Data-Driven Decision Making

A Case Study with *The Journal News*

Prior to the introduction of Chartbeat, *The Journal News* staff was heavily reliant on next-day reports to tell them about the performance of their content. The reports were complicated and resource intensive to put together, and the hours-old data left the team powerless and unable to react to it.

TURNING TIDES

In 2012, *The Journal News* decided to accelerate their tough but necessary transition to a digital-first news strategy: the staff learned how to shoot and produce videos, senior leaders rewrote the definition for breaking news, and editors started pushing stories to the website immediately, never holding them for the print edition (as was previously a common practice). The transition also opened up the opportunity to reevaluate the way important editorial and programming decisions were made.

NEXT-DAY HEADACHES

With its origins dating back to 1829, *The Journal News* understood a lot about its print readership. But in a digitally-oriented era, the staff needed additional insight into its online audience's behavior. The staff received summary reports with traffic data, but the reports came hours or days later, and they were rarely actionable. The front-line digital editors and producers needed to know: What were the top-performing stories on the website at any given moment? What were their visitors reading, watching, and commenting on? Where were their visitors spending the most time? These were big questions.

SMART THINKING

With Chartbeat at the fingertips of every reporter, editor, and producer, *The Journal News* now has visibility into the performance of its content and behavior of its audience—in real time. "We finally have a way to prove or disprove the assumptions we make every day,"

Takeaways

- Make Chartbeat available to everyone in the newsroom.

- Take smart risks and test hypotheses—it's okay to be wrong from time to time.

- Highlight Daily Content Perspective "takeaways" in morning meetings.

- Use data to inform homepage programming and front-page layouts.

- Share and discuss what you learn as you learn it with others in the newsroom.

says Jill Mercadante, multimedia editor. "If something isn't working, we can quickly understand why." And from there, the team can start developing best practices.

In one example, says Mercadante, the importance of real-time feedback became apparent when the staff was experimenting with livestreaming video: "Governor Andrew Cuomo was speaking at a press conference, and we made the decision to post the live video to our homepage." The staff wanted to see how the audience would react. Using the Video Dashboard, Mercadante and the staff saw visitors leaving the homepage in droves.

"We were heartbroken," she says. "But we wanted to understand what was happening: Why was everyone abandoning our site so quickly?" It wasn't long after that the team realized the livestreaming video was set to auto-play. "When the video was auto-playing, it wasn't something that our visitors were expecting. We were scaring them away. It was such a no-duh moment, but without Chartbeat, we wouldn't have figured that out until the next day."

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TAKING ACTION

Armed with audience engagement data, editors swap the lead story on the homepage every 30 minutes. Key "takeaways" from Chartbeat's Daily Content Perspective are discussed in morning "huddle" meetings and also inform editors' decisions for the day's coverage. The staff even uses Chartbeat to help determine the layout of the print edition; highly engaging online articles often get prime placements on the front page of the paper.

"Chartbeat has definitely made us a smarter newsroom and better journalists," says Mercadante. "We now know what's actually resonating with our audience, and we can make much better informed decisions about the content we're delivering to them."