FT STRATEGIES

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Google News Initiative

TAKING AI FROM THE BACK-END TO THE FRONT PAGE: SCALING INTERNAL TESTS INTO CONVERSATIONAL AUDIENCE EXPERIENCES

AI Launchpad 2024 report

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence remained a high priority for news organisations in 2024, with many publishers looking to accelerate and scale the AI journeys which they had already started. As teams and management all developed a more informed view of its potential, the focus shifted from broad, scattered experimentation towards use cases with tangible business value. This value was initially expected to come from speeding up or streamlining existing processes - but in the second half of the year **it became clear that meaningful value could come from applying AI within the audience experience, building upon the lessons of early internal experiments to develop conversational experiences that help audiences engage with journalism in new ways.**

In the first half of the year many AI projects were focused on internal workflows. Newsrooms enhanced their content management systems by integrating technologies like Large Language Models (LLMs) to power headline generators, automatic metadata tagging, and summarisation. These tools aim to boost scale and efficiency while maintaining editorial quality and trustworthiness through robust validation processes such as human-in-the-loop review. Exploring internal use cases made sense: organisations generally had a clear handle on their processes, systems and data, and could integrate AI in a controlled and relatively low-risk way.

However, as the year progressed, innovating the audience experience became a strategic response to how audiences themselves are changing. Today's audiences are shifting towards new, often multimedia, output - particularly in younger demographics seeking more accessible and convenient formats[1]. Across age groups, people also seek content that goes beyond factual updates and instead play a more useful or actionable role beyond pure information[2]. Moreover, useful content on its own is not enough: today's audiences expect to be shown the right content at the right time, tailored to their individual interests and needs - and surfaced with minimal effort.

These changes are unfolding at a time of generally "declining trust in news in many countries", when "audiences themselves are learning and forming their own opinions about AI" [3]. Together, these trends underline a critical tension: news organisations must preserve trust while embracing experimentation with technologies that are still new and unfamiliar. Maintaining trust is crucial for news brands; it is central to the journalistic and commercial mission of building meaningful relationships with our audiences.

When used responsibly, AI has huge potential to create new user experiences which tell stories more effectively, and to enhance revenue streams through increased engagement or high-value product features. This shift is not merely about adopting new technology; it represents a

1 Next Gen News (2024) - FT Strategies & Knight Lab (Northwestern University) supported by the Google News Initiative https://www.ftstrategies.com/en-gb/insights/next-gen-news-understanding-the-audiences-of-2030

2 More than 'just the facts': How news audiences think about 'user needs' (2024), Reuters Institute https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/more-just-facts-how-news-audiences-think-about-user-needs

3 Public attitudes towards the use of AI in journalism (2024), Reuters Institute https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/public-attitudes-towards-use-ai-and-journalism

fundamental rethinking of how to connect with audiences in a world where expectations for interactivity and accessibility are higher than ever.

Emboldened by insights from internal AI pilots, many news organisations began turning towards audience-facing engagement products: experiences that foster deeper connections by better serving the needs of news consumers. Innovations such as conversational interfaces powered by LLMs became part of newsroom and product strategies. With these experiments, news publishers can gain valuable experience of aligning AI applications with user expectations to drive engagement, loyalty, and a deeper understanding of their audiences.

This report synthesises the key insights from the AI Launchpad, a programme by FT Strategies and the Google News Initiative (GNI) that supported 16 news publishers across EMEA in identifying and launching AI experiments. Our findings emphasise the importance of developing a foundation of technical and organisational readiness before responsibly moving into audience-facing AI experimentation.

As AI technology continues to evolve, and audiences continue to seek personalised and multimedia experiences, the future success of news organisations depends on conducting the right external experiments now. Balancing technical innovation with meaningful audience connections is essential for driving sustainable growth.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AI LAUNCHPAD PROGRAMME

Programme Overview

This AI Launchpad programme, a collaboration between FT Strategies and the Google News Initiative, ran from June to December 2024. It aimed to help news publishers harness the potential of AI by identifying and testing impactful use cases. The programme featured two cohorts of eight publishers across EMEA, representing a range of approaches to integrating AI into their operations and a valuable opportunity to share knowledge across the industry. Through a structured three-phase approach, publishers were supported in evaluating and implementing AI initiatives that aligned with their strategic goals.

1 Discovery Phase: Identifying and Prioritising AI Use Cases

The programme began by exploring case studies of AI implementations across the media industry, categorised based on business area. Participants considered whether the solution would enable incremental revenue or cost savings, how quickly the use case could be deployed, and the potential impacts on audiences. We also assessed the feasibility of implementing each use case, considering factors such as data inputs, technology complexity, specialist talent requirements and brand risk. To further guide decision-making, experts from the Financial Times, Google and other organisations provided additional training on topics such as prompt engineering, AI product management, and lessons from failed AI implementations.

2 Experimentation Phase: Developing and Testing AI Applications

Each publisher selected one high-impact experiment to focus on in this phase. Publishers were encouraged to leverage advice from the Financial Times' data science team, or support from third-party vendors offering software trials, in order to maximise the business value and knowledge gained from these experiments. The phase concluded with an experiment retrospective, where participants shared insights, reflected on challenges, and discussed strategies to improve the design and execution of future experiments. Inspiration Sessions continued, offering technical insights into machine learning systems and ethical considerations to refine experimentation.

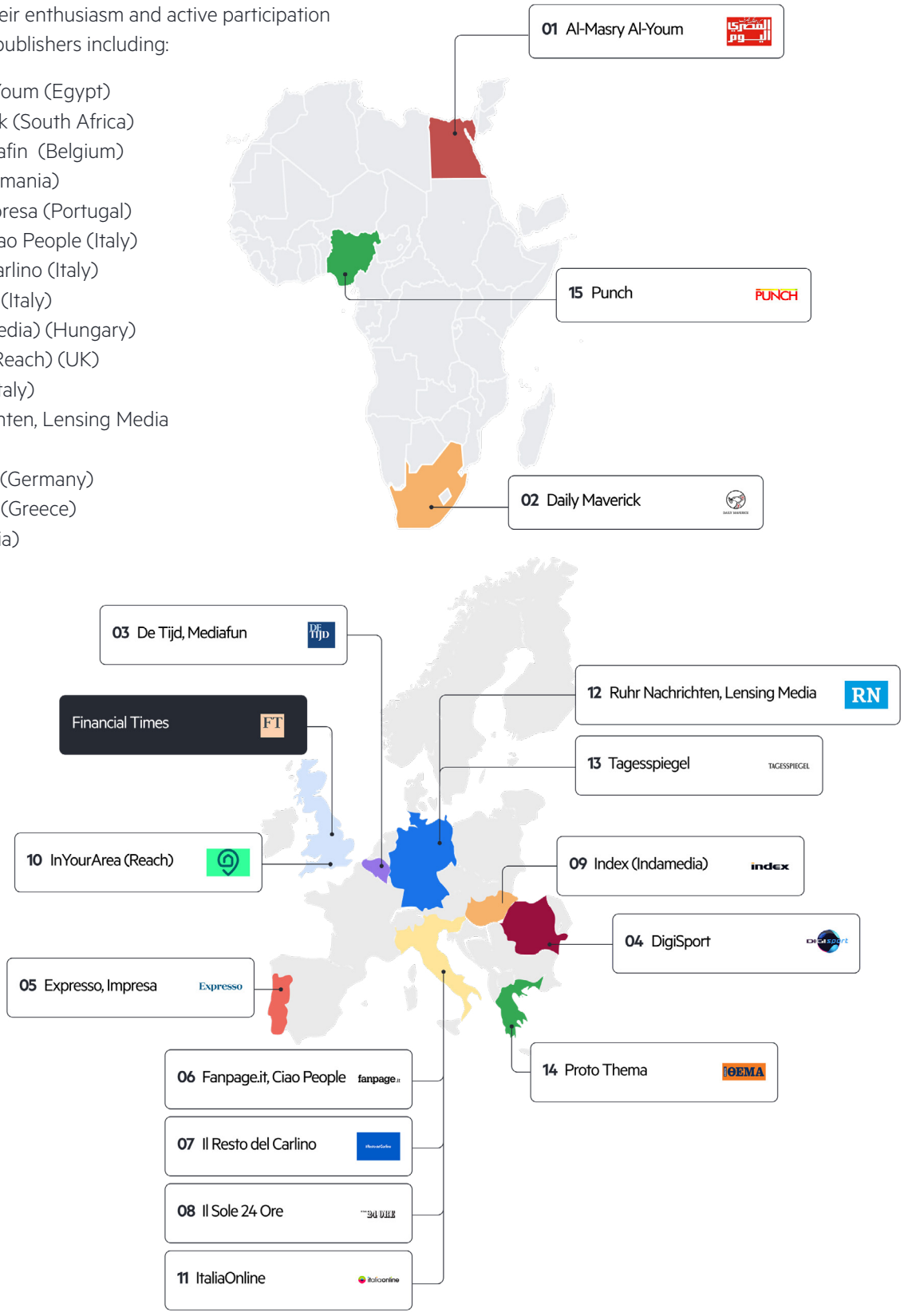
3 Future Plan Phase: Refining Organisational Governance Structures and Future AI Roadmaps

Although this categorisation is conceptually helpful given its simplicity, the lines between these options are increasingly blurred. As a result, we find it more helpful to think of diversification on a spectrum, where there is a continuum of options for news organisations both in terms of the audience segments they can target and the products they can create. Organisations can (and often do) concurrently pursue multiple diversification initiatives, which can be plotted at different intersections on the spectrum.

By the programme's conclusion, publishers were equipped with a global range of perspectives, a wealth of examples, and tailored strategies to incorporate AI into their editorial and audience engagement initiatives. The programme's structured approach ensured that a foundation for future success was laid by considering broader technical readiness and organisational alignment around and beyond the prioritised AI project.

FT Strategies and the Google News Initiative would like to thank the entire cohort of the AI Launchpad programme for their enthusiasm and active participation throughout, with publishers including:

01. Al-Masry Al-Youm (Egypt)
02. Daily Maverick (South Africa)
03. De Tijd, Mediafin (Belgium)
04. DigiSport (Romania)
05. Expresso, Impresa (Portugal)
06. Fanpage.it, Ciao People (Italy)
07. Il Resto del Carlino (Italy)
08. Il Sole 24 Ore (Italy)
09. Index (Indamedia) (Hungary)
10. InYourArea (Reach) (UK)
11. ItaliaOnline (Italy)
12. Ruhr Nachrichten, Lensing Media (Germany)
13. Tagesspiegel (Germany)
14. Proto Thema (Greece)
15. Punch (Nigeria)



INTERFACES WITH PURPOSE: CHATBOTS AND AGENTS FOR REAL AUDIENCE NEEDS

INTERFACES WITH PURPOSE: CHATBOTS AND AGENTS FOR REAL AUDIENCE NEEDS

Many publishers in the AI Launchpad cohort explored a common set of tools which have emerged as particularly relevant for content-orientated businesses, especially leveraging the latest advancements in generative AI: chatbots and agents powered by vector search across content archives. Publishers on the programme, and in the wider industry, looked to solve different business challenges around content discovery, user retention, and reader experience. While the interfaces can look similar, each project was grounded in a distinct objective: surfacing archived content more effectively, improving customer support, or deepening engagement through interactivity and feedback. Full case studies of the publishers' projects can be found later in this report.

Meeting Real Business Needs

The most impactful projects were those tightly aligned with audience or organisational priorities. Al-Masry Al-Youm and Proto Thema focused on improving access to their vast archives, recognising that traditional keyword search failed to match how users naturally look for information. Ruhr Nachrichten's chatbot targeted local news discovery, streamlining how readers find timely, place-based content. Daily Maverick aimed to reduce customer support volumes and gather audience sentiment at scale.

In all cases, AI was a means to an end: not just to introduce new formats, but to better serve core user behaviours like searching, navigating and asking questions. These needs also map to clear business outcomes like driving registrations (as seen in wider industry such as Aftonbladet's election buddy chatbot[1]) improving user satisfaction, increasing session time, or providing value to high-intent research users. In the case of the Financial Times, the "Ask FT" chatbot was specifically created to help Professional subscribers using the FT for research to retrieve precise answers from a complex body of financial journalism - solving a real user job-to-be-done with measurable impact.

Lesson

Start with a defined problem or user behaviour which can be improved.

Language, Localisation, and Fine-Tuning Matters

Several publishers operated in non-English markets, and success required more than simple translation. Al-Masry Al-Youm, working with Miso.ai, fine-tuned its chatbot to handle Arabic, which introduced both language model challenges and UI design considerations, such as right-to-left text formatting. Proto Thema took an incremental approach by launching first in English, allowing for faster validation and supporting strategic business aims.

Just as important as tuning the language model was tuning the output style. Teams aligned chatbot responses with their editorial tone of voice, ensuring consistency with how their brand communicates elsewhere. In many cases, this involved collaboration between editorial and tech to train the system on appropriate phrasing, clarity and format.

Lesson

Fine-tuning applies to both back-end (language model) and front-end (UI/UX and tone)

1 Aftonbladet sparks interest in elections using its new chatbot (2024) INMA, https://www.inma.org/blogs/Generative-AI-Initiative/post.cfm/aftonbladet-sparks-interest-in-elections-using-its-new-chatbot

Guardrails and Editorial Oversight Are Essential

Publishers were cautious not to overpromise. Ruhr Nachrichten, for example, made deliberate choices to avoid over-selling the chatbot as fully conversational. Labeling audience-facing AI features clearly as "AI-powered" and adding usage guidelines can help to manage expectations, while disclaimers make a tool's status and limitations clear.

Editorial guardrails were just as important. In some cases, teams excluded opinion-based content from the databases used by the AI in order to prevent generating misleading responses which could mistakenly be interpreted as endorsed by the publisher as fact. Several publishers also used human-in-the-loop validation, especially during early rollout phases, to monitor quality and prevent hallucinations.

Lesson

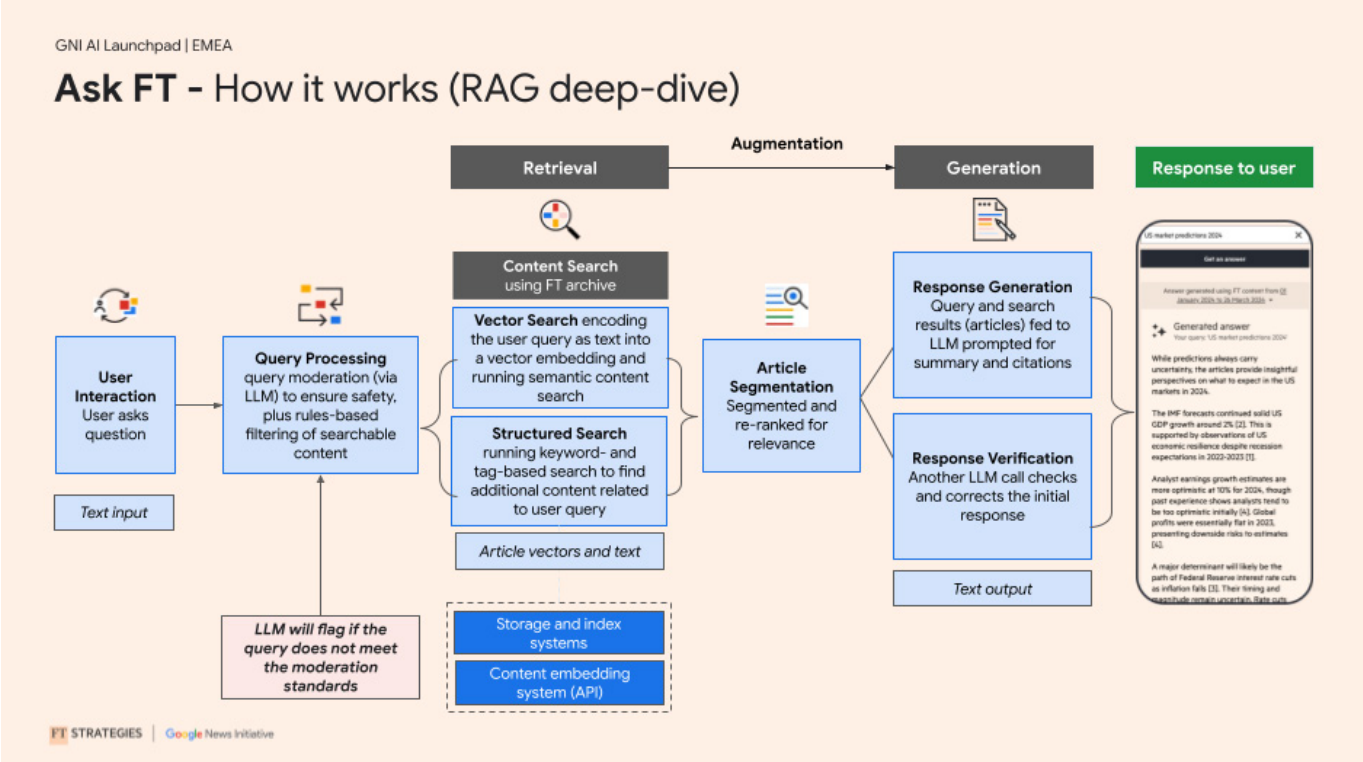
Be transparent. Always label AI outputs, communicate capabilities clearly, and remove subjective content where it could mislead, or otherwise be careful about which data sources an AI can use.

Underlying Technical Requirements Must Be Understood

Many of these tools relied on vectorisation, an underlying process that transforms articles into numerical formats known as "vector embeddings" to enable a more flexible (i.e. semantic) search beyond traditional keywords or rigid metadata. The process of searching an archive or database to provide additional material that an LLM can turn into a summarised answer is known as Retrieval Augmented Generation (or RAG). While vectorisation is the most popular way to approach RAG, it is still viable to use more traditional search algorithms (e.g. keyword-based). However, in either case, having accessible and well-structured data is crucial.

Lesson

Semantic search, or other RAG implementations, require well-structured, clean datasets, with rich metadata and potentially novel technologies such as vector databases.



Cross-Functional Implementation Drives Success

Every successful deployment involved collaboration across editorial, product, engineering, and data teams. For example - Daily Maverick involved editorial, tech, and customer service teams to ensure its chatbot aligned with user expectations, and Proto Thema regularly incorporated journalist feedback to fine-tune its search tool, ensuring quality outputs aligned with newsroom values.

This cross-functional approach helped resolve early blockers - such as unclear tone, technical limitations, or data gaps - and created shared ownership of the tool's outcomes.

Lesson
Cross-functional collaboration is essential to align AI tools with both editorial standards and user expectations, and to address technical or content-related challenges early in the process.

Measurement Is Part of the Experiment

Clear success metrics helped publishers evaluate and refine their tools. Ruhr Nachrichten tracked session duration, click-through rate, and answer success rate, to validate whether the tool was increasing engagement. Al-Masry Al-Youm is now tracking metrics such as registrations, time on site, and tool usage volume to assess real impact. Particularly with chatbots, where optimisations often include re-engineering the prompts (i.e. input instructions) for the LLM and watching to observe any measurable change in usage metrics, it is crucial to establish measurable baselines.

Lesson
Define measurable KPIs from the start and build feedback loops into the product.

In all cases, AI was a means to an end: not just to introduce new formats, but to better serve core user behaviours like searching, navigating and asking questions.

PUBLISHER CASE STUDIES

AL-MASRY AL-YOUM - LAUNCHING A CHATBOT TO ENHANCE CONTENT ACCESSIBILITY

The Situation

Al-Masry Al-Youm, a prominent independent Egyptian daily newspaper, has long been a trusted source of national and regional news. The publication has a substantial archive of articles covering a wide range of topics, but sought a way to reshape the reader experience to help them to access and understand relevant news more quickly. Al-Masry Al-Youm decided to explore artificial intelligence solutions to streamline information retrieval from its extensive content archive.
Al-Masry Al-Youm collaborated with Miso.ai to develop a reader experience driven by semantic search algorithms and generative AI. This tool was designed to help users simply ask a question and receive a precise, contextually rich answer sourced from the publication's extensive archive. This tool is Al-Masry Al-Youm's first AI-powered tool aimed at enhancing the reader experience and was intended to boost audience engagement.

AI Use Case

The tool combines semantic search algorithms with a conversational chatbot-like interface powered by generative AI. The aim was to interpret

user questions and provide accurate, contextually relevant answers. The Miso team worked closely with Al-Masry Al-Youm to integrate the service with their article archive, allowing it to search through millions of articles. The chatbot was additionally tuned to respond in Arabic, making it one of the first tools of its kind in the region to facilitate Arabic-language content discovery at scale.

The project involved a multi-phase development approach, starting with a sandbox testing environment using a subset of 100,000 articles. Once the system proved effective, it was scaled up to cover the entire archive. The team also implemented a registration wall, requiring users to sign in before accessing the chatbot, as a way to increase engagement and potential user registrations. They further refined the chatbot's accuracy by applying guardrails to prevent irrelevant or inappropriate responses, as well as including clear disclaimers regarding the usage of AI, and a human-in-the-loop validation process, to ensure a smooth and reliable user experience.

Results

The semantic search chatbot proved to be a successful experiment for Al-Masry Al-Youm, delivering encouraging results across several key metrics. The chatbot effectively processed user queries in Arabic, providing access to Al-Masry Al-Youm's 3 million article archive and ultimately facilitating an intuitive and meaningful way for readers to engage with Al-Masry Al-Youm's news coverage. This project marked a significant achievement, as it was the first tool of its kind in the region, allowing users to interact with Arabic content in a conversational manner.

Latency in response time was significantly reduced during the programme, with response times reduced by half when compared with the first iteration of the tool. By instituting guardrails and smart routing to different content segments, the team was able to minimise hallucinations (inaccurate or irrelevant responses) thereby boosting user trust in the tool. Initial testing across internal teams showed promising engagement metrics, validating the service's potential to enhance user experience and content accessibility.

Next steps

With the initial success of the tool, Al-Masry Al-Youm plans to further develop it. The service was launched to the public; additional user feedback will allow the team to fine-tune its responses and better understand the needs of the users who engage with it. The tool's performance will be monitored through metrics such as registration rates, click-through rates and session duration, allowing the team to measure its impact on engagement and readership.

Additional experiments will explore the monetisation potential of the chatbot, assessing whether it can drive advertising revenue or sponsorships. The team plans to conduct regular workshops to keep the editorial and technology teams aligned on project goals, ensuring that the tool remains a valuable asset in Al-Masry Al-Youm's digital strategy.

The chatbot effectively processed user queries in Arabic, providing access to Al-Masry Al-Youm's 3 million article archive

DAILY MAVERICK - DEPLOYING CUSTOMER-FACING AI AGENTS TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY

The Situation

Daily Maverick, one of South Africa's most trusted and representative news sources, has seen significant growth in readership and engagement, largely through its membership programme, Maverick Insider. To continue driving this growth, Daily Maverick recognised the opportunity to apply AI technologies to both internal and external use cases: with a priority to explore innovations in the reader experience, Daily Maverick also saw an opportunity to use AI-powered automation to enhance its customer support processes.

AI Use Case

Daily Maverick collaborated with Bridged Media to develop two specialised AI agents: a customer service knowledge agent and an interactive polling agent.

- The customer service knowledge agent was designed to handle frequently asked questions related to the Maverick Insider programme, including registration, membership benefits, and technical support. By automating responses to routine inquiries, the aim was to reduce

customer service volumes and allow the team to focus on more complex customer issues.

- The interactive polling agent was developed to engage readers through on-site polls, gathering insights into audience preferences and their opinions on key news topics. The agent was intended to complement existing engagement tools while providing actionable data to inform editorial and strategic decisions.

The team conducted a six-week test phase, refining the knowledge agent's responses by providing additional documentation of Daily Maverick's workflows and further aligning its output style with the brand's tone of voice. Evaluation focused on response accuracy, relevance and user experience. Meanwhile, the polling agent was tested through measurement of reader interest and engagement.

Results

The experiment demonstrated the potential of AI agents in reader engagement and customer support. The customer service knowledge agent responded accurately to approximately 78% of queries. However, it ultimately did not reduce the number of customer service inquiries in Daily Maverick's support inbox. With hindsight, the agent was deployed in the wrong channel – most customer questions continued to come through email rather than the website, meaning the knowledge agent's presence on the site could not meaningfully shift volumes away from email support.

Despite this, the initiative provided valuable insights: the team identified and updated outdated information in the knowledge base, leading to a better overall support experience, and gained fresh perspectives on process goals and bottlenecks.

Next steps

Daily Maverick is now investigating how to integrate AI solutions into the support systems that customers already use, particularly email, so that readers are served on the platforms they prefer.

Audience engagement remains a priority for Daily Maverick in 2025, and AI integrations form a critical part of establishing new engagement opportunities. This programme highlighted the critical importance of being able to track audience engagement at the individual user level. But rather than continuing with polling agents, Daily Maverick will explore more active community engagement platforms that enable audiences to connect not only with Daily Maverick, but also with one another.

Additionally, Daily Maverick has a team who are dedicated to spearheading three strategic AI initiatives in 2025. These projects are focused on improving membership acquisition conversion rates, deepening community engagement and amplifying the impact of their journalism.

PROTO THEMA - ENHANCING CONTENT ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH A SEMANTIC SEARCH CHATBOT

The Situation

Proto Thema, Greece's largest online news publisher, is known for its extensive coverage of news, entertainment and lifestyle content. As a digital-first publication, Proto Thema continuously seeks innovative ways to enhance user engagement and make content more accessible to its audience.

With a large archive of articles in both Greek and English, Proto Thema identified an opportunity to improve the reader search experience by surfacing relevant content directly to readers through a more efficient process than traditional keyword-based search and manual browsing. To address this, Proto Thema implemented a conversational tool that navigates the article archive and returns relevant results to users through a chatbot. Proto Thema aimed to boost user engagement and gain insights into audience needs through analysis of their input queries.

AI Use Case

Proto Thema collaborated with Miso.ai to build a chatbot capable of responding to natural language queries, allowing users to find relevant articles

quickly. The chatbot was designed to:

- Interpret user queries contextually, rather than relying solely on keyword matching.
- Retrieve relevant content from Proto Thema's article archive in both Greek and English, allowing seamless access to historic articles.
- Provide real-time responses, helping users quickly locate relevant news and information on topics such as current events or weather updates.

The development process involved the Miso team setting up a sandbox environment, initially using the English archive and later expanded to Greek. Proto Thema's editorial team provided feedback to refine responses. Guardrails were implemented to prevent inappropriate responses, and disclaimers in the chatbot UI clarified that the tool was an AI experiment.

Results

The project successfully launched the region's first AI-powered chatbot designed for content discovery through natural language interaction in a conversational format. Users were able to ask questions and receive answers based on relevant articles from the Proto Thema archive, with information being delivered in an efficient way (achieving response times within 10 seconds on average).

Proto Thema also established guardrails to filter sensitive questions, and maintain brand integrity and user confidence. Initial tests indicated that the chatbot met accuracy and engagement targets, positioning it as a valuable addition to Proto Thema's digital offering.

Next steps

Following the successful deployment of the chatbot, Proto Thema plans to refine the tool further by improving name recognition and ensuring language accuracy in Greek. The team will continue to gather user feedback to understand how readers interact with the tool, allowing for incremental improvements in user experience. Future enhancements may include embedding the chatbot directly into high-traffic sections, such as "Travel" or "Sports", to drive use in particularly relevant areas of the site.

Proto Thema is also considering implementing a registration wall to gather user data for more personalised content delivery and to analyse the chatbot's impact on registrations and reader engagement. The team will assess metrics such as click-through rates, engagement depth and overall site interaction. Additionally, Proto Thema plans to explore monetisation strategies for the chatbot, evaluating advertising or sponsorship options aligned with content-based queries.

Users were able to ask questions and receive answers based on relevant articles from the Proto Thema archive, with information being delivered in an efficient way (achieving response times within 10 seconds on average).

RUHR NACHRICHTEN - ENHANCING READER ENGAGEMENT WITH AN AI-POWERED CHATBOT

The Situation

Ruhr Nachrichten, a prominent regional newspaper in Dortmund, Germany, is well-regarded for its comprehensive coverage of local news and in-depth journalism. As part of the Lensing Media group, Ruhr Nachrichten has set ambitious goals to grow its digital engagement and strengthen audience loyalty in an increasingly competitive media landscape. The publication identified a critical opportunity to leverage its rich local content by making it more accessible to its readers. Ruhr Nachrichten believed that a tool allowing users to easily find relevant information would enhance the overall user experience and encourage longer sessions on its platform.

To address this need, Ruhr Nachrichten joined the GNI AI Launchpad programme to explore the potential of artificial intelligence. The team hypothesised that an AI-powered chatbot would improve engagement by enabling readers to interact directly with their vast archive of articles. By enhancing content accessibility and providing an intuitive user experience, Ruhr Nachrichten aimed to support its digital growth strategy, ultimately boosting metrics like session duration, repeat visits and reader retention.

AI Use Case

In partnership with Bridged Media, Ruhr Nachrichten developed an AI chatbot capable of answering user queries in German, with relevant answers based on content from Ruhr Nachrichten's articles of the past 30 days. The chatbot's primary function was to make information retrieval seamless and conversational, allowing users to enter questions related to local events, public figures or local news items, and receive answers and links to relevant articles.

By integrating AI-powered search into its platform, Ruhr Nachrichten aimed to streamline content discovery and encourage readers to spend more time engaging with the site. The decision to work with Bridged Media helped accelerate development while ensuring that the chatbot met the publication's editorial and technical requirements.

Results

The chatbot successfully enhanced user engagement and provided valuable insights for future AI initiatives. During the initial test phase, it facilitated over 1,400 user interactions, with an average session duration of 50 seconds, indicating strong engagement. The chatbot achieved a 91% success rate in responding to queries, surpassing a benchmark of 85% accuracy.

User behaviour data showed a click-through rate of 31%, which when compared with benchmarks demonstrated that readers found the chatbot's responses useful and were motivated to explore linked content. However, some user feedback highlighted instances where the chatbot generated unexpected or misleading responses (hallucinations). To address this, the team implemented disclaimers and usage guidelines in order to set user expectations and maintain their trust while continuing to refine the chatbot's accuracy.

These results underscored the potential of AI to enhance audience engagement by offering readers a faster, more convenient way to access information. They also demonstrate the importance of transparency and feedback loops with users.

Next steps

Following the success of the initial rollout, Ruhr Nachrichten plans to continue enhancing the chatbot to maximise its value as an engagement tool. Increasing user feedback collection will be a key focus, as this input is crucial for improving the chatbot's conversational capabilities and aligning its responses more closely with user expectations. Additionally, Ruhr Nachrichten intends to monitor retention metrics such as user registrations and repeat visits to assess the chatbot's long-term impact on reader loyalty. By continuing to iterate on its AI capabilities, Ruhr Nachrichten aims to solidify its position as a trusted digital news source while deepening audience engagement.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

AI tools like chatbots have shown strong potential to improve audience engagement, but their success depends on being designed for the right use cases, deployed in the appropriate channels, and shaped through input from both editorial and technical teams. Across the AI Launchpad cohort, the most effective tools were those rooted in specific audience needs, not abstract innovation goals. These tools prioritised usability, trust and clear performance metrics from the outset.

Rather than asking "What AI tool should we build?", the more productive question for publishers is "What problem are we solving, and how will we measure success for our audience and business?"

The projects featured in this report demonstrate how user-facing AI can help publishers strengthen engagement through better content discovery, responsive interfaces and more personalised interactions. Tools like RAG chatbots enabled faster, more relevant access to archive content, while others offered new channels for gathering feedback or addressing common reader queries.

Several common factors underpinned success: a strong focus on user experience, cross-functional collaboration between editorial, product and engineering teams, and a willingness to test, refine and adapt through iterative development. Where vendor partnerships were used, they helped accelerate progress while keeping teams focused on strategic implementation and audience outcomes.

Ultimately, the goal is not just to use AI, but to use it in ways that deepen relationships with readers, deliver value at scale, and support the long-term sustainability of quality journalism.

ABOUT FT STRATEGIES AND THE GOOGLE NEWS INITIATIVE

FT STRATEGIES

FT Strategies is the specialist media consultancy owned by the Financial Times. Staffed by the experts who successfully transformed the FT's business model in the face of disruption, FT Strategies provides the expert insight and consulting excellence required to transform the future of business based on real-world, first-hand experience. FT Strategies has worked with over 800 organisations globally helping them to address strategic challenges, drive sustainable growth and innovate using AI, technology and data.

Google News Initiative

The Google News Initiative represents Google's largest-ever effort to help journalism thrive in the digital age. In collaboration with editors and journalists worldwide, the Google News Initiative (GNI) strives to foster a more sustainable, diverse, and innovative news landscape. Through a comprehensive suite of programs, digital tools, training, and resources, the GNI empowers journalistic endeavors, enabling journalists to effectively discover, verify, and narrate compelling stories while upholding the highest standards of quality journalism.

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APPENDIX - ADDITIONAL PUBLISHER CASE STUDIES

IL SOLE 24 ORE - LAUNCHING AN AI-POWERED TRANSLATION PLATFORM FOR ITALIAN-TO-ENGLISH CONTENT

The Situation

Il Sole 24 Ore, Italy's leading financial and business news publication, is widely recognised for its comprehensive coverage of economic, financial and regulatory affairs, targeting a professional audience primarily within Italy. With a robust presence in Italy, Il Sole recognised an opportunity to reach beyond Italian-speaking readers into new markets, especially international professionals interested in Italian and European economic insights. To meet this demand, Il Sole embarked on an AI-powered translation project to create an English-language mirror of its Italian website which would enable non-Italian readers to access its specialised content.

The goal was to develop a cost-efficient and scalable translation process, ensuring high quality Italian-to-English translations which would help Il Sole to expand its audience reach, increase user engagement from international readers, and ultimately establish a new avenue for digital growth without the significant cost associated with manual translations. The project targeted a 99% translation accuracy rate. The project's success would support Il Sole's strategy to attract new readership and solidify

its reputation as a global authority on Italian and European financial news.

AI Use Case

The translation system was designed to automate the process of mirroring Italian articles in English, ensuring rapid and accurate translations that align with the rigorous standards of Il Sole's journalism. The approach included a human-in-the-loop (HITL) step, where human reviewers would selectively edit complex articles or those with intricate, specialised terminology.

In collaboration with data scientists from the Financial Times, Il Sole assessed multiple AI translation tools and methods, before selecting DeepL for its ability to handle nuanced language, a critical factor for accurately conveying Il Sole's sophisticated content. Multiple translation vendors were engaged, including Translated, which provided valuable insights into HITL options that could enhance translation accuracy and maintain journalistic integrity.

Results

The AI-powered translation project, while still in its proof-of-concept phase, has made significant progress toward Il Sole's goals. In the first phase of the project, the team successfully defined a realistic roadmap that outlined key milestones and a clear timeline, targeting a full-scale implementation by January 2025.

A proof-of-concept (POC) was launched to assess the feasibility of mirroring the Italian site's content in English. This POC involved translating a selection of 20 articles, providing a preliminary view of the platform's impact on audience engagement. Early results from the POC indicated that AI-powered translation can effectively handle straightforward content, but more complex, nuanced topics may benefit from human review. In addition, the initial analysis of translated content helped Il Sole establish essential metrics for quality control, including accuracy, user satisfaction and cost efficiency.

Next steps

Building on these findings, Il Sole plans to expand and refine the translation solution. The team will experiment with selective content translation, focusing on high-value articles rather than translating the entire site. This approach aligns with audience demand while optimising cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, Il Sole intends to develop dynamic monetisation strategies tailored to the English-language site, exploring targeted paywalls and ad placements that resonate with an international audience.

A critical next step will involve integrating the translation tools within Il Sole's content management system (CMS) to ensure efficient, real-time translation workflows. This integration will be supported by a cross-functional team, ensuring alignment between editorial, marketing, and technical departments. Tracking key performance indicators such as pageviews, ad performance and conversion rates will be crucial to assess the commercial success of the English-language site and refine monetisation strategies based on user behaviour.

By advancing its AI-powered translation capabilities, Il Sole aims to broaden its global reach, enhance accessibility, and establish itself as a key source for international financial insights.

EXPRESSO - IMPLEMENTING AUTOMATED TAGGING TO STREAMLINE EDITORIAL WORKFLOWS

The Situation

Expresso, one of Portugal's most respected weekly newspapers, is known for its in-depth political, economic and social reporting. As part of its digital transformation, Expresso sought to enhance editorial efficiency by reducing the time spent on manually tagging articles for SEO and internal categorisation, especially with increasing volumes of content.

To address this, Expresso joined the GNI AI Launchpad programme to explore the potential of automation in its content tagging workflows. The goal was to implement an AI-powered tagging tool that could improve SEO discoverability and metadata accuracy, enabling journalists to dedicate more time to complex editorial work.

AI Use Case

Expresso approached the experiment with two tracks in parallel. The team partnered with smartocto to integrate smartocto's automated tagging API within Expresso's content management system (CMS), while also building a bespoke tagging tool using Claude deployed on AWS Bedrock. The tools were both designed to analyse articles and

generate relevant tags, with the editorial team reviewing and approving outputs. This dual approach allowed Expresso to compare the effectiveness of different solutions in terms of editorial accuracy and efficiency.

The core hypothesis was that an automated tagging tool could reduce editorial workload while maintaining or improving tag accuracy and ultimately SEO performance. The project also aimed to establish a scalable tagging workflow that could adapt to Expresso's evolving content strategy (for example new tag taxonomies).

Results

The six-week experiment involved API integration, testing and iteration phases. Despite initial integration challenges, the project delivered promising outcomes:

- The smartocto API was successfully integrated into Expresso's CMS, generating automated tags based on article content.
- The Claude LLM-powered tool provided an additional tagging solution, enabling the newsroom to compare outputs, and the pros and cons of each system.
- Both tools were optimised for publisher-specific context, ensuring that content was categorised accurately with locally relevant labels such as "Domestic" or "Portugal" (instead of more generic international labels).

Early feedback indicated a significant reduction in the time required for tagging articles, with accuracy levels meeting Expresso's quality standards. SEO improvements were observed, with initial metrics showing enhanced pageviews and discoverability for tagged content.

Next steps

Expresso plans to expand the use of automated tagging across its editorial team, collecting additional feedback to refine the tool's performance. The next phase will involve rolling out both the smartocto and Claude tagging tools to a wider editorial group for further evaluation. A structured feedback form, as well as in-person interviews, will help the team understand tool usability and refine its accuracy and SEO impact. To support a smooth transition, Expresso will focus on providing additional training to ensure that all editorial team members feel confident in using the AI tools.

DE TIJD - BOOSTING AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH USER NEEDS AND AUDIO EXPERIENCES

The Situation

De Tijd, a leading Belgian financial newspaper, explored AI-driven solutions to enhance audience engagement and operational efficiency. In response to a shift towards personalised and high-utility content, De Tijd launched two parallel experiments.

- User Needs classification - categorising articles based on reader intent (aligned with the User Needs for News framework) such as “Update Me” or “Help Me”, to better align content with audience preferences.

- Text-to-Speech (TTS) - transforming articles into high-quality audio format to provide a convenient experience for audiences seeking an alternative to reading.

Both initiatives aimed to improve user engagement through a focus on addressing evolving audience demand.

AI Use Case

- For the User Needs experiment, De Tijd developed prompts for categorising articles according to their User Needs framework. The classification results were analysed in terms of traffic, engagement and other key metrics, for example enabling a deeper understanding of which content drives conversions. The LLM-driven tagging system allowed the newsroom to efficiently classify and analyse their archive, highlighting trends and opportunities for optimisation of content strategy.

- The TTS experiment involved a partnership with ElevenLabs where De Tijd developed Dutch and French audio versions of selected articles using advanced text-to-speech models to produce natural-sounding audio content. The goal was to expand content accessibility and test audience appetite for audio formats, particularly among commuting readers. Internal testing ensured audio quality met editorial standards before external publication.

Results

Insights from the User Needs analysis showed that “Update Me” articles generated the highest pageviews, while “Help Me” articles were more likely to convert readers into loyal subscribers. These findings provided actionable guidance on content optimisation to drive both engagement and conversions.

The TTS feature was successfully launched in October, and high completion rates for audio content were observed. Early feedback indicated positive reception, suggesting potential for further audience engagement through targeted audio offerings.

Next steps

De Tijd plans to refine the accuracy of AI-driven tagging by incorporating advanced prompt engineering techniques like chain-of-thought reasoning in prompts, and benchmarking LLMs for Dutch and French to select the optimal model. The team will also align User Needs insights with additional engagement metrics to identify content types that drive key actions such as newsletter sign-ups. For the TTS initiative, the focus will be on improving audio quality while minimising manual editing, streamlining production with the Audio team, and adding features like musical intros and outros. Additionally, De Tijd will launch a marketing campaign to increase adoption of the TTS feature. Both initiatives will be closely monitored to track their impacts on user engagement and inform future AI-driven initiatives.

FANPAGE.IT – RECOMMENDING ARTICLES THROUGH AI

The Situation

Fanpage.it is an Italian digital news publication serving a large and diverse readership with a strong emphasis on user engagement. Recognising the potential impact of personalised content on reader retention, the team sought to improve content recommendations to drive higher click-through rates (CTR) on recommended articles, and engagement metrics such as pageviews and session duration. As part of its broader strategy to integrate AI into content operations for operational scalability and enhanced user experience, Fanpage.it launched an AI-driven recommendation system, leveraging vectorisation techniques to improve content targeting and relevance.

AI Use Case

Working with data scientists from the Financial Times, Fanpage.it developed an in-house content recommendation (to retain control and flexibility). The team created a prototype within two days, using a Pinecone database for vector management, and then entered a refinement and testing phase. The recommendation system was deployed across seven verticals, including news, entertainment and innovation, with specific placement optimisations to enhance engagement.
To assess the system's impact, Fanpage.it conducted A/B testing across different regions, including Naples, Milan and Rome, to compare user responses. The hypothesis was that vector-based recommendations would lead to a measurable increase in CTR.

Results

Fanpage.it's experiment delivered strong results with notable increases across all user engagement key performance indicators (KPIs). CTR and pageviews per session rose, while average engagement time per session doubled after initial tests, indicating that users were interacting more deeply with the recommended content. This success laid the groundwork for future AI initiatives, enabling Fanpage.it to strengthen its AI capabilities and help with cross-functional collaboration. The in-house approach also supported the development of internal AI capabilities.

Next steps

Following the success of the initial implementation, Fanpage.it plans to refine the recommendation system by exploring additional placements and vectorisation techniques to further boost engagement metrics. They aim to introduce automated tagging in the future to enrich content recommendations and streamline workflows. Additionally, the team will conduct a deeper analysis of metrics, such as return visits and acquisition rates, to further optimise the system's impact on reader loyalty and satisfaction.

ITALIAONLINE - HEADLINE EFFECTIVENESS IN DRIVING TRAFFIC AND INCREASING RECIRCULATION

The Situation

ItaliaOnline, one of Italy's leading digital news publications, serves millions of users through a diverse portfolio of web services and content platforms, with publishing verticals such as DiLei, QuiFinanza, and Virgilio Notizie. With increasing competition in the digital media space, the organisation sought to increase traffic and user engagement, and improve operational efficiency.
As a leading web services provider, ItaliaOnline has already experimented with using AI for social media post generation and chatbots, providing a solid foundation for further AI applications. In the AI Launchpad programme, the organisation focused on optimising headlines to drive traffic, content discoverability, and recirculation across its platforms.

AI Use Case

To improve headline effectiveness in driving traffic to Virgilio Notizie and increase recirculation across the different verticals, ItaliaOnline partnered with smartocto to test AI-driven headline generation, paragraph optimisation, and article refinement. The tool was designed to automatically tag content, assess headline effectiveness, and provide insights tailored to ItaliaOnline's specific business objectives. The initiative aligned with broader efforts to increase traffic to Virgilio Notizie and improve recirculation across ItaliaOnline's ecosystem, ensuring that readers remained engaged for longer periods. This supports ItaliaOnline's broader strategic aims to provide its newsroom and content generation verticals with advanced tools to increase data utilisation and data-driven decision-making.

Results

The trial phase highlighted both the potential impact of AI-driven headline optimisation and challenges in implementing new tools at scale. While the AI tool was effective in improving headline efficacy, ItaliaOnline recognised the need for process adjustments to enable faster experimentation and streamlined approvals. The organisation also identified the importance of dedicated AI governance, requiring a structured approach to managing AI initiatives.The TTS feature was successfully launched in October, and high completion rates for audio content were observed. Early feedback indicated positive reception, suggesting potential for further audience engagement through targeted audio offerings.

Next steps

ItaliaOnline plans to expand its trial with smartocto, measuring impact through CTR, impressions, and time on page. The next phase will focus on:

- Establishing a structured AI governance model, ensuring dedicated resources for experimentation.
- Integrating AI-driven content insights into newsroom workflows, allowing for faster decision-making.
- Optimising procurement and onboarding processes, making it easier to implement and test new AI tools.

By refining its approach to AI adoption, ItaliaOnline aims to drive measurable improvements in content engagement, traffic, and visibility, ensuring its publishing platforms remain competitive in an evolving digital landscape.

INDEX - SUPPORTING THE NEWSROOM WITH INTERNATIONAL NEWSGATHERING, SUMMARISATION AND TRANSLATION

The Situation

Index, a leading Hungarian news outlet, is known for its in-depth reporting and broad coverage of national and international stories. Facing the dual challenges of growing content demand and Hungary's unique linguistic complexities, Index sought innovative solutions to enhance newsroom efficiency. Manual processes for tagging, translating, and summarising content were becoming increasingly time-intensive for editorial teams.

To tackle these challenges, Index joined the GNI AI Launchpad programme at a crucial point in its tech stack upgrade journey. Alongside CMS and data platform improvements, the organisation sought to integrate AI-powered tools to streamline content workflows. The primary goal was to automate newsgathering, translation, and summarisation, allowing journalists to focus on producing high-quality content more efficiently.

AI Use Case

Index prioritised a newsgathering tool which would integrate into their new Python-based CMS and help the newsroom to efficiently access worldwide

news. While the initial plan involved working with a vendor, the team quickly realised that open-source Python libraries provided greater flexibility and cost efficiency.

The AI-driven system was built to:

- Scrape international news sources, gathering relevant stories from key outlets.
- Tag articles using category and entity recognition, improving search and filtering.
- Summarise content, making it easier for journalists to assess and process stories quickly.
- Translate news into Hungarian, selecting the best model for each task to balance between accuracy and token (cost) efficiency.
- Provide a trending topics feed, allowing journalists to quickly identify and cover emerging global stories.
- Generate early drafts, helping journalists accelerate story production while maintaining editorial oversight.

By breaking down each step and optimising tools for different phases, Index improved cost efficiency, for example by only using LLMs for translation where existing tools were deemed insufficient.

Results

Index successfully developed a working proof of concept, which was presented to the board and senior editors. The team's approach - starting with a limited set of international news sources - helped them refine the system and resolve technical issues before scaling further.

The tool demonstrated clear benefits, reducing the time required to produce stories on international topics. This efficiency boost is expected to increase Index's market share and traffic, particularly for breaking news. The positive reception from leadership led to formal approval for scaling the initiative across the newsroom.

Next steps

Index is now focused on refining the workflow and improving output quality. Key next steps include:

- Optimising category and named entity tagging, ensuring that only the most relevant and trending topics are prioritised for search and filtering.
- Expanding the tool to cover more news sources and additional languages, broadening its reach beyond the initial pilot phase.
- Enhancing translation and summarisation capabilities, incorporating editorial feedback and introducing a Hungarian glossary to improve terminology consistency.

With strong board support and newsroom adoption, Index is now well-positioned to scale its AI-driven content workflows, ensuring its journalists can focus on high-value reporting while AI handles time-intensive tasks.

IL RESTO DEL CARLINO - HEADLINE GENERATION TO SUPPORT THE NEWSROOM STAND OUT IN A CROWDED MARKET

The Situation

Il Resto del Carlino and its sister publication, Il Giorno, are two of Italy's most respected regional titles, serving readers in Emilia-Romagna and Milan. As part of Editoriale Nazionale, the company has focused on strengthening its digital presence to compete more effectively in an increasingly crowded market.

With significant investments in data infrastructure and AI capabilities, the organisation has developed a dynamic paywall and invested in a centralised data platform that serves as a strong foundation for future AI and digital use cases. Il Resto del Carlino has also invested in in-house AI tool development capabilities: including an internal AI-powered editorial tool, "AI-light". AI-light is an editorial assistant CMS plug-in, which analyses articles in real-time for length, tags and other important parameters. One of AI-light's features is an AI-driven headline generator designed to improve SEO performance, consistency and content discoverability. However, early newsroom feedback indicated that the AI-generated headlines were too simplistic and did not fully reflect the distinct tone and style of the publications.

By joining the GNI AI Launchpad, Il Resto del Carlino aimed to enhance AI adoption in the newsroom and refine the headline generation feature of AI-light to better align with journalistic standards while maximising visibility on Google Search and Google Discover.

AI Use Case

The company prioritised updating the AI-driven headline generator within AI-light, refining the underlying prompt and backend technology to produce more nuanced, style-appropriate headlines. The goal was to increase journalist adoption, improve content discoverability, and drive higher impressions and pageviews. Il Resto del Carlino decided to use its in-house capabilities in collaboration with a data scientist from the Financial Times experienced in prompt engineering, for example to add techniques for reducing inherent model biases and hallucinations.

The experiment was conducted in three phases:

- Defining success parameters – Analysing Google Search Console data to determine what makes a high-performing SEO headline and identifying key stylistic and

emotional elements for Google Discover.

- Redesigning the prompt – Working with an FT data scientist, the team refined the prompt structure, introducing a split design to optimise headlines separately for SEO and Google Discover. A few-shot prompting technique was implemented to improve accuracy, with built-in bias and hallucination checks.

- Testing and evaluation – Conducting internal A/B testing within the digital newsroom to compare AI-generated headlines with manually written alternatives, iterating based on Google Discover and SEO performance.

Results

Early newsroom testing confirmed that the new prompt significantly improved headline quality, aligning more closely with the tone and style of the publications. Feedback highlighted improvements in accuracy, SEO consistency, and alignment with Google's E-A-T principles (Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness).

The new AI-light functionality also introduced greater flexibility, allowing journalists to select between SEO-focused and Google Discover-optimised headlines. This customisation enabled better targeting for different audience segments and traffic sources, ultimately intended to drive higher traffic to the publication. In addition to reinforcing the quality and standardisation, the AI functionality enables journalists to produce headlines more quickly, leaving them with more time to focus on high-quality reporting.

The new prompt also allows flexibility to integrate new functionalities as part of future upgrades, such as updating the few-shot examples and catering for different types of articles (such as editorials, breaking news, or crime, politics or economics coverage).

Next steps

The next phase involves live testing on published content, starting with headlines from the print edition, followed by digital-only articles at an increasing rate. Key metrics will include impressions on Google Discover and Google Search rankings.

Further refinements will focus on adjusting prompt parameters, such as temperature settings for Discover headlines and keyword structuring for SEO. Additionally, the AI-light interface will be updated to improve usability and encourage wider newsroom adoption.

A structured training and communication plan is also in place to familiarise journalists with the tool, demonstrate its benefits, and ensure seamless integration into editorial workflows. By continuing to optimise AI-driven workflows, Il Resto del Carlino aims to solidify its position as a well-read regional news provider while maintaining the quality and distinctiveness of its journalism.

PUNCH – LEVERAGING AI FOR EDITORIAL EFFICIENCY AND INNOVATION

The Situation

Punch has been at the forefront of adopting digital tools to maintain its competitive edge in Nigeria's dynamic media landscape. With over five decades of publishing experience, Punch embarked on its AI journey to improve operational efficiency and enhance audience engagement. The organisation has explored AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT for headline suggestions and Google Ad Manager for optimising price floors. However, Punch recognised the need for structured experimentation and deeper AI integration to tailor solutions to its regional and cultural context.

To advance this strategy, Punch embarked on a focused AI initiative to improve editorial efficiency and audience engagement through automation and data-driven insights.

AI Use Case

Punch partnered with smartocto to implement an AI-driven headline generation tool, designed to produce SEO-optimised headlines that align with the publication's editorial style and appeal to its regional audience. The goal was to increase click-through rates (CTR) from Google Discovery and Search while streamlining the editorial workflow.

This initiative also acted as a stepping stone for broader AI adoption, opening up future opportunities in transcription, data visualisation, and predictive analytics. By experimenting with AI-driven editorial tools, Punch aimed to enhance content performance while reducing manual workload for its newsroom teams.

Results

The experiment demonstrated AI's potential to improve both efficiency and creativity in editorial workflows. Early adopters within the newsroom found value in the tool's ability to suggest alternative story angles and accelerate headline creation. However, the process also revealed key challenges, particularly around adapting AI-generated outputs to the Nigerian context and ensuring alignment with multi-layered editorial approval processes.

These insights reinforced the need for tailored AI solutions and iterative refinement, as well as broader newsroom buy-in to support long-term AI adoption.

Next steps

Following the initial success, Punch plans to expand its trial with smartocto, focusing on deeper integration into existing publishing systems such as WordPress. A key priority will be ensuring cultural alignment in AI-generated content while exploring region-specific pricing models for scalability.

Additionally, Punch will prioritise training sessions and governance frameworks to build internal expertise, ensuring AI tools are used effectively while maintaining editorial integrity. These next steps will help foster a culture of innovation across the organisation, positioning Punch for long-term success in AI-driven content strategy.

TAGESSPIEGEL - BUILDING AN AI PLAYGROUND AS A TESTBED FOR NEWSROOM INNOVATION

The Situation

Tagesspiegel, a leading German daily newspaper in Berlin, sought to enhance newsroom efficiency and foster innovation through use of AI. With journalists facing constant time pressure to produce high-quality content, Tagesspiegel recognised the need for tools to speed up repetitive tasks and enable journalists to focus on high-impact work.

Recognising the wide potential of applying LLMs in various ways in newsroom workflows, the team recognised that a system which encouraged experimentation, feedback loops and knowledge sharing would be a valuable accelerator for AI adoption. Tagesspiegel designed and implemented a multi-featured "AI playground" to achieve this aim.

AI Use Case

The AI playground was designed as a standalone platform, allowing journalists to experiment with headline generation, article summarisation, suggestions for improvements, remarks on possible biases and lacking sources, and social media draft creation. A key feature of the playground was the ability to switch between different large language models (LLMs), enabling comparative analysis to determine the most effective models for specific editorial tasks.
By providing a controlled environment for AI testing, Tagesspiegel created a collaborative space where journalists could trial new functionalities. The project follows a three-step process: test functions and workflows in the Playground, integrate the most successful tools into a browser plugin for use in the CMS, and then integrate the most successful features directly into the newsroom's content management system (CMS).

Results

The AI playground was successfully rolled out to a select group of test users, who provided valuable feedback on usability and functionality. Early results highlighted the benefits of a phased approach, starting with core features and iterating based on newsroom input. The structured testing phase confirmed that functions like (SEO) title suggestions for improvement and article summarisation had strong potential for improving workflow efficiency. After three weeks and final fixes based on beta testing, the tool was rolled out company-wide.

Next steps

Tagesspiegel plans to refine the AI playground based on user feedback, focusing on improving usability elements such as navigation and retention of unsaved changes. The most effective tools, including SEO optimisation and article summarisation, will be integrated into a browser plugin, allowing direct application within the newsroom's CMS. To build trust and alignment, Tagesspiegel will finalise ethical AI principles and governance frameworks within an AI Board consisting of a diverse range of colleagues from the newsroom, ensuring responsible AI implementation while exploring advanced features like audio features, assistants for end-users, and data-driven tools to support editorial innovation and scalability.

DIGI SPORT - AUTOMATED SPEECH-TO-TEXT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

The Situation

Digi Sport is Romania's leading sports content platform known for its exclusive coverage and a highly engaged audience. As part of its strategy to improve operational efficiency, the publication was looking for technology to speed up repetitive, time-consuming editorial tasks, such as transcription, to free up resources for content creation while maintaining high standards of accuracy.

AI Use Case

To explore this opportunity for improving workflow efficiency, Digi Sport partnered with Podcastle to test an AI-driven speech-to-text (S2T) transcription tool. The experiment aimed to automate Romanian language interview transcriptions while maintaining a word error rate (WER) below 10%, a benchmark set to maintain sufficient quality while freeing up editorial resources to focus on content creation. Digi Sport viewed this experiment as a foundational step toward broader AI integration.

During testing, the tool was evaluated across various situations. The results were compared against manual transcription processes to assess time savings and accuracy. Ease-of-integra-

tion into existing workflows was also a consideration.

Results

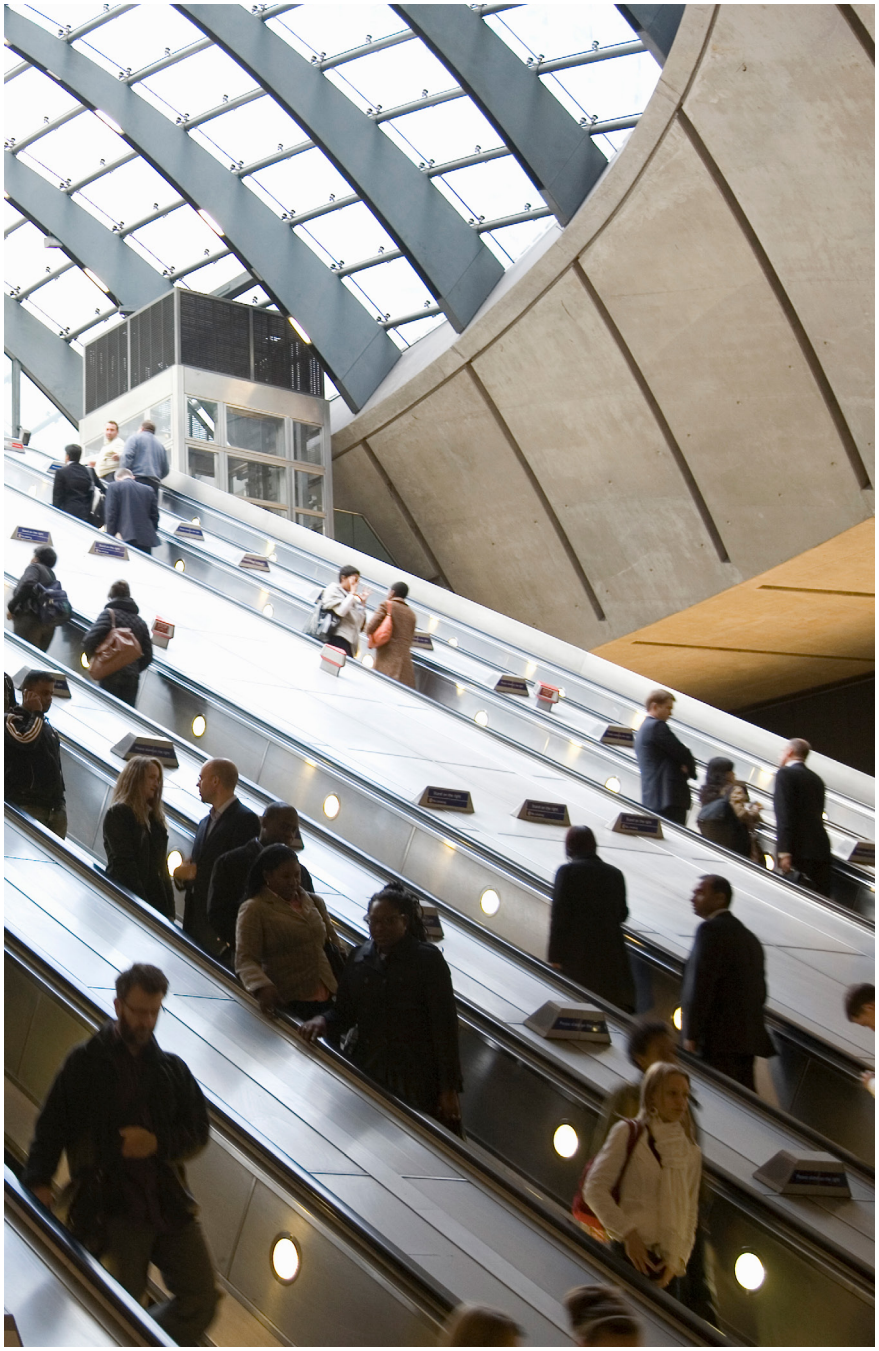
The speech-to-text tool performed well for simpler use cases, such as single-speaker scenarios and live recordings, reducing time taken to produce transcripts. However, challenges emerged around Romanian-specific terminology, sports-related names, and complex multi-speaker interviews. Feedback highlighted the need for tailored model training and real-time transcription capabilities to align with editorial workflows.

Despite these challenges, the collaboration established a productive feedback loop with Podcastle, facilitating ongoing product refinements, including glossary integration and other technical enhancements. Digi Sport also identified cost and scalability considerations as key factors in evaluating AI adoption for long-term use.

Next steps

Following additional testing, the speech-to-text tool showed improvements in transcription accuracy, delivering better results according to usability feedback from the editorial team. Multi-speaker diarisation (splitting a transcript into segments attributed across multiple speakers) was a feature that was re-prioritised for future implementations. Further refinements will be made based on input from both editorial and commercial teams. This experiment successfully laid the foundation for future transcription initiatives, with various learnings on technical features, market-specific challenges, and newsroom preferences having been made through the collaboration.

INYOURAREA - AUTOMATED ADVERTISEMENT TAGGING FOR ENHANCED PRECISION



The Situation

InYourArea, a leading hyperlocal news aggregation platform in the UK and part of the Reach group, sought to optimise its advertising operations by reducing the manual workload associated with advertisement tagging and enhancing the precision of ad targeting. The team initiated an AI experiment focused on automating advertisement tagging and clustering. The goal was to enhance the quality of tags, and lay the groundwork for scalable and efficient ad segmentation, enabling more effective audience targeting.

AI Use Case

Supported by data scientist from the Financial Times, the experiment applied Reach's AI tools and Google Vertex AI to generate accurate and consistent advertisement tags. The objective was to automate the tagging process while developing high-quality clusters of advertisements for targeted segmentation. The team hypothesised that AI-driven tagging would reduce manual effort, improve tagging accuracy, and facilitate the creation of better-defined clusters for advertising categories such as properties. By refining how advertisements were categorised, InYourArea aimed to

enhance ad performance and click-throughs.

Results

The experiment successfully tagged and clustered over 200 property advertisements, demonstrating clear efficiency gains. The system effectively grouped ads into relevant categories, improving the structure and precision of property listings.

However, challenges emerged in clustering processes, particularly in reducing noise and refining distance metrics to improve ad segmentation. These issues highlighted the need for further iteration in data processing and classification methodologies to ensure optimal results.

Next steps

Following the success of the initial roll-out, Ruhr Nachrichten plans to continue enhancing the chatbot to maximise its value as an engagement tool. Increasing user feedback collection will be a key focus, as this input is crucial for improving the chatbot's conversational capabilities and aligning its responses more closely with user expectations. Additionally, Ruhr Nachrichten intends to monitor retention metrics such as user registrations and repeat visits to assess the chatbot's long-term impact on reader loyalty. By continuing to iterate on its AI capabilities, Ruhr Nachrichten aims to solidify its position as a trusted digital news source while deepening audience engagement.