like it. (**Success + Discuss This = Discuss This**)
- If it gets a high percentage of views from heavy users and a low percentage of its pageviews from search, but receives high pageviews and engaged time, we should work to improve how it does with our light users and nonsubscribers. (**Discuss This + Success = Improve This**)

Got it? If this is confusing at all, come to one of our information sessions about it, and we'll take your questions.

## Chapter 7: What We Cover

### How this framework can drive change and help us with all audiences, including our heavy readers:

Not so long ago in our newsroom, and maybe even still in some pockets now, attracting a high percentage of pageviews from our subscribers was seen as an achievement. We thought, “That means our core audience, our most devoted fans, our smartest readers, appreciate this coverage! It’s worth it to do it for them.”

This metric often doesn’t mean what we think it does.

What it really means is not so much that heavy readers appreciate it, but that only heavy readers appreciate it. And shifting our focus to other audiences doesn’t mean we leave heavy readers unsatisfied. It could even help with them.

Here’s what the Coverage Strategy Mapper taught us: The types of coverage from recent months that land in our “Success” quadrant—signaling a small percentage of pageviews from heavy users—in fact receive **higher** median pageviews **from our heavy readers** than coverage that lands in the “high pageviews from heavy readers” quadrant. Before coronavirus turned the world upside down, the same was true for average pageviews.

The pattern also holds for engaged time for our coverage since early March (though not earlier in our sample). Heavy readers’ relative engaged time was slightly higher for coverage in our “Success” quadrant that reached a broader audience. That means, fascinatingly, heavy readers’ time spent was lower for the coverage for which they made up a higher percentage of the audience. In other words, heavy users spent good amounts of time on stories that did well with broader audiences.

There will be occasions when choosing to pursue new audiences does actually trade off with creating work that our heavy readers enjoy. And in those cases, we strongly recommend prioritizing growth and our future. It’s deeply possible—and even likely—that a coverage strategy designed to connect with many different kinds of readers yields highly engaging journalism that our heavy readers will also love.

But we can no longer produce work that connects with our heavy users and no one else.

We can improve our reach at the same time we improve quality and engagement with all audiences.

## Chapter 7: What We Cover

### Here are some broader insights:

#### 1. Create Better Playlists for Running Stories

We need to tie articles together more attractively to show the long arc of stories. Our journalism cannot exist in a vacuum, especially when the depth and breadth of our coverage allows us to show far more than a snapshot of any particular story. There are a number of ways we can do this, through presentation but also by giving readers the ability to follow the longer arcs of stories through a Follow feature specific to that story arc. We currently offer ways to follow some topic areas and reporters but no way to follow the arc of a storyline.

U.S. News has the highest percentage of nonsubscriber prospects across all our coverage areas. We need to find ways to move them further along the funnel. U.S. News has the highest average pageviews across all coverage areas, but produces the fewest number of articles. We can create loyalty to our news product by locking them into our developing stories through a Follow feature, where we become their go-to source for that particular storyline.

#### 1. Create Efficiencies Through Modularization

We need to be more efficient about how we tackle the commodity news so resources can be used to make sure our deep reporting provides a strong return on our investment.

What efficiencies do we need?

Reusable copy across articles that refer to the same situations we are reporting on.

- We should develop a system that modularizes our content
- Modularization allows us to write less
- It also provides us with opportunities to create custom articles for different audiences based on their prior reading or preferences (location, topic, etc.)

The New York Times leads with live updates nearly daily. They have a distinctive format that doesn't resemble a live blog in the traditional sense but provides a report that feels immediate but also contextual.

We can produce something like this even more efficiently—in the form of our wrap stories—with modularization. We can eventually apply that modularization to other stories to gain even greater efficiency across the newsroom. They can power newsletters and new products.

We can also gain valuable data and insights about our readers based on more granular information, regarding how they interact on an individual story-component level.

This modularization would be useful in many coverage areas, and U.S. could be a place to experiment.



# Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

Before we move into our recommendations on **How We Cover Things**, we will pause here to talk about diversity in our coverage. Is it a matter of **What We Cover**? Or is it a matter of **How We Cover Things**? The answer is both—and in fact, it's also tied to **How We Listen to Audiences**, our first area of recommendations.

CONTENT REVIEW JULY 2020



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## Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

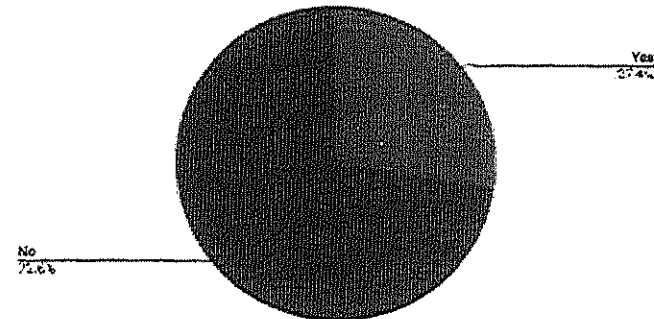
**The WSJ has done many great pieces in recent weeks related to race, but over the longer past, there has been a lack of focus on diversity within our coverage.**

There is risk that our coverage will continue on that foot, especially when the current news cycle changes. In our May 12 newsroom survey—before a police officer killed George Floyd—there was broad consensus that we do not reflect the diversity of the general public.

Of course, newsroom perception isn't primarily what we are focusing on in the content review. We are focusing on the content itself and how it fared with our audience.

The newsroom strategy teams and other newsroom partners have been ahead of the curve in looking at diversity in our sourcing in our stories going back 18 months. So first, we will give a quick review here of what that research has found.

**Do You Believe Our Coverage Reflects the Diversity of the General Public and Changing Demographic Trends?**



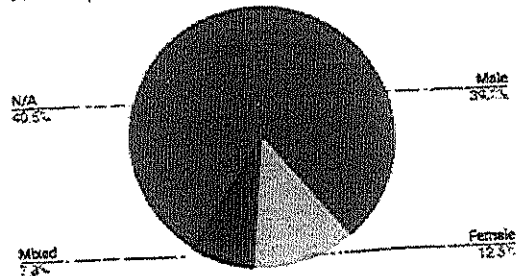
Source: Newsroom survey, May 2020

## Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

### Photography and Images

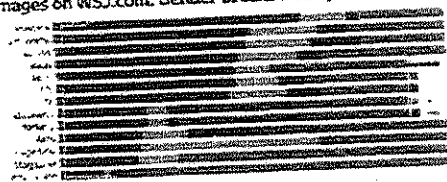
A review in spring 2019 found a need for improvement. The review looked at one week of coverage from March 25 to 29. Here are details of those findings.

Gender Representation in Photos on WSJ.com



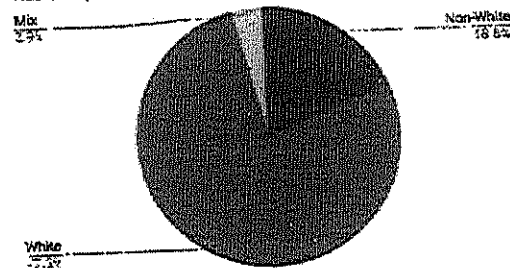
Data from stories published on WSJ.com, from March 25-29, 2019

Images on WSJ.com: Gender Breakdown by Section



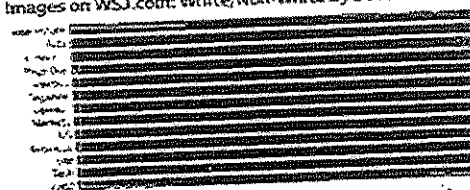
% of Total Number of Records

Racial Representation in Photos on WSJ.com



Data from stories published on WSJ.com, from March 25-29, 2019

Images on WSJ.com: White/Non-White by Section



% of Total Number of Records



## Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

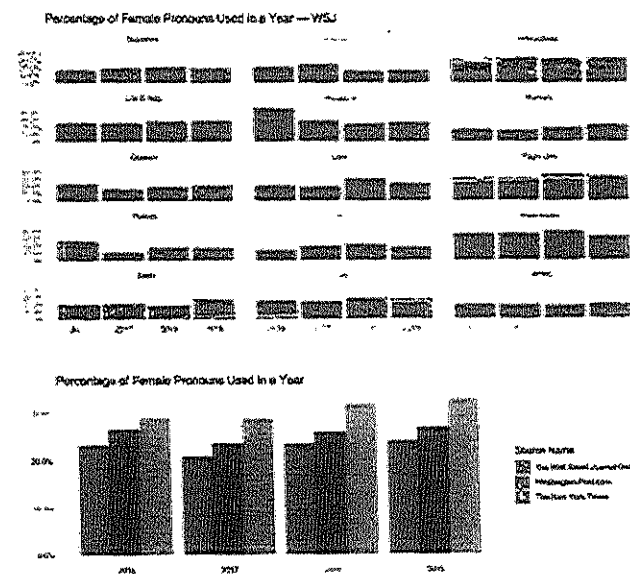
### Quotations

We have done numerous examinations of male/female pronouns used by the WSJ. The focus on gender is not meant to underweight the importance of any other type of diversity—it is simply the case that “he” and “she” are variables we can count in an automated way, while other types of diversity are not always as straightforward to quantify.

Here is the most recent analysis from earlier this year, which shows data from the last four years.

In addition to the systematic gender analysis and racial photo analysis, there was an examination of race among quoted people conducted by the WSJ’s trust fellow last year. Charity Scott, the fellow, examined all 513 articles that ran the week of April 14, 2019. She found that overall, 64.3% of all sources were white, 18.2% were nonwhite and 17.5% were unknown. When you exclude World stories from the results, 70% of the sources were white, 12.6% nonwhite and 17.3% unknown.

Charity’s findings were in line with our photo findings, which found that 69% of the photos we ran digitally with people were ones that featured people who were white.



## Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

### But is the issue here with “What We Cover?” or “How We Cover Things?”

As we’ve discussed diversity in the past, the focus has mainly been on how to get more quotes or photos of diverse people into what we are already covering. That’s because most editors at the Journal don’t like to be told what to cover or that they should change what they are covering. And there are certainly improvements that can be made without changing topics of coverage. We have seen some improvements among reporters who have prioritized this in their existing beats.

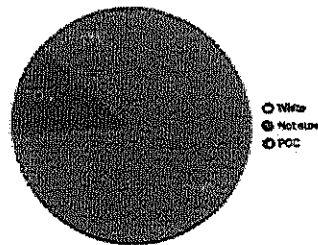
But making significant headway will mean more of our journalists thinking differently about what they are covering in the first place. There is currently no mandate that assigning editors, for example, think at all about whether they are selecting stories that reflect the diverse population of our country, much less if they’ll be stories that will be of interest to diverse audiences.

Beyond source counts and photo counts, we wanted to see how subject selection affected diversity in our stories, so we took a look at all of the leders in the past three months. We selected leders because of the prominent role they play in the newsroom. It’s a mark of prestige to write a leder, which always runs on the front page in print. And leders tend to get excellent placement and promotion online. (Leders, for instance, are on the home page 99% of the time while content overall is on the home page 75% of the time.)

## Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

We found that of the 108 leders from March 1 this year through May 31, only one had race as the main topic. None had gender as the main topic, and none had LGBTQ-specific issues as the main topic of the story. As far as the protagonist of a story—many of our stories do not have human protagonists. But when they did, we found that 13% were people of color (we are including Black Americans, Latinos, Asians and all other people of color in that figure).

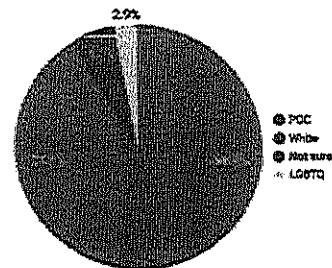
Protagonist



\*Proportion of stories with a human protagonist  
Source: Leders, March 2020 through May 2020

One area where we have been featuring people of color is among our "real people," i.e., the people we quote who are affected by policies. In these cases in leders, people of color were 54% of the real people.

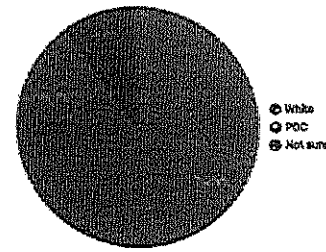
Real People



\*Proportion of stories that quote real people  
Source: Leders, March 2020 through May 2020

In contrast, when we quoted experts, we leaned more heavily on white and male experts.

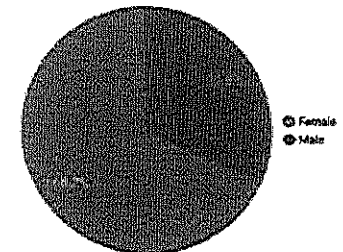
Experts



\*Proportion of stories that quote an expert  
Source: Leders, March 2020 through May 2020

Last, we took a look at gender in the leders where there were protagonists, and here is what we found:

Protagonist



\*Proportion of stories with a human protagonist  
Source: Leders, March 2020 through May 2020

## Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

Readers have a lot of news sources to choose from. As with any consumer product, there's an allegiance of some sort that has to be built for people to pay you money month after month. They have to find value in what you provide, and generally have a positive feeling about the experience. WSJ researchers have been told by women who read us but don't subscribe that part of the problem is not seeing themselves in our coverage.

*"I do have the WSJ, but sometimes it does bother me a little, where it'll be all pictures of white men, and I realize that's who is in the news, but I do think there's a choice in what you cover or include a picture of. Sometimes I do find the opinion page a little too - they won't admit that they're overtly supporting men v. Women (or vice versa), but I don't feel as included on the opinion page.*

*Come on, you just could say this in a different way, instead of acting like you're poo-pooling a feminist issue. Reading it over the decades - I notice a difference. I do like that they're not about identity politics, they want to rise above it, but you don't always acknowledge what is happening or why someone might feel a certain way...*

*The WSJ will have a special section on a conference, there are almost all men in the pictures, and then I don't feel as included. I do know there are women out there, they're just not being interviewed or included. I work in business, and pharma is fairly gender balanced except at the top, so it's frustrating when your life is balanced, but the news is just so many men in the senior levels of power."*

*- Stacey, 35 - 40*

Source: Project Arctos

## Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

We have new audiences interested in The Wall Street Journal—we have a decent number even “trying us out” (i.e., subscribing for a short time). And so we have an opportunity to keep more of them if we keep in mind their interests and perceptions in What We Cover and How We Cover Things.

Along those lines, here are other top research findings that can inform our approach:

- The topic where women prospects overindex the most on their interest compared with our current subscribers is the Environment, followed up by Career and Consumer Products.

The environment was also the top topic of interest that young readers indicated they would like to read about in The Wall Street Journal, in a survey done for Noted. And, as you’ll see below, “Climate change” is of interest to Black and Latino readers.

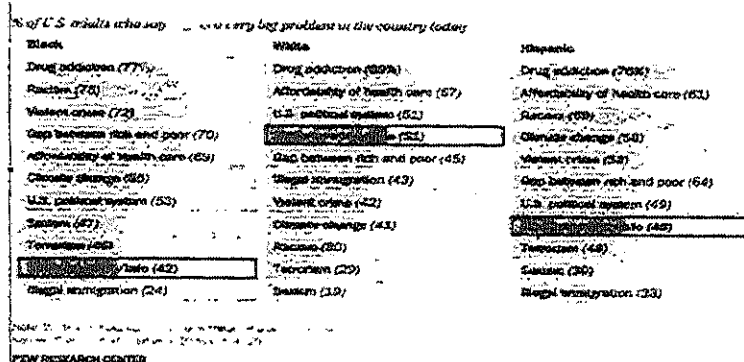
- The topics that Pew Research has found overindex in interest for Black and Latino readers are shown at the table at right.
- We recommend an evaluation right away on creating or expanding beats around all of these topics: the environment, career, consumer products, drug addiction, racism, affordability of health care, income inequality and violent crime.

Index of ‘Extremely/Very Interested in each topic (100 = Average)	Female WSJ prospects	Female WSJ readers	Male WSJ readers
National current events	96	102	101
International current events	93	99	104
Opinions and editorials	84	104	119
Investigative journalism	90	111	87
Breaking news	103	104	91
Politics	94	104	104
Environment	135	87	148
Science and medicine	104	105	90
Financial markets	71	74	112
Personal finance	99	89	78
Career	133	65	42
Retirement	106	89	106
Corporate news	73	82	100
Marketing	99	85	63
Economic (jobs, housing)	94	88	100
Consumer/product	124	81	70
Personal technology	98	91	90
Business/industry technology	81	86	104

## Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity

The environment was also the top topic of interest that young readers indicated they would like to read about in The Wall Street Journal, in a survey done for Noted. And, as you'll see below, "Climate change" is of interest to Black and Latino readers.

- The topics that Pew Research has found overindex in interest for Black and Latino readers are:



- We recommend an evaluation right away on creating or expanding beats around all of these topics: the environment, career, consumer products, drug addiction, racism, affordability of health care, income inequality and violent crime.

These new beats will help us better understand future audiences. New research published from Pew Center in June says 60% of Americans feel the news media does not understand them. On economic issues, 30% of Americans say they are not understood. If we want to acquire these new audiences, we will have to show we understand and report on their issues as the content review already says. This research might be helpful to support the point.

We note that since part of the point in creating or expanding these areas would be to appeal to new audiences, good thought and accountability should go into how to pursue these beats, the storytelling and the community building around them.

- We also strongly recommend putting muscle behind efforts to feature more women and people of color in all of our stories, and we note that doing so must come from the start of reporting, not the end. Editors at all levels must work with reporters to pursue this change.

**Exhibit 1: A Focus on Diversity**

**“We could cover race and gender more, if we could get reporters more comfortable, and make reporters feel they have our support,” said Emily Nelson, our U.S. news editor, in May, before George Floyd’s death and subsequent unrest. “Reporters self-censor and don’t suggest those stories enough. They’re worried about the scrutiny of how it will be written.”**

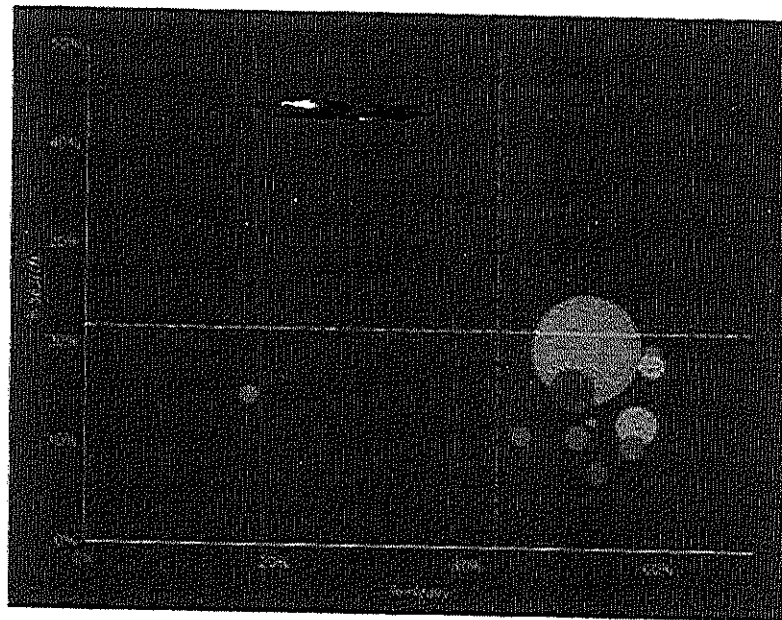
# Exhibit 2: How Print Affects Our Content

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## Exhibit 2: How Print Affects Our Content

We took a look at every recurring feature in print in the A and B sections<sup>10</sup>. We wanted to see how they perform digitally. Here is what we found.



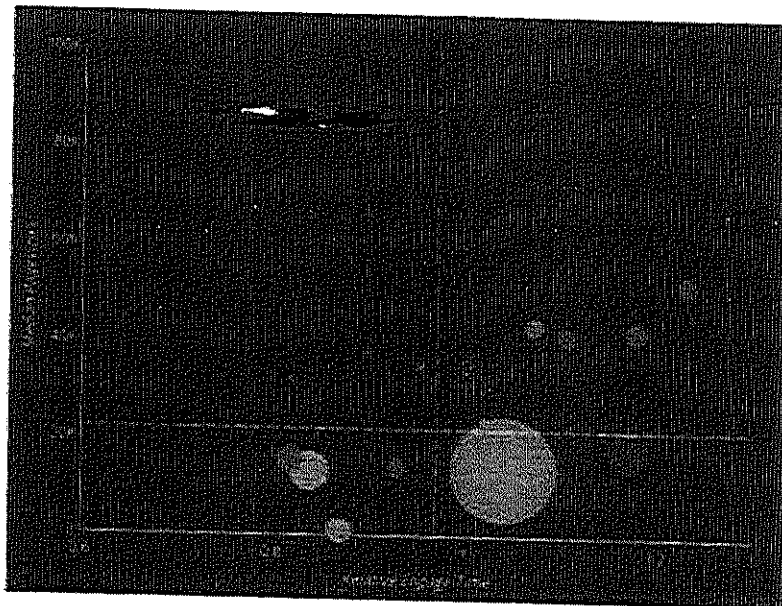
<sup>10</sup> This doesn't include the many recurring print features that are in the Weekend sections, but it's still highly informative. And it shows some light on why the Weekend editions are also landing quite heavily on the "trouble zone" quadrant, perhaps because of the conventions of print. Regular print features even outside of Weekend are not generally doing well.

You'll notice that:

- Nearly all of the recurring features are in the lower right-hand problem area of our Coverage Strategy Mapper.
- Every recurring feature in print except "The Numbers" overindexes with our heavy readers on digital.
- Every recurring feature in print except "Small Business" does below our baseline on search.
- Not a single recurring print feature is in the upper left corner, which is the desirable quadrant for our coverage.

## Exhibit 2: How Print Affects Our Content

We'll look next at our Coverage Strategy Mapper graph that focuses on audience consumption.



CONTENT REVIEW, JULY 2020

You'll notice that:

- Some of the print-driven stories do land in the desired quadrant here—the upper right quadrant. This means that they have good engaged time and good median pageviews. This is a good thing. It means we have a solid number of online readers who enjoy this content (specifically the content that made it to the upper right quadrant). And this is content that we should focus on with a digital lens. The fact that none of this content in the upper right quadrant, other than "The Numbers," reached a diversified audience is a problem. And none of it did well on search, another problem.
- There is content in the bottom left quadrant. This indicates that a small number of people read this online and they didn't spend very long on it.

## Exhibit 2: How Print Affects Our Content

**Given that all this content also flunked on the prior quadrant, we need to ask, why do we do it at all?**

**Yes, in this case, we know the answer likely is: for print. But therein lies the problem.**

Print is a product with a dying audience. Print has a rhythm and product limitations that don't translate into great digital presentations.

You may think it's harmless that we have recurring features in print, but the way the WSJ works, it's not. There is an immense focus on print and that a) boxes in people's thinking on how to approach stories and b) takes up resources that aren't focusing on digital.

As Charles Forelle, our Finance coverage chief, said:

*"Print chart desire is overwhelming. ...Print still drives a lot of graphics decisions, ties up a lot of time. If a story is moved from B1 to A1, someone has to rebuild the chart because of a different print spec."*

And as one Life & Arts editor explained:

*"Everything is very print-based. We have very little opportunity to try new digital formats. Digital considerations are not a part of the conversation till the very end, on every story."*

## Exhibit 2: How Print Affects Our Content

When we see print sections driving content that does terrible in digital, we should rethink that content. It's likely there are a whole host of workflows, patterns and people involved who are not digital-forward thinkers—partially because they are measured by how their print product looks.

**We need to ask ourselves: How would we operate if we did not have a print edition? And that's how we start operating immediately.**

CONTENT REVIEW JULY 2020

In our newsroom survey in May, a number of our colleagues volunteered that they are confused by the continued focus on print and how it changes the way we operate for digital.

*"I'm curious to know how much longer the WSJ expects to produce a print edition. It seems like not having one will free up so many resources and not force us to conform each day's production to an artificial print edition."*

*"Why can't we run a story online Wednesday and put it in the paper Saturday? Other publications do this all the time. If there's a reason, it would be helpful if someone explained it. At present, competitive stories are held for print reasons, which makes no sense to me."*

*"I still get the feeling that many buros are filing for print rather than for digital. Stories sometimes arrive late in the day, too long and without consideration for a headline or visuals, making it difficult or impossible for editors to publish in time to capitalize on peak traffic periods. Often it seems like the headline is the last thing to be considered."*

And this survey comment is notable:

*"Some people think that digital first means they never have to think about print."*

## Exhibit 2: How Print Affects Our Content

We're here to say, let's talk about this: **Digital first may only be possible if we can stop thinking about print.**

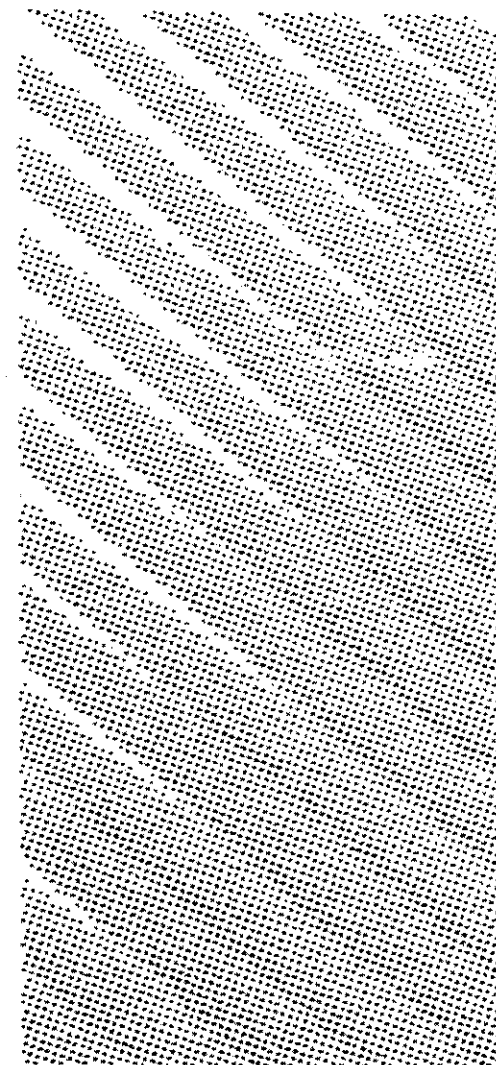
As Matt Murray puts it:

*"Print is here for the foreseeable future, and needs to be robust and strong. BUT we should do as little as possible for print only. Anything done for print that isn't resonating digitally should be evaluated—for content, workflow, publishing, whatever it is. Some of it, maybe most of it, we should stop if it can be successful digitally. And we should ensure print is both resourced and ringfenced to be as self-sufficient as possible. The vast majority of the newsroom should be focused on digital product experiences and never think about print."*

WSJ ●

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

CONTENT REVIEW JULY 2020



## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

We have a whole team of people at The Wall Street Journal who specialize in print layout. They exchange proofs of every page again and again with each other and top editors as they close out editions and look at the layout article by article.

Guess who is doing this for digital?

No one. At least not consistently. The vast majority of our articles are published without much, if any, oversight from anyone thinking about the digital reader experience of the stories. These stories, especially on mobile web, are often the equivalent of A1 and the first impression we're making on people. Their satisfaction—whether we scratched the itch that prompted their click—determines whether they continue to dive deeper or hit the back button and return to search, social or email.

As Jason Anders, our chief news editor, said, "There's a failure to connect on kind of easy places," such as mobile web. "Stories are too long without thoughtful presentation. You scroll and there's just text. That doesn't seem to happen at the [New York] Times, where there seems to be more thought put into the experience on the front end. There's missed opportunities daily. It's a visual story with no visuals in it."

How We Cover Things needs to combine new ways of thinking about the stories we're telling, how to report and present them digitally, how to provide appropriate context and voice, how to create logical connections between updates and how to expand the impact of evergreen content.

This section will offer recommendations in all those areas. Keep in mind: These recommendations aren't "nice to haves." In the art and science of drawing more audience, the art of how we approach it is often how we nail the science. We have goals—as laid out in the prior chapter and illustrated in the Coverage Strategy Mapper—and How We Cover Things is an important part of reaching those goals.

As we head into this section, take a look at these findings from WSJ user research on what would move the needle with new audiences:

- *In an era where people are struggling to discern what is truthful and what is "unbiased", it turns out that people try to solve this problem not only with more 'facts' but also with more context.*
- *Connecting a story to people's real-life experiences is one way of providing context.*
- *Connecting a story to bigger picture impact is another way of providing context.*

### What is context?

- *Historical context: how this compares to other periods and time, appeals to a kind of rational reasoning*
- *Human context: how this affects real people/people "like me", appeals to a sense of empathy/sympathy*
- *Implications/next steps: what will happen as a result, appeals to a sense of certainty*
- *Behind the scenes/raw data: how you reported the story and your conclusions, appeals to a sense of credibility*

Source: Project Anamix

## **Chapter 8: How We Cover Things**

Consumer research shows that Americans aged 25-45 are increasingly:

- Pursuing hobbies and feel-good experiences as escapes from "serious news"
- Chasing happiness, relaxation and comfort on practical budgets
- Craving deeper connections to various communities
- Looking inward, setting personal growth goals and seeking realistic guidance
- Searching for relevant, trustworthy and fulfilling content that makes them smarter

**Our data findings to be outlined on the next pages provide back-up that we need to change How We Cover Things.**



Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

Quoting Real People

Our research indicates that quoting real people can be helpful to connecting stories to people's lives, so we tagged stories that quoted real people to examine how much we do it and whether it seems to help a story perform. We also split our sample to determine whether trends changed with our pivot to pandemic coverage, which we defined as on or after March 9, 2020. Here's what we found:

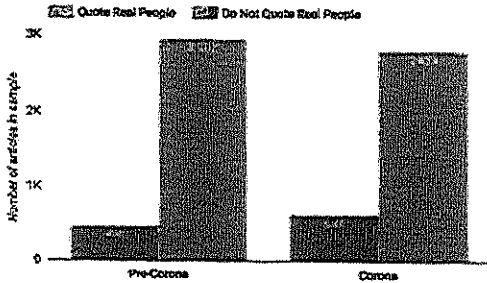
Are we quoting real people in stories?

Not often. Less than a quarter of the time.

How do the stories that quote real people succeed with readers?

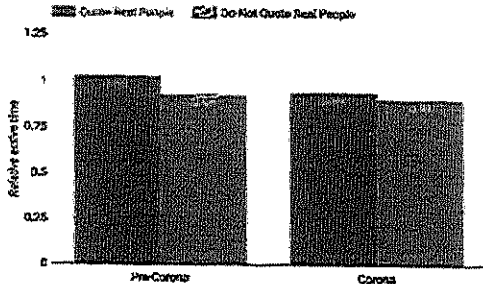
Readers spend more time with these stories, with increased engaged times across most coverage areas. These stories also drive more orders.

What Are We Publishing?



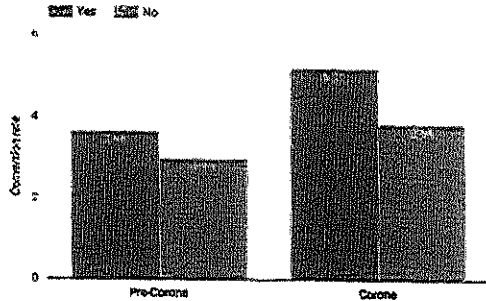
Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

Are Articles That Quote Real People More Engaging?



Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

Articles that Quote Real People Have Higher Conversions



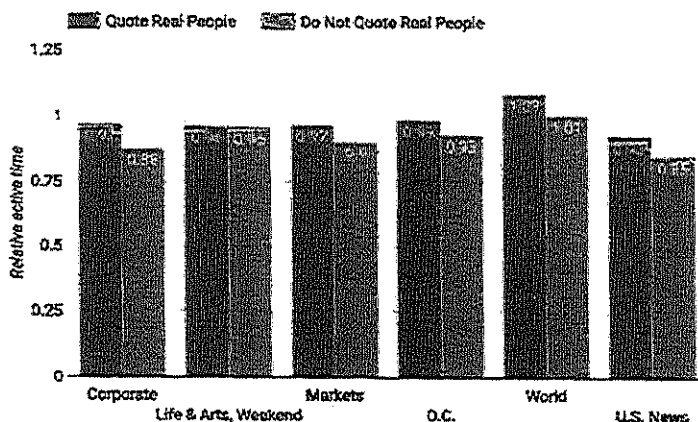
Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

We controlled for home-page play and found that articles that quoted real people still performed better than those that did not.

All coverage areas seem to benefit in engaged time when they quote real people, except Life & Arts and Weekend, which were neutral.

### Do All Coverage Areas Benefit from Quoting Real People?



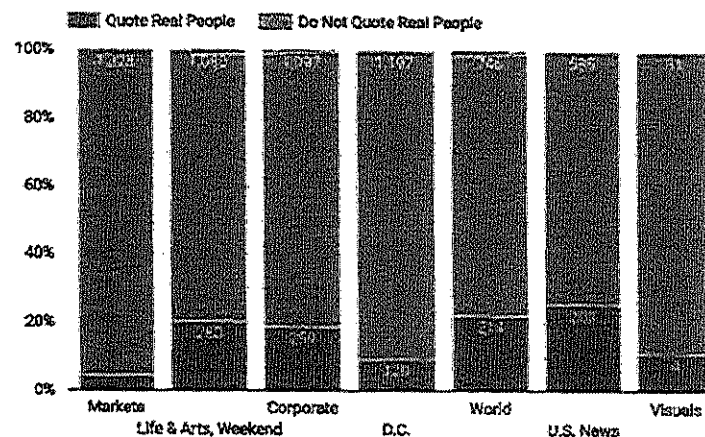
Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

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### Which sections quote real people the most?

U.S. News and World have the highest percentage of stories with quotes from real people. D.C. and Markets have the lowest.

### What Proportion of Articles in each Coverage Area Quote Real People?



Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

**Recommendation:** We need to quote more real people in stories. Quoting real people helps the reader see the people affected by news and pushes the reporter to explain how stories affect people's lives. Those are important steps for our journalism to take, especially in the eyes of new audiences.

As Nicole, a 26-year-old reader quoted in the user research at the start of this chapter, said:

**“You have to have empathy in your stories. If you don’t know how people are impacted, you don’t actually have the full story.”**

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### Audience Needs

What draws people to The Wall Street Journal's reporting? What needs are we meeting? Too much of How We Cover Things assumes that people need to know what we think they need to know. That may be true for a core group of die-hard fans who visit our home page out of habit and loyalty. But most people don't show up asking, "What do you have for me today?" They're coming to get an edge over a competitor, to make better decisions about their 401(k) or to learn about trends in their industry. Digital consumers don't typically consume news passively, like someone who sits down to watch the nightly network news. Instead, they are driven by specific needs and emotions, which fuel their decisions about which headlines and publishers to engage with.

We developed a list of audience needs based on WSJ as well as broader industry research. Then we tagged our stories to see how many of them cater to those user needs. Here's what we found:

#### What user needs are we meeting with our stories?

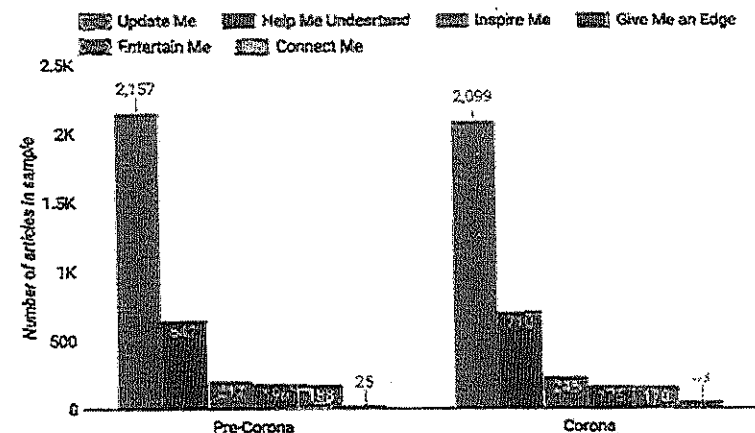
We are publishing more Update Me stories than all other stories combined.

It's not surprising to see the large number of Update Me stories, given that we are a traditional news publisher. It's also in line with the evergreen findings in the next section, where we will see that Fleeting News stories account for the majority of our reporting.

The problem is, Update Me is not the only type of story that readers value, and these articles have a short shelf life, retaining little value and offering less utility after they have run and time has passed. Generally speaking, Update Me news stories are read for about 1.5 days.

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### What Are We Publishing?



Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### So which audience needs drive the most interest in our stories?

Controlling for home-page placement, Connect Me ranked highest in median pageviews in the pre-corona period, while Give Me an Edge took the top spot since the coronavirus hit. Help Me Understand performed well across both.

### Which audience needs hold readers' attention the longest?

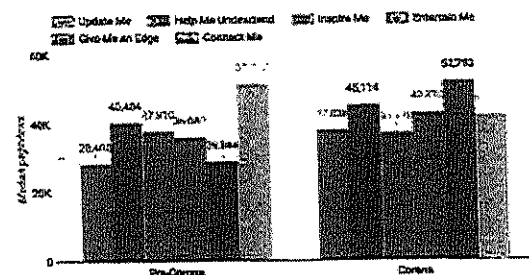
Help Me Understand and Entertain Me stories recorded the highest relative engaged time.

### Which types of stories drive the most orders?

Give Me an Edge and Inspire Me stories converted the most readers before coronavirus. Once coronavirus hit, Inspire Me stories brought in the most orders, followed by Entertain Me, Help Me Understand and Give Me an Edge.

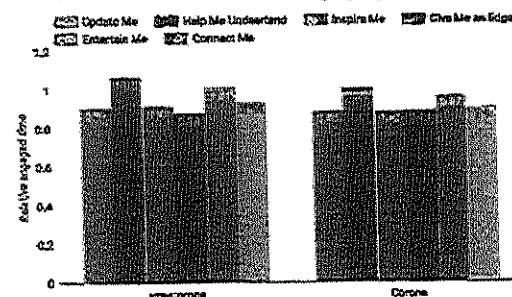
There's no doubt we'll keep writing Update Me stories, but we need to remember that this category is the least likely to convert a visitor into a paying member who develops a deeper relationship with our reporting. We must write more stories that meet other needs.

### Median Pageviews for Articles Appearing on Homepage



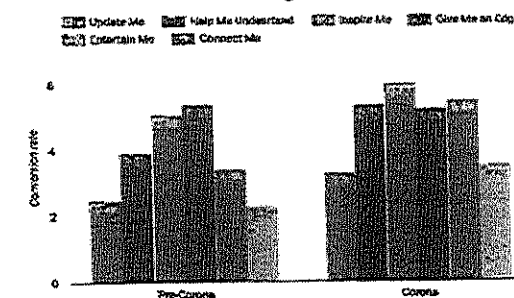
Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

### Which Stories are the Most Engaging?



Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

### Which Stories Have the Highest Conversion Rate?



Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

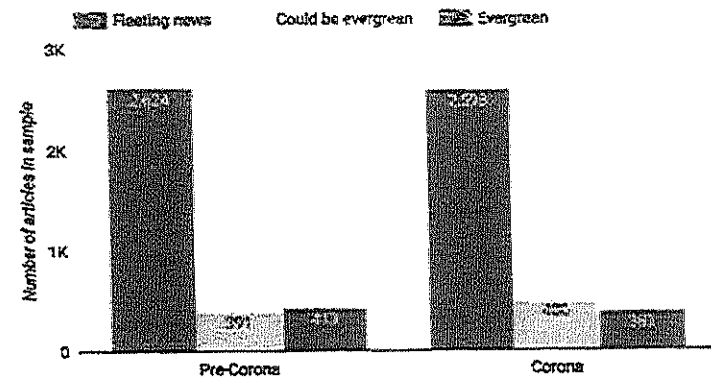
## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### Evergreen Content

#### How much fleeting news versus evergreen content do we produce?

Our manual tagging exercise also found that roughly 75% of the stories we produce are “fleeting news,” meaning they age quickly and aren’t relevant for long after publication. Even during peak coronavirus coverage (on and after March 9, 2020), when we consciously wrote more service-oriented stories, that ratio did not change.

#### What Are We Publishing?



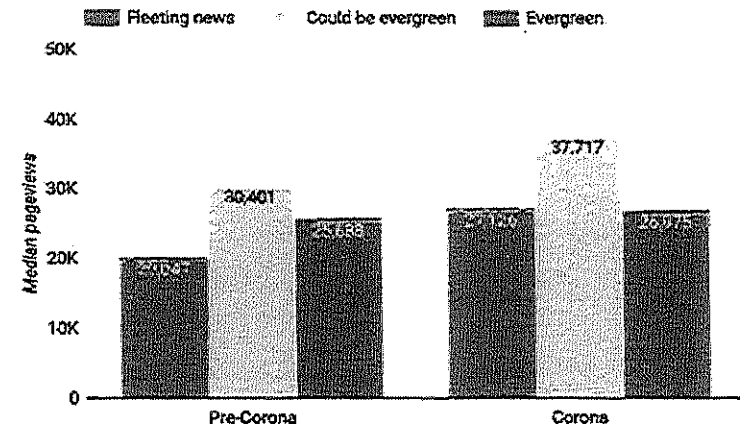
## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

The other 25% of stories we write are evergreen. We have broken evergreen stories into two categories: stories that really are nonexpiring as written ("evergreen" above), and those that could become evergreen with small changes.

### How do our audiences respond to evergreen stories?

Evergreen and Could be Evergreen stories generated 28% more pageviews than Fleeting News, on average, in October through February. That advantage narrowed in March, April and May as coronavirus Fleeting News stories captured mindshare, though we still see Could be Evergreen remaining the story type with the highest median pageviews during the coronavirus story.

## Which Evergreen Content Has the Highest Median Pageviews per Article?



Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

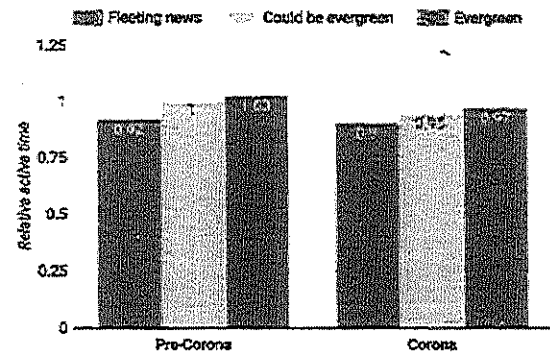
Note: To control for whether or not being on the home page affects this, we're including here only ones in these categories that were on the home page. The result looks the same, however, for this data even when you do not control for home-page placement.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### How do readers engage with fleeting news and evergreen content?

Beyond pageviews, Evergreen and Could be Evergreen stories also kept readers' attention for a longer period of time than Fleeting News stories, with 7% more engagement in October through February.

### Which Stories are the Most Engaging?

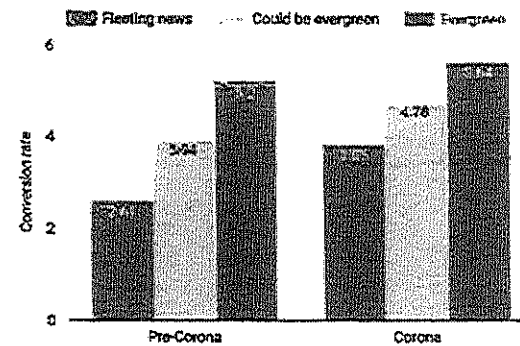


Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

### Which types of stories drive the most orders?

As with Inspire Me and Give Me an Edge stories, Evergreen and Could be Evergreen stories also consistently do better than Fleeting News (44% on average) at converting visitors to paying members.

### Which Stories Have High Conversion Rates?



Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

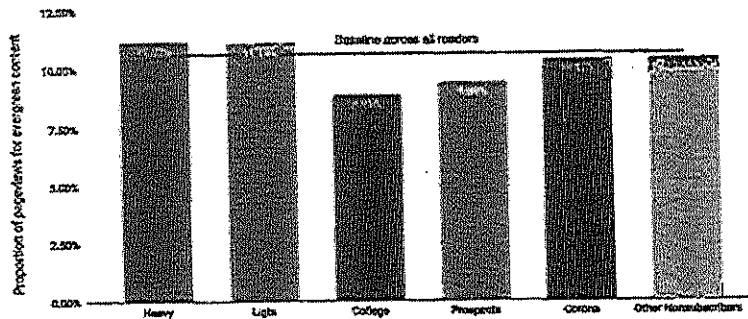


## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### How do audience segments index on Evergreen stories?

It's often assumed that service journalism does well with prospects and younger audiences, but for WSJ, it performs even better with heavy users. This suggests that the topics and ways we are telling evergreen stories does not resonate as much as possible with younger, more casual audiences. This could be driven by how coverage areas approach their reporting.

### Which Audience Segments Prefer Evergreen Content?

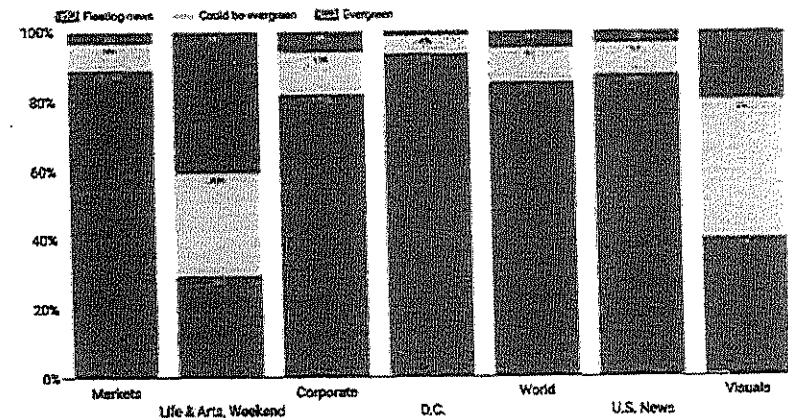


Note: This is the breakdown post-corona. The distribution pre-corona is about the same.

### Which coverage areas publish more Evergreen content?

The sections with the largest proportion of existing content that Could be Evergreen or is Evergreen are Life & Arts and the Weekend sections. We know these sections currently overindex with heavy readers. As we work on helping them diversify their audience with the Coverage Strategy Mapper, that should lead to evergreen content that is more interesting to broader audiences.<sup>17</sup>

### Which Coverage Areas are Producing More or Less Evergreen Content?



Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

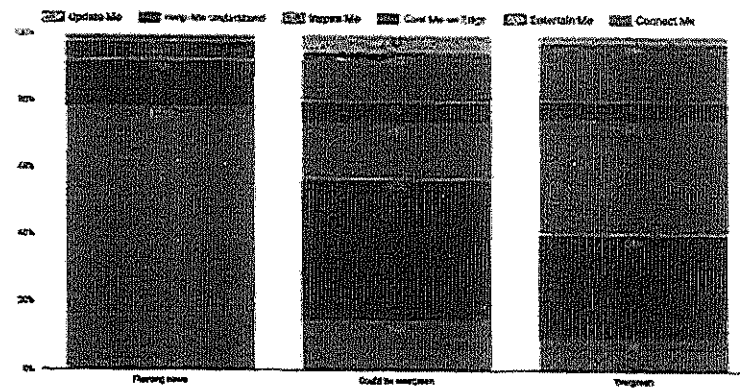
<sup>17</sup> See the Exhibit before this chapter on the example of the Personal Journal project.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### Which audience needs do Evergreen stories meet?

Unsurprisingly, Help Me Understand and Inspire Me stories make up the majority of Evergreen and Could be Evergreen stories.

### What is the Breakdown of Audience Needs by Story Type?

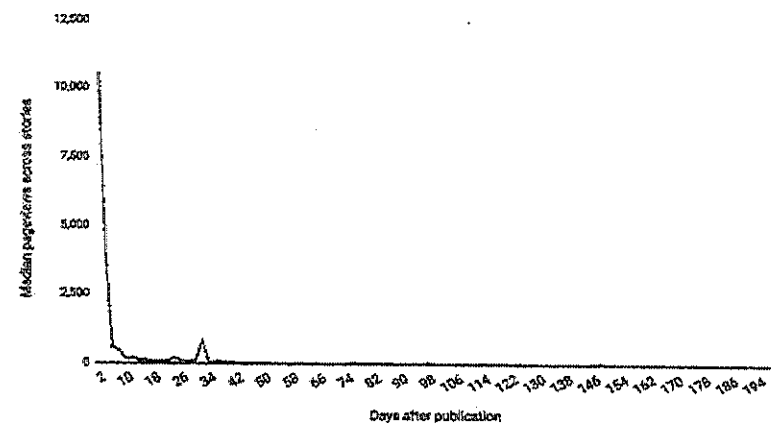


Source: Random sample of articles, October 2019 to May 2020

When we look at the lifespan of our Evergreen stories, we see a missed opportunity. Evergreen isn't being used to its fullest potential—we're not taking advantage of its durable shelf life. Our Evergreen content attracts readers much longer than the average

1.5 days for Fleeting News stories, but still falls off faster than it should. Look at our chart of ongoing readership of Evergreen stories.

### October 2019 Evergreen Stories Over Time



What the graphic shows is the pageviews over time of evergreen stories we published in October 2019. If we were making the most of our evergreen content, the pageviews wouldn't have such a steep fall-off. They would have been going on and on ever since October. This is a missed opportunity.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

**Recommendation:** We need to rethink content that has the potential to be Evergreen and make sure we are approaching it from an audience-driven perspective that will make it useful and discoverable for as long as possible. If we have more Evergreen content and we tag it correctly, it can be offered to readers via our recommendation engine much longer, increasing our long-tail of content (and increasing the odds that we recommend something they like). And if we have more Evergreen, that has been done with search and/or social in mind, we can welcome external traffic on those stories for far longer than we currently do.

**There are two types of evergreen content we need to pursue:**

**1. Context on Major News Stories:** General news readers don't read as incrementally as our heavy readers (and our journalists) do. This means they often arrive at news stories that update them but don't help them understand or give them an edge. (For example, many readers who got our news alert "Advertisers Seek to Revise Deal Terms With Streamer Quibi" may not have known the streaming startup's backstory.) As identified above, those other needs—helping them understand, giving them an edge, etc.—are real and move the needle on engagement. We've already recommended that we write more of these stories, but we're now specifically saying that we need to do more of them tied to major news stories. More broadly, these best practices shouldn't be viewed as one-offs to be done by a subset of the newsroom. These need to be at the heart of our coverage. For every fleeting news story we write to update people, we should be sure we've also produced a complementary story or two that will fulfill other user needs and do so in an evergreen way, which means intentionally writing for discoverability and to achieve a longer half-life.

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We successfully dipped our toe into this with our coronavirus coverage. Rather than simply writing fleeting news stories on a particular state opening or closing, we created a state-by-state guide that we promoted over time. And rather than simply writing a one-off story about the symptoms of the virus, we created a living guide that became the most viewed story of the year.

We have expanded this approach to other coverage areas. For instance, our reader guide for the Iowa Caucus, initiated by our SEO editor, drove just under 100,000 pageviews, with half of that coming via search. This was the most-read article WSJ published on the Iowa caucus. This type of content has potential not just for organic search, but also for paid social marketing. Another example: We published this piece on Hong Kong's Security Law on the day news broke and drove 40,000 pageviews within two days. Then we updated it with more information and the piece doubled in pageviews. We are now at 130,000 pageviews and plan to update the piece again when the law takes effect. This approach, facilitated by the World strategy editor and the SEO editors, really got the team excited about the format. We have been working on several evergreen Q&As since then.

Going forward, we should be tracking a small set of "hot topics" on WSJ.com, writing and linking to evergreen, non-Update Me stories that add context to major news stories, and do so through the lens of search trends. For these contextual stories, our user research suggests we should consider: historical context, how this affects people like me, next steps from here, original data or ways to go deeper, and background info on how the WSJ is covering this story.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

**2. Service Journalism:** Beyond contextual content tied to large news topics, there is a large opportunity for us in service journalism. To pursue this, we must remember, as noted in the introduction to this report, that our digital products are less like our daily print edition and more like living libraries.

Given that the bulk of our evergreen content is currently produced by Life & Arts and the Weekend sections, that is probably the best place to start. But we also should look to revamp our personal finance and career areas with a bigger focus on how our stories can continue to attract audiences for months—even years—after publication.

We must drive all this content from a broad audience perspective, focusing on nonsubscribers and on search engine optimization. This approach will fulfill audience needs such as Help Me Understand and Give Me an Edge. We should conceive the content with those needs in mind and accept that these stories will offer little value to the print edition. We must divorce all this content from print demands. This area of content is critical to our growth goals and must be driven by people with strong knowledge of digital strategy who closely collaborate with product development.

For both our contextual and service-oriented pieces, we need the full newsroom adopting best practices of tagging evergreen content in Methode and Gutenberg, using the tags DXS created with the publishing desk. This will allow the content to be identified and surfaced longer in more visible ways. That way, beyond optimizing for search referrals, we can also deepen our pool of recommended content available to persuade people to read more while they're on our platforms.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

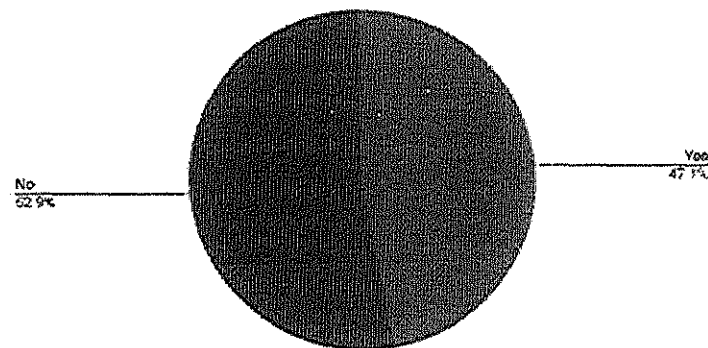
### Presentation and Visuals

**“The default mode of coverage is a bunch of words—people in charge of coverage manage people who deal in words. Collaborating with people who have other skills is always a second-order thing.”**

**— Charles Forelle, Finance chief**  
(Charles noted that this is not the way it should be)

There's wide awareness of and frustration about the way we use visuals. In our newsroom survey, when we asked about working with visuals and related teams, here is what people said:

**Are You Able to Find Partners in the Newsroom to Pursue Your Storytelling Ambitions Across Various Mediums and Formats?**



## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

**"I started in December so while folks are happy to help once I find them, it hasn't been a seamless process to find them. Having Krista on board as a dedicated strategy editor has made this process much much easier."**

**"One of the things that has helped is having Kevin [Dubois Join World] as a strategy editor. He was able to get invited to meetings that I had otherwise not really been a part of and I'm not totally sure how he did it, but I think he got the rest of the section to start working more closely with us."**

It's heartening that people understand that the strategy editors will be able to help (and in fact have already helped in a number of high-profile text and visuals collaborations, including Who's Hiring and Who's Firing: How Firms Are Reacting to the Coronavirus and A Rainforest, Maya Ruins and the Fight Over a Tourist Train).

Strategy editors also have an important role to play in our strategic thinking about visuals, including video, audio, graphics and the format and layout of stories, to ensure we maximize our resources toward achieving our audience goals. They are uniquely positioned to help their coverage areas make decisions about which formats to pursue for which stories or how to cover a story using a mix of mediums.

When it comes to multimedia and news presentation, it's impossible to separate "How We Cover Things" from the "Ways We Work", so the following sections—Video, Audio and Graphics—are a combination of both topics.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### Video

WSJ offers a strong slate of video series and distributes video content across multiple platforms, including WSJ.com, YouTube and OTT (over-the-top) services. In the past two years, the video team transitioned from being a service desk—producing content to supplement news articles—to running a full-scale video storytelling unit producing breaking news stories, nonfiction films and everything in between.

See our chart for an easy way to understand our four video content pillars.

#### News & analysis

Quick videos that get done in real time and news videos closely timed to the news cycle

*Examples:*

[In Nebraska, a City With Many Essential Workers Charts Its Own Way to Fight Coronavirus](#)

[Beijing's Coronavirus Cases Spoil Its Return to Normal](#)

[George Floyd Is Laid to Rest in Houston](#)

#### Explainers

Videos that bring context, clarity to complicated subjects that WSJ covers

*Examples:*

[How Smartphone Cameras Told the Story of Police Brutality](#)

[What to Expect When Flying Now \(and in the Future\)](#)

[Can't Unlock Your iPhone's Face ID with a Mask On? There's a Mask For That](#)

#### Originals

Enterprise videos that are not pegged to the news cycle but are timely and topical

*Examples:*

[How China Is Using Artificial Intelligence in Classrooms](#)

[2047: The Fight for the Future of Hong Kong](#)

[Koalas' Sanctuary Island Is Under Threat From Wildfires](#)

[Huawei Staff Help Governments to Spy on People](#)

#### Nonfiction films

On- and off-platform documentaries

*Examples:*

['Predator on the Reservation': A Documentary Film by Frontline and WSJ](#)

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

As part of a partnership with Twitter, we also produce quick, information-packed videos designed for social audiences. Each video features early morning news digests, a look ahead at the big stories of the day, market-moving moments, personal finance segments, and end-of-day insights.

Although some have been put on hold due to the pandemic, we also run several video series, including:

- The highly engaging and relatable Personal Technology series hosted by Joanna Stern.
- The Middle Seat series full of travel insights by our columnist Scott McCartney.
- In The Elevator With featuring Joanna Stern stuck in an elevator with senior executives of innovative companies.
- WSJ Glossary breaking down the basic terms and ideas that move the markets.

Here we are making initial recommendations to support our video strategy as well as to align it with our wider newsroom strategy.

### Recommendation 1: Strategic Integration

- As we define our audience growth and loyalty goals for the digital future of WSJ, we need to bring our key performance indicators for video in line with this strategy. What does that mean? We are on a mission to retain our light readers and attract nonsubscribers to our content. Video, as with everything we publish, should help us win at search and reach new audiences. In other words, our priority is not to get

people already on the platform to watch more videos, but rather to help us bring more people to our platform. The fact that videos aren't behind the paywall offers a great opportunity to hook first-time or light readers. Our push to livestream videos and to host live Q&As on site also supports this strategy.

- To support this work and further collaboration among the wider newsroom, the strategy team, and the video team, we recommend having a strategy editor specialized in video storytelling with extensive experience in on- and off-platform video distribution sit within Programming Strategy.

### Recommendation 2: Data

- We need to centralize the management of video data with our newsroom News Insights team and integrate video data within the overarching reporting framework. All audience insight reports need to be vetted and issued by the data team if we want to maintain data accuracy and our reporting authority. We understand this work is just getting under way and will require a serious engineering effort, but this is the right strategy if we want to build a more robust reporting system.
- The current video tagging strategy reflects our internal team structure, not our audience needs. Such tagging makes audience-first analysis more complicated and limited. As the tagging is manual and done by video producers in the video content management system, BCE, it is easy for mistakes to happen. In line with the recommendation to rethink and rebuild our web taxonomy, we highly recommend doing the same for our video data structure and naming convention.



## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### Recommendation 3: Newsroom collaboration

- On one hand, the video team is perceived as a siloed unit producing content separately from the rest of the newsroom. Several senior editors have also confessed not to know or understand what the video strategy is. On the other hand, the video editors expressed the desire to learn about stories that could benefit from video earlier and be more included in coverage decisions. “We’re a news desk, we’re journalists [who] tell stories in a video format,” said Beckey Bright, production managing editor for video.
- While initiatives have been taken to build that bridge, more work needs to be done on both sides. This is not an us-versus-them scenario—we are a newsroom of journalists who want to produce the best content in the best format available for the widest audience possible. With further integration, we see opportunities for video-first stories and to break away from our traditional mindset that everything has to be a written story.

### Recommendation 4: Search

More thorough search-engine optimization work around video will help to better surface our content on YouTube and Google Search. This includes:

- **WSJ.com video center:** Section fronts are a very important part of a website’s architecture and taxonomy. They help Google find and crawl our content and increase our chances to rank and appear in Google Search. Currently, the URL to our video center redirects to an individual video URL. This means we are not able to boost the authority and ranking of our video center home page, which could in turn boost the authority and ranking of our videos.
- **Google’s video carousel:** YouTube is very important for Google Search. Videos always have their own separate carousel on any trending topic. Looking at a crawl of Google for “Coronavirus” during April, YouTube appeared more organically and had a higher position than any publisher. On June 24, 2020, the video carousel on Google Search saw six out of 10 videos hosted on YouTube.com. What’s more interesting is that these videos were all published by news publishers like Bloomberg.
- **Search trends:** Additionally, the same trends that work for Google will typically work for YouTube. (YouTube’s auto-suggest is also another great way to find keywords.) In May, when news broke that Kim Jong-un was nowhere to be found, we produced great web stories but failed to identify the need for a simple video explainer that would answer the question: “Where is Kim Jong-un?” It was a major trending search term on Google and YouTube. The New York Times spotted the opportunity and produced this video full of insights on how to understand Kim Jong-un’s absence. The video has since generated 8.6 million views.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### Audio

**“Bigger audiences, better measurement and easier access have combined to change the economics of news podcasting. In turn this is encouraging publishers to invest in creating more quality content, and platforms to invest in better distribution and monetisation, in a virtuous circle of growth.”**

**Nic Newman, lead author of the Reuters Institute’s comprehensive report News Podcasts and the Opportunities for Publishers, released December 2019**

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

With a strong slate of general news, evergreen, and opinion podcasts, the WSJ has clearly established itself within the audio ecosystem.

### General News

**Minute Briefing:** "Speed through top news in a flash." Approximately one-minute episodes released three times every weekday.

**What's News:** "One of the original business news podcasts. Mirrored after the popular Wall Street Journal column." Up to 15-minute episodes released two times every weekday.

**The Journal:** "The most important stories, explained through the lens of business." Up to 20-minute episodes that go deep on one leading news story released every weekday.

### Topic-Specific News

**Tech News Briefing:** "Get the latest in technology news for your weekday commute." Up to 15-minute episodes released every weekday.

**Your Money Briefing:** "Your must-listen for valuable money and market stories from The Wall Street Journal." Under 10-minute episodes released every weekday.

### Evergreen

**Secrets of Wealthy Women:** "Successful women executives, workplace pioneers, self-made entrepreneurs, industry trendsetters and money-savvy experts reveal insights on how to get ahead, reach your goals, and achieve professional success." Up to 30-minute episodes released every Wednesday.

**The Future of Everything:** "Discover what comes next with this in-depth look at how science and technology are revolutionizing the way we live, work and play." Up to 30-minute episodes released every other week, or when ready.

### Opinion

**Opinion: Potomac Watch:** "Get critical perspective and the analysis you need on developments from the nation's capital." Up to 30-minute episodes released every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday in the afternoon.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

Leading our current offering, The Journal currently sees more than 215,000 downloads per episode. The Future of Everything sees more than 125,000 downloads, according to a 2019 audio team report.

This space is, however, getting more and more competitive, and our podcast performance lags behind our competitors. We need to stay ahead and make sure we deliver our journalism where our readers, including future ones, are.

These are areas of improvement we have identified and recommend:

### **Recommendation 1: Increase Resources**

We have a team of 10 people, including the executive producer and a current intern, pushed to the max to produce seven daily podcasts as well as one three-times-a-week, one weekly and one biweekly podcasts. The executive producer has even had to step in to host one of the daily podcasts. This not only puts them in a dangerous position if they're not able to retain all 10 staff members, but it also limits their capacity to innovate and test new approaches to the current slate of podcasts. This situation makes it even more difficult for the team to experiment with entirely new podcasts, whether they be for younger audiences or in different formats, such as the forays into fiction and serialized stories many news organizations have been exploring in the past 12 to 18 months.

### **Recommendation 2: Create a Podcast Lab**

This is even more important to consider as commercial opportunities are rising around podcasts, especially audio series. In order to stay ahead and win on the advertising front, our audio team needs to be able to operate both as a storytelling and production unit and a podcasting experimental lab.

### **Recommendation 3: Improve Data**

The state of data on our podcasts is poor, in part due to the podcast ecosystem. Currently, our main tool is Megaphone for data and insights across podcast apps and smart speakers. As we work across the newsroom to improve our data insights, podcasts should be a part of that. Improving our access to and understanding of podcast data should be in the purview of the News Insights team headed by Ross Fadely and an audio/video-focused data scientist should be added.

## Chapter 8: How We Cover Things

### Recommendation 4: Improve Discoverability

Recent research by the Dow Jones Customer Intelligence team found that discoverability is a “major barrier” to more people learning about and listening to our podcasts. While this is a known issue in the podcast industry, there are opportunities to improve from where The Wall Street Journal currently is:

- **Show notes:** Make adjustments to the current publishing tool so that it can take the necessary details about each episode to maximize its discoverability across platforms. Currently, its character limit prevents the team from including all of an episode’s details, including the names of guests and keywords.
- **Transcripts:** Develop SEO-optimized episode pages that include a show’s transcript as well as links to related content on WSJ.com. This will pay off as Google has made podcasts more visible in search results.
- **Quotes.** Introduce features, such as the clip-sharing feature powered by Shortcut, an open-source web app that allows listeners to share their favorite clips over email or on social media. These are a potential great help to building a community around shows. Two ways prospective listeners said they discovered podcasts, according to our Customer Intelligence team’s recent research, are by word of mouth and social media.

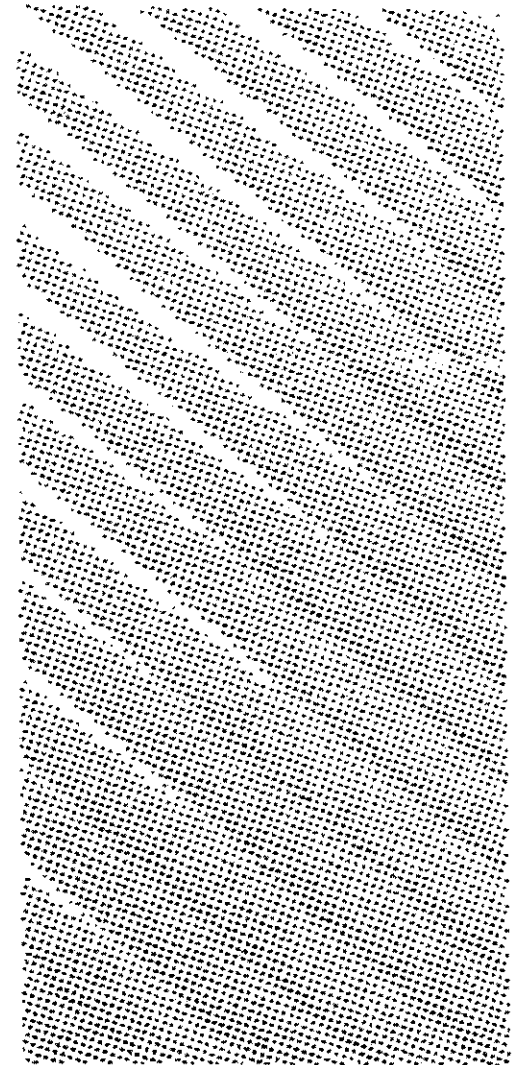
### Recommendation 5: Improve Newsroom Collaboration

We should strongly encourage and expect our reporting staff to pitch audio stories and work with the podcast team. The podcast ecosystem is young, with more than 50% of podcast listeners under 34 years old, according to the 2019 Reuters Institute report, which gives us a strong pipeline to present our journalism in engaging ways to younger audiences. To help with this shift, reporters need to be evaluated not by how many text articles they file or graphics pieces they develop, but by how many stories they contributed to agnostic of format.

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# Chapter 9: How We Work

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## Chapter 9: How We Work

Now that we've outlined a series of recommendations on how to better connect our journalism with a growing audience, you'll appreciate that we also need to change the way we operate as a newsroom. We must

- **Improve SEO.** That means allocating people and time to generate stories based on search trends. It also means respecting the judgement of the SEO team as they guide the newsroom on topics that will accelerate audience growth.
- **Prioritize digital above print.** Our newsroom still produces journalism to fill the print edition. But to become a digital-first newsroom, we must move away from thinking about filling holes in the paper and create stories for a digital audience, which can then be published in print where it makes sense.
- **Plan ahead.** We're great at creating journalism last-minute, in a fire-drill manner. But for many stories, that's not necessary. A shared calendar of events that our audience cares about, reminders of major event anniversaries, a consistent look at what performed in search this time last month/quarter/year, and better use of our Newsgrid planning tool are all things that can help.
- **Optimize meetings.**
  - For the daily news meeting: Emphasize that Newsgrid & Slack are how we communicate workflow about upcoming stories. Instead, meetings should focus on topics. News chiefs should outline and solicit key themes for the day, then lead a conversation on the multiple ways we'll pursue and tell that story for multiple audiences. That means a shift away from presentations by coverage area, and a

move toward facilitated idea meetings that culminate in fully fledged cross-team coverage plans. It also means greater involvement from visuals, video, audio, social, enterprise and investigations in every conversation.

- **For the Big Stories meeting:** Strip conversation to a single deeper theme, as selected by Matt Murray or deputies after reviewing Newsgrid. Focus conversation on audience needs and the multiple ways we can best tell the story. End with a project list that may draft resources from around the newsroom.
- **Communicate across teams.** The easiest way to do this is for the whole newsroom to move to Slack to prevent duplicate efforts and ensure smooth communication.
- **Adopt an evergreen strategy.** Evergreen articles help drive new readers to our journalism over time, and we need to recognize their value and allocate resources to develop this strategy.
- **Make story tagging a priority.** It's a challenge to understand what we're publishing because we can't track it all properly. It also hampers our ability to gauge our performance across topics and recommend the most compelling stories to readers. Hiring at least one Tagging Editor is a must.
- **Stop passing the buck.** When asked whose responsibility it is to think about visuals, how something will look on mobile, or whether it needs a graphic, the answer seems to often be "not me!" We must all take responsibility for how readers experience our stories. The Digital Publishing Checklist, which we'll present in a moment, is essential for reporters and editors.

## Chapter 9: How We Work

- **Vet our ideas.** We need to constantly ask—at the inception of each story—whether it’s desirable to an audience. There are always exceptions, but a successful story should address at least three of these:
  - Is it timely and topical?
  - Is there big public interest?
  - Is it exclusive, is it a great story? Be first or be better.
  - Does it have a great headline?
  - Is it memorable, shareable, evergreen? (Will we still be talking about it months from now? Will people still be searching for this?)
- **Think mobile first.** This is where our audience is. This is where our stories must shine brightest.
- **Better integrate digital tools with our world-class training program.** This includes SEO, Cxense and Newsgrid.
- **Find efficiencies.** Automate where it’s smart to do so. Experiment with natural language generation for earnings stories to quickly create shorter takes that can be easily updated across multiple articles or reused.
- **Work effectively with the strategy team.** This often means communicating before reporting happens—at the pitch stage.
- **Understand what success means.** Identify measurable goals for teams and individuals. No longer should anyone cherry-pick the numbers that show their work in the best light. The most important metrics for growth are reach and engagement. Period.



## Chapter 9: How We Work

### Digital Publishing Checklist

Strategy editors will collaborate with coverage chiefs to tailor this for each team, depending on how they publish.

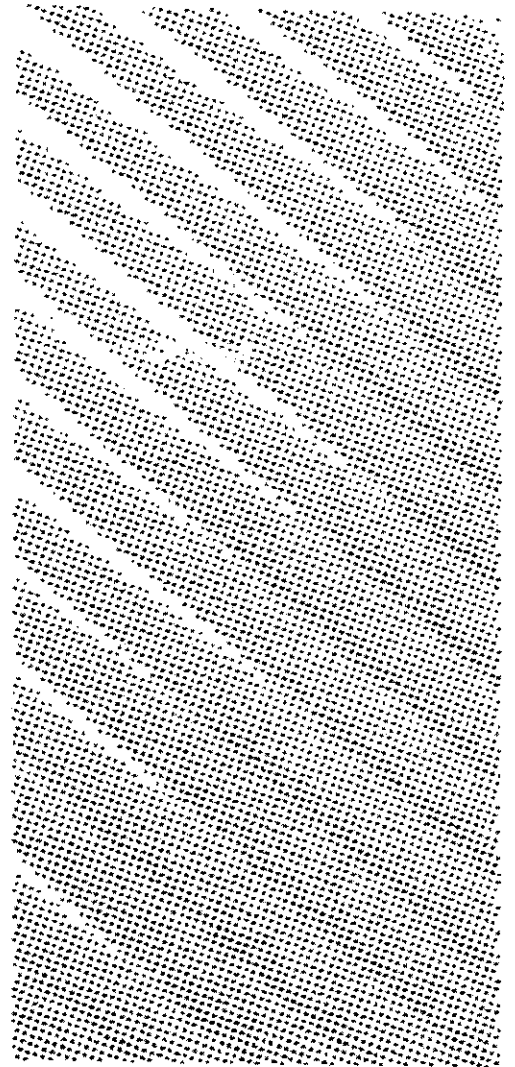
- ☐ Is the headline optimized to attract search referrals? (Support: Ed Hyatt, Eleanore Park or #wsj-newsroom-seo in Slack). See this [SEO checklist](#).
- ☐ Do you have the right recirculation links, either in the article or in the modules?
- ☐ Do you have the right call to action, providing context for those links and driving recirculation?
- ☐ Have you included social language for promo use? See this [best practices guide](#).
- ☐ Does the visual you have work on all screen sizes? For example, is your chart readable on a smartphone?
- ☐ Have you thought about which embeds and modules (e.g. audience voices module, video embed, newsletter promo) should go on the page? Have you shared those recommendations with the digital publishing desk?
- ☐ See different types of modules and best practices about embedding them [here](#).
- ☐ Have you indicated which tags should be associated with this piece? Ex/ topic, author, keywords, name of series (if applicable)

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# Chapter 10: Organizing Our Content

We should never show our org chart with our readers

CONTENT REVIEW: JULY 2020



## Chapter 10: Organizing our Content

### Organize with Readers in Mind

World | U.S. | Politics | Economy | Business | Tech | Markets | Opinion | Life & Arts | Real Estate | WSJ. Magazine

Our website and mobile app navigation reflect our newsroom's organizational structure and our print tradition. The result is a content architecture that's often confusing to newer readers. People want to know what's behind a link before clicking it.

Our current labels often add friction, working against our efforts to persuade more readers to explore the depth and breadth of the Journal's reporting. In a recent usability study, 97% of users failed to correctly categorize "WSJ. Magazine." They don't know the brand, and thus don't know what to expect from that label.

New readers also often struggle to understand what we consider Business versus Economy versus Markets. More than a third of survey respondents lumped those sections together in one homogeneous pile, when asked to sort the 114 labels in our current navigation. (If you're curious, that section sorting assignment took an average of 12 minutes, revealing a lot of cognitive overhead.)

### We must ask ourselves: who do those sections serve?

You might assume it's advertising, but our clients ask to target specific audiences and specific coverage topics, not our traditional sections. WSJ | Barron's Group Chief Revenue Officer Josh Stinchcomb went so far as to say that "sections are meaningless." His biggest

ask of the newsroom is more volume: prioritizing audience growth to expand our available inventory.

With that in mind, the DXS User Experience Research team surveyed more than 500 WSJ.com visitors to better understand how they think about our content and its labels. Respondents were nonmembers, self-described heavy news consumers (85%) who most often use their smartphone (89%). They skewed female (61%) and younger (62% between ages 25 and 39). This reflects the type of reader we need to better engage and convert to achieve WSJ's goals.

Not surprisingly, these readers struggled to classify franchises like "Far & Away" and "Washington Wire." These clever brand names also hamper search-engine optimization. Literal labels like "politics podcast" better align with user mindsets and far outperform phrases like "Potomac Watch" in terms of audience demand and reach.

Vocabulary like A-heds, leders, etc., can also get in the way. These features are appreciated and deeply valued by longtime Journal fans, but need to be reimagined and repackaged to be more inviting for digital audiences. We must embrace openness and accessibility over a "members-only" mentality that's reminiscent of secret fraternity handshakes.

## Chapter 10: Organizing our Content

Imagine "Middle Seat" rebooted as "Business Travel," or cast even more broadly to include advice for planning family vacations in a world changed by the pandemic. There's plenty of room for us to compete in the air-travel category. The Points Guy serves "million milers" who swap advanced booking codes and are opening their third airline credit card. But who's looking out for the middle-manager road warrior who travels the Midwest two weeks a month to call on clients and is curious when the new Chick-Fil-A will open in Des Moines?

One more example: A recent proposal would have moved Travel under the Personal Journal brand, as part of a daily series of themed pages in the A section of our print edition. However, fewer than 40% of the readers we surveyed told us they would expect to find topics like Travel, Entertainment, Career and Fashion under the heading of Personal Journal. They most often associated Lifestyle (75%), Family (65%) and Relationships (58%) with the Personal Journal brand, when prompted with topics. Given an open-ended question, readers most often volunteered Family and Relationships as the topics they would expect to see.

Utility (described as "getting updated/informed") was the primary driver for WSJ news consumption in our recent research. WSJ under indexed on "to help me understand," "to be connected" and "to be entertained." That perception limits our potential reach and the value proposition of WSJ Membership. These reader benefits are hardly out of reach:

- *To help me understand:* We have every right to be a go-to destination when the average American seeks to meaningfully understand a volatile market or stimulus package.

- *To be connected:* We could expand our CFO/CMO/CIO Networks into broader virtual communities and offer a safe place for professionals to come together and compare their approaches to talent acquisition and retention.
- *To be entertained:* Our rich library of A-heds offers plenty of diversion for a rainy weekend or a habitual break while an airplane ascends to cruising altitude.

We know our reporting can meet these needs, but we're inconsistent and also not explicit enough about the ways in which we help our audiences. (Think of local news proof-of-performance promotions: "5 on Your Side has saved viewers \$16,000!")

All that said, we over index on readers coming to us "to get an edge" (10% versus 6% for all news providers). We should do even more to make good on that brand promise. Consider the power of a "Take Action" box on some stories: "Now here's what you should do with the information we just shared." Maybe that's only unlocked once you register and share your email address with the Journal, moving more unknown users to known leads for membership sales.

## Chapter 10: Organizing our Content

### Discovery: Showing off our breadth

Publishers' standard approach to navigation assumes one size fits all, much like our print editions. In digital, we have the opportunity to understand and adapt to how different audiences expect to use our websites and mobile apps.

- For some, our menus are a path to serendipity: surprise and delight.
- For others, navigation presents a way to drill deeper and find more answers to a specific question or curiosity.
- For heavy, loyal users, signposts can be comforting anchors, tied to thick ropes which reliably lead them to features like our crossword puzzle.

Through technology and thoughtful user experiences, we can meet all of these needs. We're not limited to one monolithic index or table of contents.

### Competitive Analysis

To inform our strategy and design exploration, we did a comprehensive analysis of established navigation paradigms across direct and indirect competitors. We also explored media-adjacent consumer platforms such as video streaming, digital product and financial services. Through this analysis, we noticed several key themes.

### Desktop

#### Hamburger Menus

Bloomberg, The Atlantic and The Washington Post expose just a few core links (e.g. financial data for Bloomberg) and everything else is hidden in a hamburger menu.

The New York Times, NBC News and USA Today have more complex or longer horizontal navigation, supplemented by a hamburger menu.

#### Dropdown Menus

Among major national news sites, only WSJ has dropdown menus from its horizontal navigation. Our interaction methods vary: some dropdowns appear on click, others on hover.

#### Contextual Navigation

Contextual navigation schema present different options for members (signed in) versus nonmembers (signed out). Nonmember navigation often focuses on subscription acquisition or the discoverability of product and service offerings, whereas member navigation often includes account management and similar functionality.

## Chapter 10: Organizing our Content

### Mobile

Not surprisingly, most sites (except for streaming providers) rely on a hamburger menu, but the design and interaction vary. We noticed the following themes for an expanded menu in mobile.

#### Scrollable List

Among news publishers, scrollable lists are popular on mobile platforms. Depending on the length of a menu, this can lead to a very long list (Bloomberg, The Washington Post, The New York Times) or a short list (The Atlantic, The New Yorker).

#### Multi-Tiered Navigation

Where navigation includes sub-categories, some sites choose to show only the parent-level category first. Sub-categories can either be expanded within the same window or found on a secondary page, which allows users to navigate back and forth.

### Full Page Overlay vs. Navigation Drawer

Most sites rely on a full page expansion (with a close button or icon) for a hamburger menu, but a navigation drawer that takes up about two-thirds of the screen space (without a close button or icon) can be spotted on sites that incorporate Material Design.

You can find our [complete navigation analysis here](#).

## Chapter 10: Organizing our Content

### Making Connections: Showing off our depth

Our navigation and content architecture challenge is only amplified on mobile devices, where we have less real estate available. Most readers come to us seeking a specific piece of information and are drawn to the back button.

Few mobile app users engage with our list of WSJ sections. Even fewer mobile web users engage with our hamburger navigation menu. We might as well not even have it there.

We struggle to link related content to let readers explore our past reporting on an issue ("what got us here"). Breadcrumbs are insufficient signposts to help users explore beats or franchises to get a clear sense of the Journal's expertise and authority on a topic.

We need to help readers coming in through "side doors" further scratch the itch that brought them to us. It's a clear missed opportunity to drive deeper engagement and more pageviews per session, particularly if we're able to create virtual "rabbit holes" for contextual exploration on our mobile website.

**Case Study:** Perfect Market (since acquired by Taboola) optimized the digital archives of the Los Angeles Times in 2009, redesigning article pages to emphasize related links and pay-per-click search ads. The hypothesis, which proved correct, to the tune of several million advertising dollars, was that if a reader came in on a Thanksgiving stuffing recipe, more Thanksgiving recipes were the best possible thing we could recommend. It comes back full-circle to serving users' needs. Can we convince you to avoid the back button if we understand what you're researching or trying to accomplish?

### Providing Context Through Tags

One of the core capabilities we must improve to achieve our goals is better classification and tagging of our content—whether automated, manual or some combination of both. Among other benefits, more robust tags will help us better leverage evergreen content, not only by editors but also by algorithms. (For example, our "What to Read Next" module at the bottom of articles can leverage tags in its recommendations, but our data isn't sufficient to support that.)

The strategy editors' conversations revealed that the newsroom is generally unclear what tags are used for, other than ad targeting and special projects. There's no official process or guidance for how to consistently apply tags. Retagging existing assets is difficult in Methode, and something we'll consciously address in our new Authoring tools.

**Case Study:** Finance Editor Charles Forelle offered an example of how better tags could help power more engaging reader experiences. He recalled a story about one company acquiring another, where the acquiring company's name was so low in the article, Factiva's content scraper didn't automatically extract it. Imagine if our content management system could automatically surface a prompt — "It looks like you're writing about a merger" — and invite the reporter to add explicit metadata like the names of the companies involved, the deal size, the expected close date, etc. The article template could then incorporate related stories about the companies or similar deals in the same industry. We could send an alert to people who have the companies in their watchlists. We could highlight the story differently in search results.

## Chapter 10: Organizing our Content

Tag- and topics-based navigation had clear benefits for the casual readers we surveyed. Enthusiastic responses included: *"That would help me sort out what I might be interested in reading."* *"I could easily find the stories I want."* *"Having all the relevant stories in one place would make discovery easier."* As we explore those possibilities, precise language is key. Even Cars, Energy and Health stumped one in four of our survey respondents. (Are we talking about Auto Manufacturing? Health-Care Policy or Wellness?)

As additional food for thought, consider the language TED uses to hammer home the investment you're making in yourself by spending time and engaging with their content:

- Broaden your horizons
- Find your potential
- Learn something new
- Shift your perspective
- Explore what's possible

Spotify takes a similar approach to discovery with its context-based "Genres & Moods," including Workout, Focus, Sleep, Cooking, Commute, etc. Imagine the opportunities for serendipity—one of the most-loved attributes of print editions—with tags like these.

Tags can also help us reduce friction and promote readers' psychological safety, particularly when they come across our content off-platform, e.g., in social news feeds. Just over a year ago, The Guardian started explicitly labeling old stories when readers shared them. We can be better and more consistent about labeling Opinion content,

reviews, stories from guest contributors and even exclusives and enterprise reporting. By better-setting reader expectations up front, at the first point of interaction, we can build satisfaction, propensity to subscribe and active-day habits.

Finally, a more robust approach to tagging—as demonstrated by the strategy editors in preparing this report—will let us sort and organize our reporting in powerful new ways. We could filter long reads separately from short briefs. Not only how they're arranged on a section front or in search results, but also what we recommend readers "save for later" or what we might surface in a weekend email with "stories you missed." It would also add new dimensions to Membership's predictive models for identifying which readers are most likely to subscribe.



## Chapter 10: Organizing our Content

### Navigation as Promotion

We'd be remiss if we didn't mention how heavily publishers rely on navigation to promote things we want readers to find. Whether it's Journal Reports, Future of Everything, WSJ Pro, Video or Podcasts, everyone seems to covet the placement another team enjoys in a menu or on the desktop home page. But if you ask that team, they're also dissatisfied with their real estate. "I don't have enough places to put things" is a common refrain, as is "I have a fixed spot on the homepage but it's too low to get noticed."

The bigger opportunity is surfacing relevant content to the right readers, in the right places, at the right time. That will have an impact well beyond the traffic generated by the most prominent menu items (e.g. Business, Tech, Markets) in WSJ's global website navigation.

How do we make that change? It starts by talking to our readers like people. Let's not think of them only as members, audiences, users and consumers. They're our friends, neighbors, colleagues and relatives. Consider these plain-voice, natural language prompts used by Quartz:

- Here are five things on Quartz we especially liked
- Five things from elsewhere that made us smarter

Quartz comes right out and describes its Featured section as "some of our most ambitious editorial projects." (USA TODAY similarly created an Investigations section to showcase in-depth enterprise reporting.)

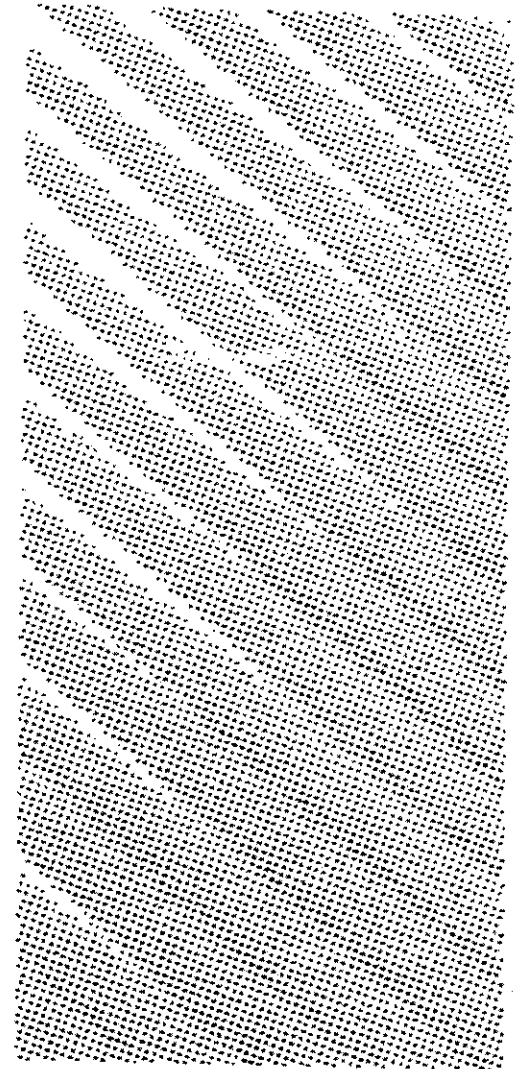
As we change our content mix to serve user needs like Give Me an Edge and Help Me Understand, let's also change our navigation, content architecture and product to follow audience research and test our way towards more natural, human experiences that resonate better and underscore the value the Journal's reporting can bring to people's lives.

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# **Chapter 11: Discuss Coverage Goals, Next Steps and Recommendations**

CONTENT REVIEW: JULY 2020

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## Chapter 11: Discuss Coverage Goals, Next Steps and Recommendations

### Our Recommendations

These appeared throughout the report and are better digested with context. But here is a list of our recommendations with the page numbers where you can go back and find more detail on them.

#### How We Listen to Audiences:

**Mindset Shift:** We need to go all in on practicing two-way journalism, listening to our audiences and growing those communities, with an eye on different types of audience groups including professional ones. We need to take action when receiving audience feedback, from assigning a story based on what we've heard or learned to asking a reporter to include specific audience questions in their reporting and incorporating the responses into the story.

#### Tactical:

- We need to actively monitor Google Trends and Google Suggestions to understand what our audiences are searching for and assign, encourage and pitch stories in response.
- When the audience doesn't come to us with insights, we need to go to them and consider having reporters go into communities we want to reach on social media. Once there, we should listen, learn who the top influencers are and learn the language and culture of the community.

#### What We Cover:

**Mindset Shift:** We should move away from favoring existing coverage read to a large degree by heavy readers (those who come to our platforms 11 or more days per month) and instead prioritize engaging with lighter-reading and new audiences.

#### Tactical:

- We need to adopt and enforce our Coverage Strategy Mapper and Framework.
- We need to dive into identifying more opportunities for change using the Mapper in partnership with coverage chiefs.
- We should keep our finger on the pulse of what's trending and maintain a few different ribbons of contextual stories that add to a reader's understanding of major news stories or specific topics.
- We should assess story pitches and commission stories by whether they will feature diverse people or be of interest to diverse audiences. We should consider how different audiences, whether by gender, race, sexual orientation or age, see themselves in our coverage.
- We should create or expand beats around topics that matter to diverse audiences. These topics include the environment, career, consumer products, drug addiction, racism, affordability of health care, income inequality and violent crime.

## Chapter 11: Discuss Coverage Goals, Next Steps and Recommendations

### How We Cover Things:

**Mindset Shift:** Preferences and tastes of digital readers—in particular our light-reading members and future members—need to drive how we cover things. This includes: format, publishing timing, medium, content organization, type of story and matters of style (such as focus on featuring real people in our stories).

#### Tactical:

- We need more Help Me Understand stories to help our audience establish a strong baseline of knowledge and expand their interest in more topics. Our hypothesis is that this will allow our audience to engage longer with our content.
- Across all sections, we make recommendations about covering topics from the lens of an underrepresented voice or how someone views the impact of a current event from a younger audience's perspective. We need to diversify our approach to covering current events.
- We recommend an increase in the volume of service journalism—content that will improve people's lives. The topics range from how to manage your personal finances to how to plan a great vacation.
- Quoting real people should not just be about checking a box or a nice-to-have element of a story. Find out why this is important.
- We need to create more evergreen stories versus creating fleeting news stories and why stories with a longer tail will help us connect with our audiences and maximize the life of our content.

- We need to improve engagement for video by optimizing our SEO strategy and picking effective preview images.
- We need to sharpen our graphics and visuals work and the process for coming up with those ideas. How do we produce more evergreen graphics and ensure they are successful? How do we spend our resources on charts that are more memorable instead of creating a large volume of them?
- We need to focus more on growing unique visitors to our platforms through newsletters.
- When it comes to social media, we need to maximize the potential of each platform individually and customize our content to take advantage of those platforms.
- If we want to continue focusing on audio, we need to add staff to the podcast team producing seven of our eight shows to guard against burnout and turnover and to allow for innovation and experimentation. We have also identified some areas of opportunity for cross-functional teams to collaborate on content. This also includes training our reporters on collaborations with the visual, video and audio teams.

### The Ways We Work:

**Mindset Shift:** We must shift to audience-driven decision making that is firmly guided by our company reach and engagement goals. All parts of the newsroom must follow the same strategy and drive to the same top-line goals. The masthead editors must join OXS leadership in communicating those goals and our strategy—more clearly and more often—and also require consistent use of technology to streamline work and communications.

## Chapter 11: Discuss Coverage Goals, Next Steps and Recommendations

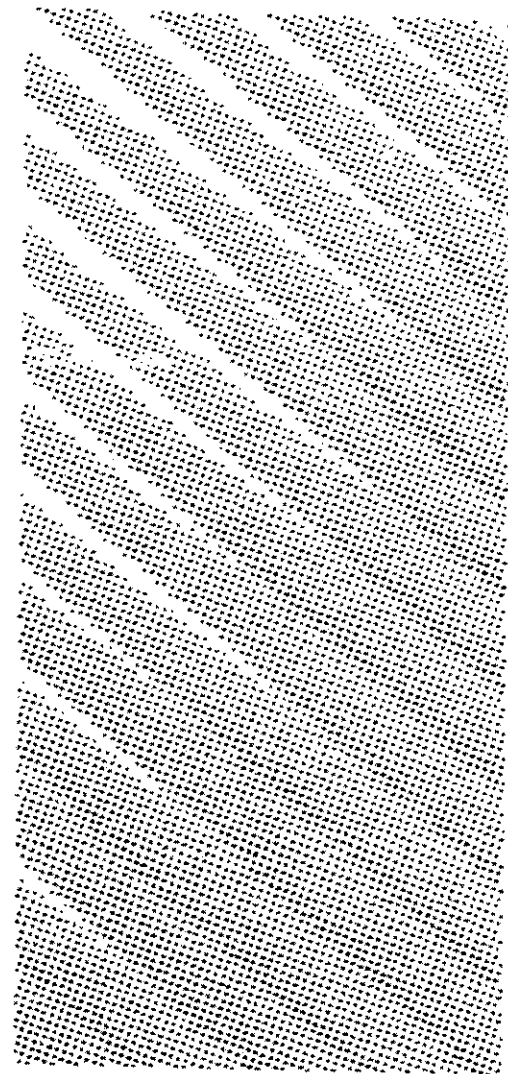
### Tactical:

- Recommendations for establishing best practice for packaging stories as a digital-first, mobile-friendly experience. There has been a lack of clarity around who in our organization is responsible and empowered to make the calls on news presentation for given stories, publishing schedules and on what mediums given stories should be. Given the strategy editors' strong grasp of the data, position as neutral brokers who advocate only for the audience rather than a particular medium and also their ties to each other for cross-newsroom comparative knowledge, they should be empowered to guide these decisions and make these calls where there is disagreement. They will bring in Louise, Leslie and Sheila as necessary and work with them on guidelines.
- Through exploring our data, we have identified where our taxonomy and metadata—including tagging, fall short in enabling the strategy editors to dig even deeper into our user behaviors when interacting with our text, videos, graphics and interactives. The strategy editors will lay out particular guidance on tagging in each of their areas and strict adherence to their guidance must be required. We also need a newsroom-wide point person who dedicates substantial time to be our tagging librarian.
- One of the important ways of reaching new audiences is through SEO. We make recommendations on how to help our sections understand the importance and impact that SEO can have on their stories. We need strong support for SEO at the top and a backing for its approach as audience-interest-driven programming. We also need devoted SEO specialists in the newsroom beyond our existing team of two editors, particularly in Hong Kong and London.
- Provide the newsroom with actionable data that empowers them to make impactful editorial decisions but also reinforce the role of the strategy editors, Leslie Yazel and Sheila Courter in holding coverage areas accountable to following our central strategies and frameworks. Consolidating this into a single source of truth across all our content types.
- We should centralize data collection, management and insights across all mediums, including video, audio, social media, and newsletters, with the News Insights team. This is important to maintain standards and quality, having one source of truth on how the newsroom is performing. They will need a minimum of two additional data scientists to handle this.
- Video strategy needs to be joined to the central strategy of the WSJ.
- We need to be more intentional about what gets promoted across our social channels and when. We need to consider not only our main social feeds but also how we can leverage the different sub-brand accounts we have. To make this strategy even stronger, we need to consider breaking our social team into two: one for creating experiences specific to each social platform and another for digital newsgathering.
- We need to have a discussion about how we empower the strategy editors to meaningfully drive change.
- We need full participation with Newsgrid, Slack and an overhaul of meeting structure (that Sheila Courter and Leslie Yazel will lead).

WSJ ●

**Thank You.**

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## Appendix

# Competitors' Content Pivots

Plenty of competitors have adjusted their content focus and adapted their digital product experiences to meet audience needs and expand the reach of their stories. Here are some experiences they've had:

### Publishers who use audience insights to drive content curation

#### The Globe and Mail

It's been eight years since the Globe and Mail newsroom started questioning which consumer datasets to rely on for editorial decision making. Wildly popular content was different from what satisfied longtime subscribers. One brought in new consumers. The other, more revenue. Which was more valuable to the news consumer and the business when and where?

So editors turned to the data scientists. This kicked off a collaboration that led to Sophi, the Globe and Mail's artificial intelligence system. "The data scientists would ask journalists which questions they needed data to answer, present the answers in an analytics tool called Sophi, and ask if the journalists were satisfied with them," wrote Sonali Verma, a staff reporter turned product manager at the Globe. "The newsroom would then provide feedback, which would shape the next iteration of Sophi, and so on."



The process resulted in an AI tool that blends consumer insights with journalistic best practice. Now Sophi continuously curates most of the content for the Globe and Mail's homepage and primary section fronts, while editors select the top three stories on Home and Business.

Homepage clickthrough rates went up 17%, subscriber acquisition was up 10% and the Globe's website was almost 100% automated.

"The newsroom of the future is one where journalists can focus on finding and telling great stories—something that machines can't do," said Editor in Chief David Walmsley. "This is why we asked our data scientists to automate the web pages, slowly and carefully testing the results before gradually implementing it across practically the entire site. And I'm very happy with the results."

The Globe was so happy with Sophi's intelligence, that "she" was behind the paper's print redesign in 2017, which gave more prominence to staff content. Sophi now handles print laydown, which freed up two more positions for reporters. Soon Sophi will determine what to push to social and newsletters. [Sources: Globe and Mail, [WAN-IFRA](#), [Media in Canada](#)]

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### Publishers who use data-driven and qualitative consumer insights to develop hypotheses about where to shift news coverage, then test whether it works

#### Dallas Morning News

In an effort to align beats with audience needs, the Dallas Morning News looked at their audience data for areas where there were "expansion opportunities," said Nicole Stockdale, the DMN's director of Digital Strategy. They used the analytics to craft a hypothesis that they could shift some resources to encourage return visits and more subscriptions.

Two opportunities came to the fore, creating a weather niche and expanding real estate coverage. A volunteer left the copy desk and shifted to weather full time for 90 days. The plan was more volume, less enterprise, in part to feed the digital beast. Reporter Jesus Jimenez produced 10 articles a week.

"Right from the start, he knocked it out of the park," said Stockdale. "His stories were in the top 10 on return visitors and conversions every month."

The paper launched with a goal for four conversions a month and 15,000 return visitors a week. At the end of the experiment, weather averaged four conversions a month and 25,000 return visitors. "That success has only grown," Stockdale said. "I just checked Jesus's metrics for 2020 so far. He's fourth in the newsroom on conversions, averaging 20 a month. And he's seventh on return visitors, at over 150,000."

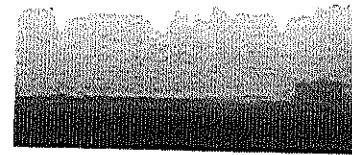
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The real estate move was based on a hypothesis that the DMN could expand coverage and audience. They devoted a business intern to the task and gave him a goal to bring in half of what the real estate writer brought in. By the end of the first month he continuously beat all goals.

Stockdale notes this proved what they had teased out in the data. "We had more audience demand than we were filling." Since then the paper has developed more beats this way. [Sources: 6/24/20 Interview with Nicole Romyer.]

#### Saharan dust brings hazy skies to Dallas-Fort Worth

A thick plume of dust from the Sahel in Africa has brought hazy skies to the Dallas-Fort Worth area, turning the city into a giant outdoor oven.



These weather conditions are not a Saharan dust storm, but a thick plume of dust from the Sahel in Africa has brought hazy skies to the Dallas-Fort Worth area, turning the city into a giant outdoor oven.



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### Aftenposten

Norway's largest newspaper is known for aggressive changes it has made to its content strategy in recent years. A key driver is the gathering and wide dissemination of audience data in the newsroom, as well as training and tools.

"We encourage them to take positions informed by data, but we encourage them also to combine it with editorial experience and journalistic gut feeling," Karoline Fosslund, Aftenposten's acting development editor said in 2018.

According to executives at an INMA subscriptions summit in February, this ongoing review of consumer data regularly leads to new content, such as a parenting vertical the company created. Twenty-six percent of their digital audience had children, but only 5% subscribed to the paper. The new beat was designed to entice these parents into becoming members. [Source: INMA]

### Hartford Courant

At the Hartford Courant last winter, director of Audience Engagement Megan Merrigan wanted to see how consumer data could inform better coverage. So the news organization armed itself with the American Press Institute's Metrics for News software solution to look for actionable audience insights.

Data showed that on the sports desk, one columnist had a Sunday column but no traction. At the same time, Metrics for News provided audience-driven information about

which stories were "most interesting," a metric that the API developed based on several data inputs. The team formed a hypothesis that if the columnist scaled back the number of columns and instead reframed his stories, they could do better. "Let's just focus on quality over quantity and chase those down," Merrigan said.

Story:  
Mike Anthony: Manquillo  
Husband's Chiropractor's Sister  
Volunteering for Chiropractor and  
Wife's Ability to Watch College TV



Summary:  
Mike Anthony: Going to the cinema is  
a pleasure but has nothing to do  
with doctors and sports



Issue:  
Mike Anthony: Watching is for  
members and not just for the  
the frontlines in the world of a  
sports



Summary:  
Mike Anthony: Hartford Police  
Gradually Approaching Problem of  
Arresting Young with a Gun  
Through Community Relations  
Strategies



Issue:  
Mike Anthony: College's New  
Tougher on the Student's New  
Wishes

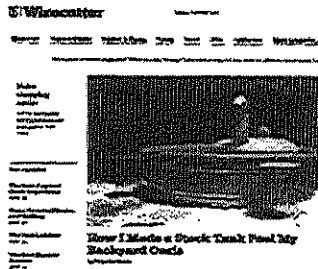


On the politics desk, the team noticed stories that missed the mark focused on political players instead of the issues. It got them thinking how audience members might see such stories. "The hypothesis was a headline on social about a representative that I don't recognize....I might not give that story the time of day," Merrigan said. "But if you see that X issue is happening in your town then it's a whole different story." So the desk made sure to lead stories with the issue, not the person, when it made sense.

Overall, this hypothesis-driven methodology, starting with insights from consumers and their behavioral data, followed by small, tracked content experiments led to "a lot of success," Merrigan said. Over the four months that the project ran, 36% more subscribers came to the Courant month-over-month than in the previous time frame. [Source: ONA conference 6/24/20]

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### Publishers using data from Google Search to identify audience interests that dovetail with the organization's expertise, then writing content to capture those searchers



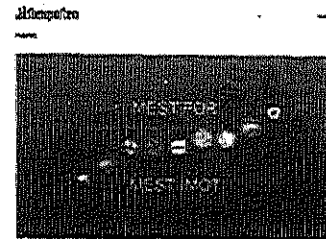
Called everything from service, educational, SEO, explanatory, dictionary to evergreen content, this genre is a means to an end for consumers. Searchers use these stories to get something done. But they're looking for authoritative, trustworthy and expert counsel, as well as tight writing, to quickly and confidently get to their next step.

This has fueled startups, acquisitions and new verticals dedicated to advice, reviews and recommendations, including NYT's The Wirecutter, USA Today's Reviewed, CNN's Underscored, NYMag's The Strategist, and Hearst's Best Products. The Points Guy covers travel and points, NerdWallet offers expert millennial finance advice.

Now more news organizations have recognized that this desire for expertise, authority and trust is exactly what they already do today.

### Afterposten (again)

The aforementioned Norwegian innovator told an intriguing story about how it mined search data to find political questions that readers might be searching for answers to in advance of the 2018 elections. Here is how the [Lanfest Institute](#) recounted it:



One of the most-searched terms from the previous election was, "What do the political parties stand for?" [development editor Karoline] Fossland said. With that knowledge in hand, Afterposten created an interactive guide to the different parties. Readers would answer questions about their beliefs on different policies, and then the guide would tell them which party most aligned with their views.

Afterposten published the guide three months before the election and then bought search advertisements for the relevant keywords. The guide resulted in about 1,100 new subscribers, with one-third of those coming from Google.

"A lot of competitors had the same service for free, but it was a matter of having trustworthy content and putting it in front of users when they had the user need," Fossland said. "That made us get our conversion goal for election coverage."

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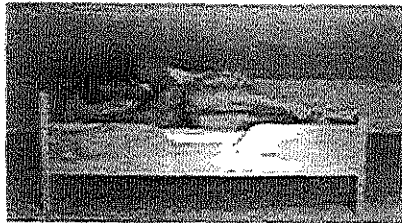
### Realtor.com

The bulk of traffic going to News Corp's Realtor.com already came via Google several years ago, mostly searches for addresses and locations where homes were on sale. So the 12-person News & Insights team knew people with an active interest in their area of editorial expertise were already on search in big numbers. So Editor in Chief Jim Kaminsky kicked off an effort to capture more of them at different stages of their home journey, even well before they had a location in mind, or after they had purchased.

"For instance," he said, "if we're not No. 1 [in Google's search results] for 'How do I find a Realtor,' then we're doing something very wrong, because it's in our name, not to mention our expertise."

#### What Is a Bedroom? Make Sure You Know the Legal f

by Carissa Encarnacion | Oct 13, 2019



The team's SEO group mined Google search data for the common questions consumers were asking and looked at tools that helped them determine just how many other publishers were vying to rank at the top with content to answer them. Armed with a list of hundreds of queries where there was

a nexus of traffic and moderate competition, Kaminsky shifted his team's editorial focus, and began commissioning 10 stories a week.

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"We saw good results very quickly," Kaminsky said. (In the SEO world, that often takes at least 12 weeks.) "We started beating Zillow by a factor of two and by the end of the first year we were four times bigger."

Part of their secret sauce, Kaminsky said, isn't really a secret to journalists at all. "These aren't Wikipedia entries. These may seem basic, but we do it with expert sources, we do it with journalism, we do it with craft and style."

Take [What is a Bedroom?](#), a question where Realtor.com ranks at the top on Google's results page. "It's about the legal definition of a bedroom," Kaminsky said. "You'd be surprised how many people want to know this. Our mission is to deliver news but also advice that gives them the ability to navigate a complicated process."

### NPR—Life Kit

This kind of journalism doesn't have to be text. A podcast and online resource can rank too.

It is also especially relevant to Millennials and Gen Z, who prefer to do much of their own research online before contacting someone else.

So into the fray jumped NPR with Life Kit, in 2019, with audio, webpage and a newsletter and that had a younger demographic in mind. Said [Neil Camuth](#), NPR's podcast GM, at the time, "[These are] shows designed to be explicitly useful for the audience, delivering tangible and actionable things that listeners can immediately take into their lives.

"That's different from merely informing them, or just telling them a good story," Camuth said. "Useful" is the key word."

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Data wasn't immediately available on how well this franchise has done in Google Search. According to [Chartable](#), Life Kit doesn't rank particularly highly on Apple, but it consistently cracks the top 50 podcasts on Spotify.



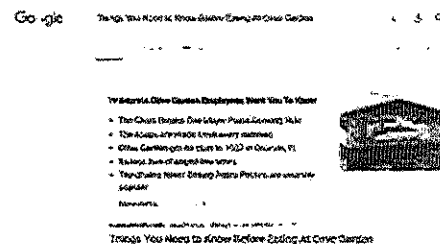
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## Delish

The food publisher Delish, a Hearst property, made its bones by eating the Facebook audience alive. They posted sharable, snackable, celebrity-infused videos on Facebook and garnered tens of millions of viewers a month at their peak. But when Zuckerberg shut down the party for media companies, they had to find distribution a new way. Delish chose search.

"Our strategy over the last two years was drilling down into what people were searching for," editorial director, Joanna Saltz told Digiday. "We didn't move away from posting to Facebook, but we balanced out the spectacle with key information."

The results have been good, Digiday reports: "Delish has nearly doubled its audience over the past two years, hitting a record 41 million unique visitors in September, according to Hearst."



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### Publishers developing a competitive advantage—differentiating to stand out—and focusing resources on it

One of the cultural legacies of newspapers' cash-rich, near-monopolistic heyday in the late 20th century was their freedom to expand coverage with relative ease. In today's environment, obviously, that's no longer the case. But that cultural practice to broadly serve the public is difficult to pare back, especially since it dovetails with journalists' mission-driven instincts.

So most news organizations are taking a hard look at an important facet of any strategy: what not to do. The smart way to consider this is a two-sided approach: While discovering what consumers don't want from you, also find out which pain points they have, and double down. This is your competitive advantage.

#### Times of London

Like many papers did as the internet took off, The Times of London, a News Corp property, used its digital presence to compete for the breaking news audience. But the data showed readers looked elsewhere for urgent updates. Their competitive advantage was not speed, it was depth and quality.

So in 2016 they decided to give up speed, and update the website only at set times, except in the most urgent circumstances. These updates became, in effect, fresh digital

editions of the paper three times a day. Editors only broke into that schedule about 10 times in the first year.



"Readers don't come to us for breaking news; they can go to the BBC and Twitter for that, which are free," Alan Hunter, The Times's head of digital, told *Digiday*. "They come to us for the authority of our reporting, opinion and analysis. Breaking news has become a commodity, and it's hard to charge people for it. We believe in the power of digital editions."

They generally eschewed live-blogging even when big news warranted a between-edition update, such as the terror attack at Westminster in 2017. "[That update was] the best

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knowledge we have at the time from our reporters," Nick Petrie, The Times's deputy of digital told Nieman. "Then we looked at that throughout the day if appropriate, but we were pretty much back to a 5 p.m. edition two-and-a-half hours later.

This content strategy also tested another hypothesis: That some readers looking to be kept up-to-date might prefer an editor-curated, manageable set of content from a trusted source, rather than a never-ending feed.

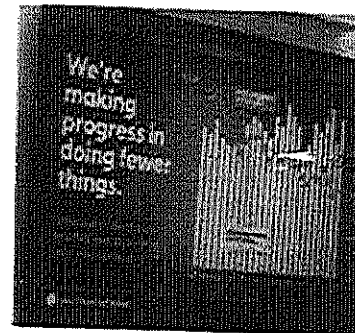
About a year later, the paper reported back on its experiment to Nieman:

The Times said the number of subscribers that pay for app and website access increased 20%, usage of its smartphone app grew 30%, mobile website usage increased about 30%, and articles read per visit was up 110%.

### The USA Today Network

The papers that make up Gannett's 20 largest metros as well as the flagship USA Today were facing staff cuts, an all-too regular event for local news providers. So the network's senior director of News Strategy Josh Awtry turned to audience engagement data to see if they could narrow and focus the beats to cover with a reduced team. As the News Media Alliance reported, it turned out that 80% of the papers' audience was coming for 20% of the stories.

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So, they took a gamble—they cut 50% of their content. The outcome was that they lost only 3-6% of their audience. So, they decided that going forward, they could afford to do less, but they had to make sure that the content they did create was top-notch.

For a Local Media Association Innovation Mission event eight months later, Awtry explained what that meant. "The work we're generally doubling down on are dot-connecting, more impactful pieces. We're

trying to help reporters off of the 'content hamster wheel' to focus on stories with impact—yes, in audience numbers, but also in time spent and loyalty. Quality matters."

Moreover, Awtry added, the numbers went up. "By focusing on what matters to readers," he said, "we're writing almost half the stories—and our audience hasn't fallen, it's not even flat, it's growing!"

Not every audience insight from the exercise was followed, however. Making choices like that after informed, consumer-first discovery, is exactly the right way to take a risk, with humility and knowledge. Take advantage of the capabilities that ubiquitous data offers us today: Measure results. Learn more about your consumers. Make hypotheses about how you can improve your product. Build and measure again.

It is what the sharpest competitors in our profession are doing right now.