

Changing Newsroom Culture

A Case Study with *The Journal News*

The Journal News knew it needed to modernize its newsroom. The staff originally integrated Chartbeat Publishing into their workflows to better understand their audience and content's performance. But they never imagined it'd so dramatically and positively impact their culture.

INDUSTRY HEADWINDS

When Anjanette Delgado joined *The Journal News* in 2010, the Gannett-owned newspaper was finding its footing on new and uncertain terrain. Increasingly low barriers to entry in online publishing meant more competition for readers' attention, and long-reliable wells of print advertising revenue were drying up. (According to the Newspaper Association of America, print advertising accounted for \$19 billion in 2012, compared to \$64 billion in 2000.)

In newsrooms across the country, reporters and editors were grappling with transitions from a print-centric to digital-first strategy, and things were no different in White Plains, New York, the suburban coverage area for *The Journal News*. But Delgado and the staff didn't shirk from the challenges of moving faster into the digital era; they embraced the opportunity to make sweeping changes to their news organization—changes that manifested themselves both physically and strategically.

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

In its transition to a digital-first strategy, *The Journal News*, like many of its newspapering peers, needed to shed the habits of the old print days. There were many adjustments, around everything from staff scheduling to best practices for breaking news. But one of the most critical changes, says Delgado, was the culture of the newsroom and the mindset of everyone who worked in it: "We knew we had to get rid of our strong bias for print."

Takeaways

- Encourage staff to watch their stories' performance and look for opportunities.
- Use a big-screen TV to make Chartbeat visible to everyone in the newsroom.
- If something extraordinary is happening, take a few minutes to talk about why.
- Highlight Daily Content Perspective "takeaways" in morning meetings.
- Sort by "top authors" in your Chartbeat dashboard to create friendly competition.

CENTER OF ATTENTION

A move to a new office building opened up the opportunity to start from scratch. The staff designed a new newsroom where “all roads lead to digital.” In the middle of the office, desks are arranged in an octagon, which is anchored by a big-screen display of Chartbeat Publishing. “Chartbeat needed to be something that everyone saw,” says Delgado. By making Chartbeat visible, they created an ambient environment of data in the newsroom.

But the introduction of Chartbeat into the newsroom wasn’t just a novelty, it also had a major impact on reporters’ workflows and how editors were making big decisions. Every morning, staff members gather in “the octagon” for a stand-up meeting. They review the performance of the previous day’s stories using highlights from Chartbeat’s Daily Content Perspective, and they use their insights to develop new hypotheses for the upcoming day.

“We’ve been able to create this wonderful culture of data that didn’t exist before,” says Delgado. “Chartbeat has given us a jolt of energy.” Having the dashboard front and center in the newsroom, she says, keeps the staff excited about the work they’re doing every day. There’s even been more friendly competition among reporters, too. The staff will often reference Chartbeat to see which authors have the highest performing articles of the day.

QUANTIFIED JOURNALISM

In the days of print dominance, a reporter’s job was more limited in scope; it was the mission of plain-dealing writers to simply report the facts, and after the act of publishing, their civic duty was complete. But in the digital era, reporters have to reply to tweets, chime in on comment threads, and—as it happens at *The Journal News*—even shoot and produce videos.

“We’re asking reporters to do things they haven’t traditionally been asked to do,” says Delgado. And that can be a tough sell at first, she says, but the great thing about Chartbeat is that it gives the team quantifiable evidence that their work is making a difference: “Even on our slowest days, Chartbeat helps us sing about our success.”

“Even on our slowest days, Chartbeat helps us sing about our success.”

— Anjanette Delgado, Mobile Editor

