

The background image shows a group of people in a workshop or conference setting. In the foreground, a man in a blue sweater is pointing at a large sheet of paper on a table, while a man in a pink shirt looks on. Other people are visible in the background, some sitting at tables and others standing. A man in a black t-shirt with 'ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DESIGN SPRINT' printed on it is visible on the right. A digital clock in the background shows '00:52'.

Connecting to audiences through AI and user needs - *Lessons from the Financial Times and beyond*

INMA, New York
1 March 2024

Aliya Itzkowitz



Manager
FT Strategies

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Chief Product & Technology Officer
Financial Times

Renzo Veenstra



Editor in Chief
Omroep Brabant

> Insights from FT Strategies

Like many publishers, the FT has been accelerating efforts to integrate AI into more of our workflows, balancing speed and responsibility

Artificial Intelligence

Generative AI exists because of the transformer

This is how it works

By Visual Storytelling Team and Madhumita Murgia in London SEPTEMBER 12 2023

Opinion Artificial intelligence

Letter from the editor on generative AI and the FT

Our journalism will continue to be reported, written and edited by humans who are the best in their fields

ROULA KHALAF [+ Add to myFT](#)



FT STRATEGIES Google News Initiative

Google and FT Strategies invite you to:

NEWS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A future with AI

20th October 2023
10:00am - 10:30am (BST)
19 real world stories

[REGISTER NOW](#)

Book your calendar and register for our upcoming News 19 The Digital Age virtual event, co-creating with Google News Initiative, on the 20th of October, 10:00am (BST).

The session will cover both how to think strategically about AI and how to make that strategy work in the real world.

We've invited to announce some of our expert speakers who will be sharing their insights and learnings on how to approach AI in news organisations.

Event Speakers

 PRISC BAILEY Lead Product Manager (Newsroom Product) Google	 CHRIS GATHERCOLE Director of Technology Research Financial Times
 BRIAN DE RUYCK Head of Data Science and AI Mediaset Group	 LOUISE STORY Media & Consumer Technology Specialist London Story Strategies
 JOSEPH TEASDALE Head of Technology Reuters Analytics	 OLE THORSRUD Head of Artificial Intelligence Swedish Retailer

Don't miss this opportunity to gain valuable insights from FT Strategies, the Google News Initiative and speakers in news and technology in the region. Be one without intelligence and pay in the sustainable news business of the future.

Online registration is open now

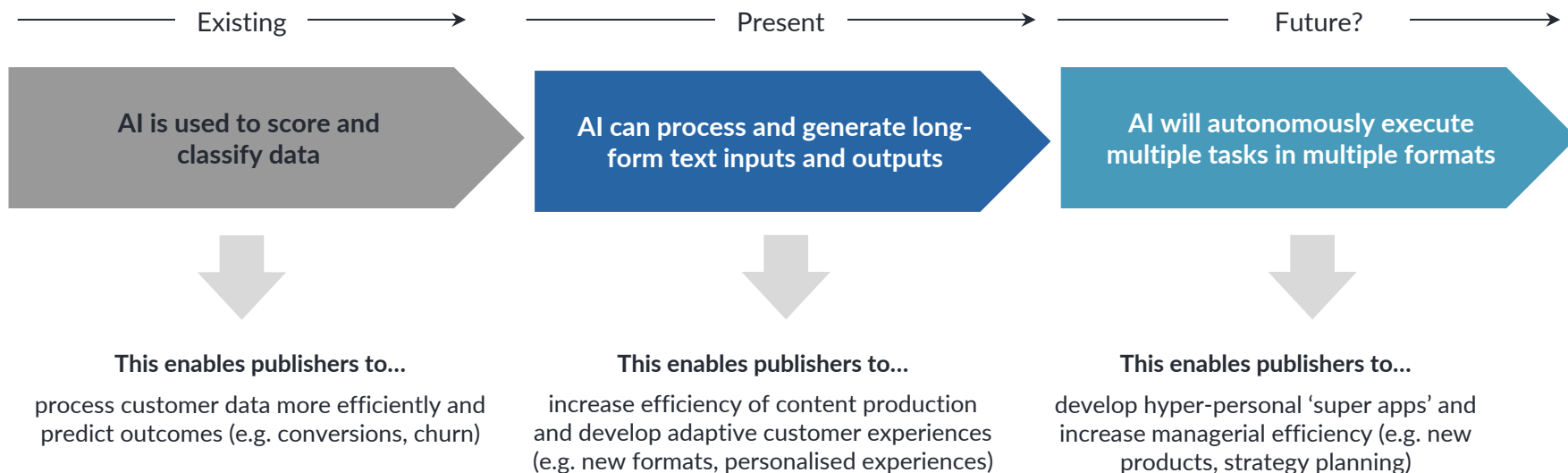
[REGISTER NOW](#)

At FT Strategies, we have a front row seat to this work; helping us guide our clients on their approach to AI and how they execute



A specialist media consultancy that helps news providers to transform and create sustainable value

AI has long been in the publisher toolkit but GenAI is accelerating us towards what we used to call 'the future'



Note: this is not necessarily a linear path or implementation timeline

As a result, the industry is facing existential questions about how to maximise the benefits of using AI whilst minimising the risks

Changes to content production

- What aspects of content production should be automated vs. human-led?
- What aspects of reporting will be most valued by consumers?
- How will this impact the traditional role of reporters?

Impact on efficiency

- What are the potential cost savings associated with implementing AI?
- Where should we focus our investments?
- How will we keep pace if AI continues to develop at extreme rates?

Evolving formats and user experience

- How can we use AI to enhance content localisation and personalisation?
- How can we leverage AI to deliver multimedia experiences?
- How will consumers' expectations evolve?

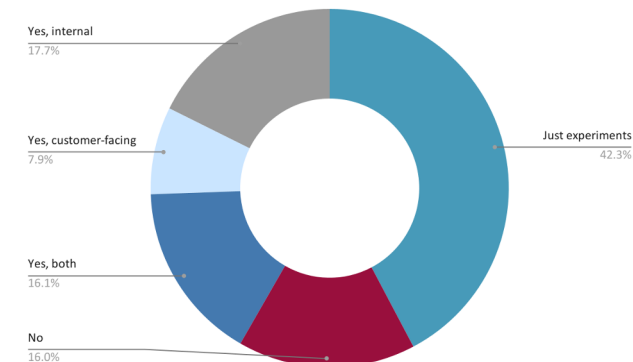
Ethical considerations

- How will we ensure quality control and uphold editorial standards?
- How will we mitigate the risk of biases emerging from the use of AI?
- How will we ensure good governance and effective oversight of AI usage?

Our research finds that most publishers are already experimenting with AI

The majority of publishers are already using or actively experimenting with AI in their organisations

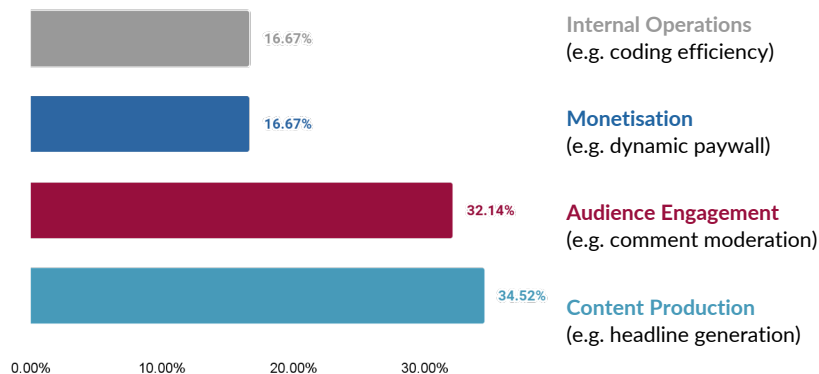
Q: Are you currently using AI in your business?



An FTS survey of 1,000+ publishers found that ~42% of news media and publishing companies are actively using AI in internal or customer-facing processes while ~42% are experimenting

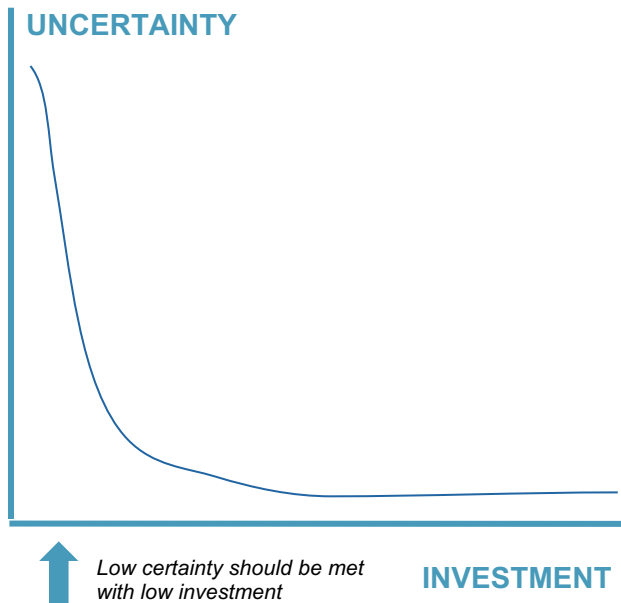
While publishers see the value in AI across several functions, content production is the most compelling use case

Q: Which AI use cases will most likely improve your performance?



Respondents believe there are opportunities for AI to improve performance across a range of different business areas, but ~35% believe content production is the biggest opportunity

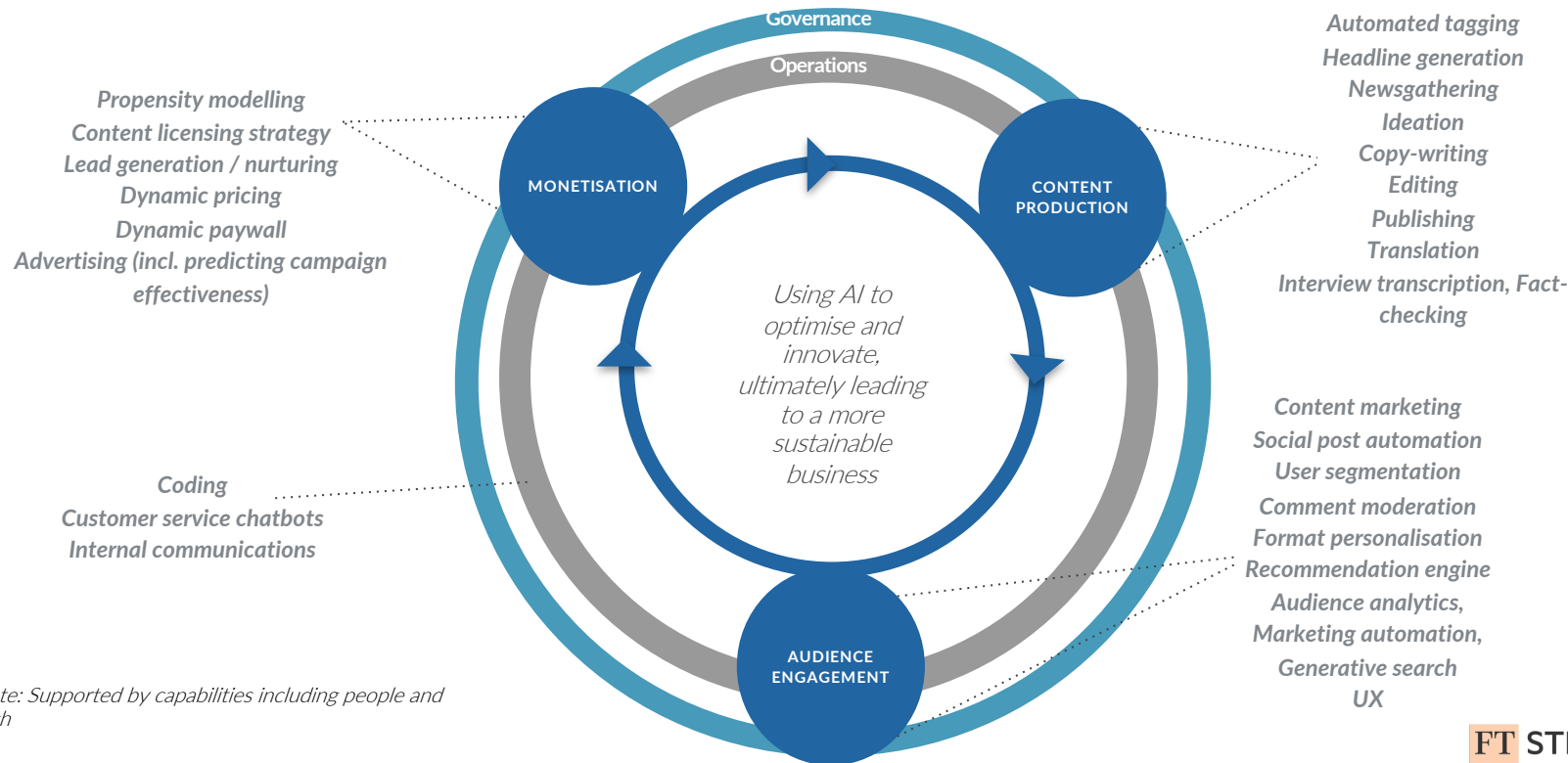
Experimentation is a way to reduce uncertainty and keep up with the pace of AI innovation



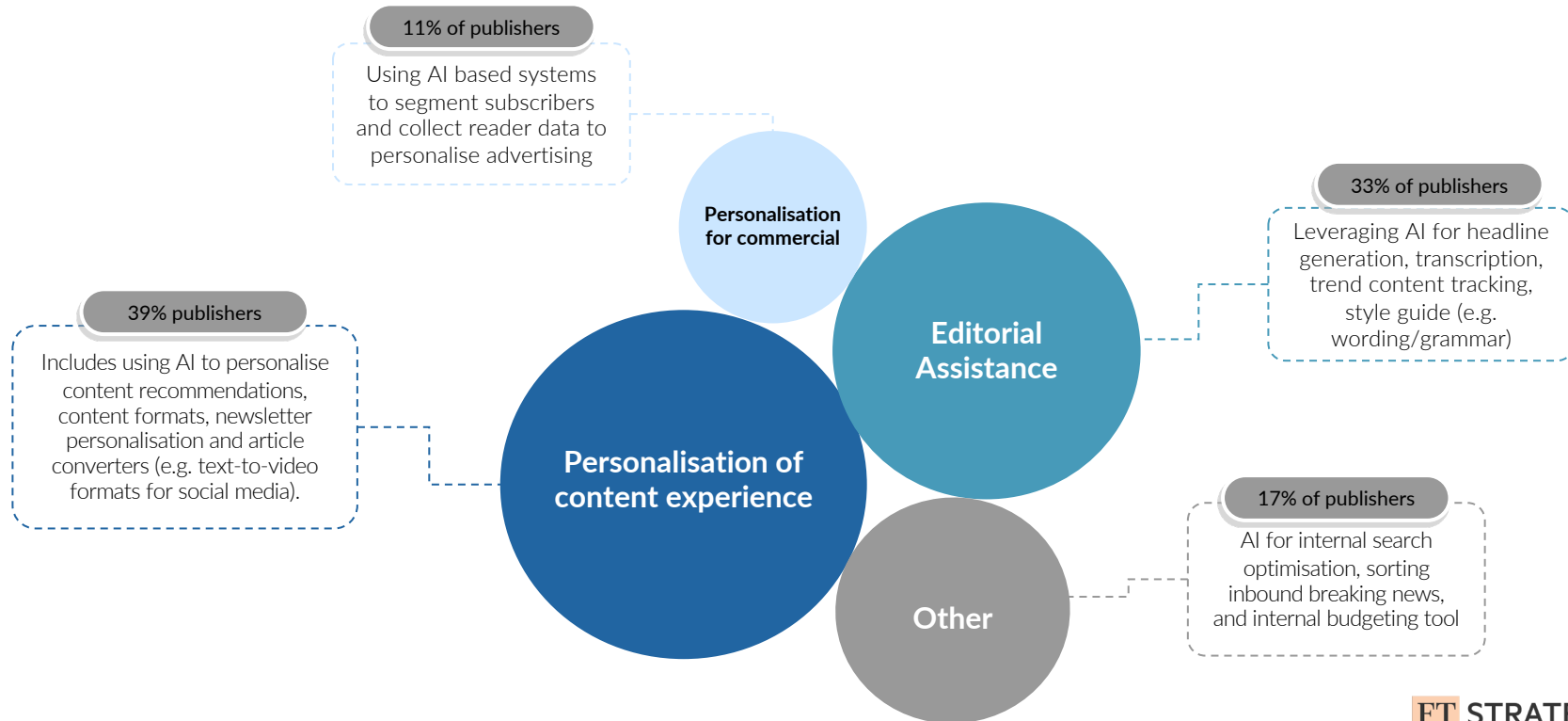
“(AI) is like surfing, you want to get out in the water, you want to get used to it, you want to get in that practice of running experiments regularly.”

Lucky Gunasekara
CEO, Miso.AI

In our work supporting news organisations, we use a guiding framework for AI use cases to identify where to drive adoption

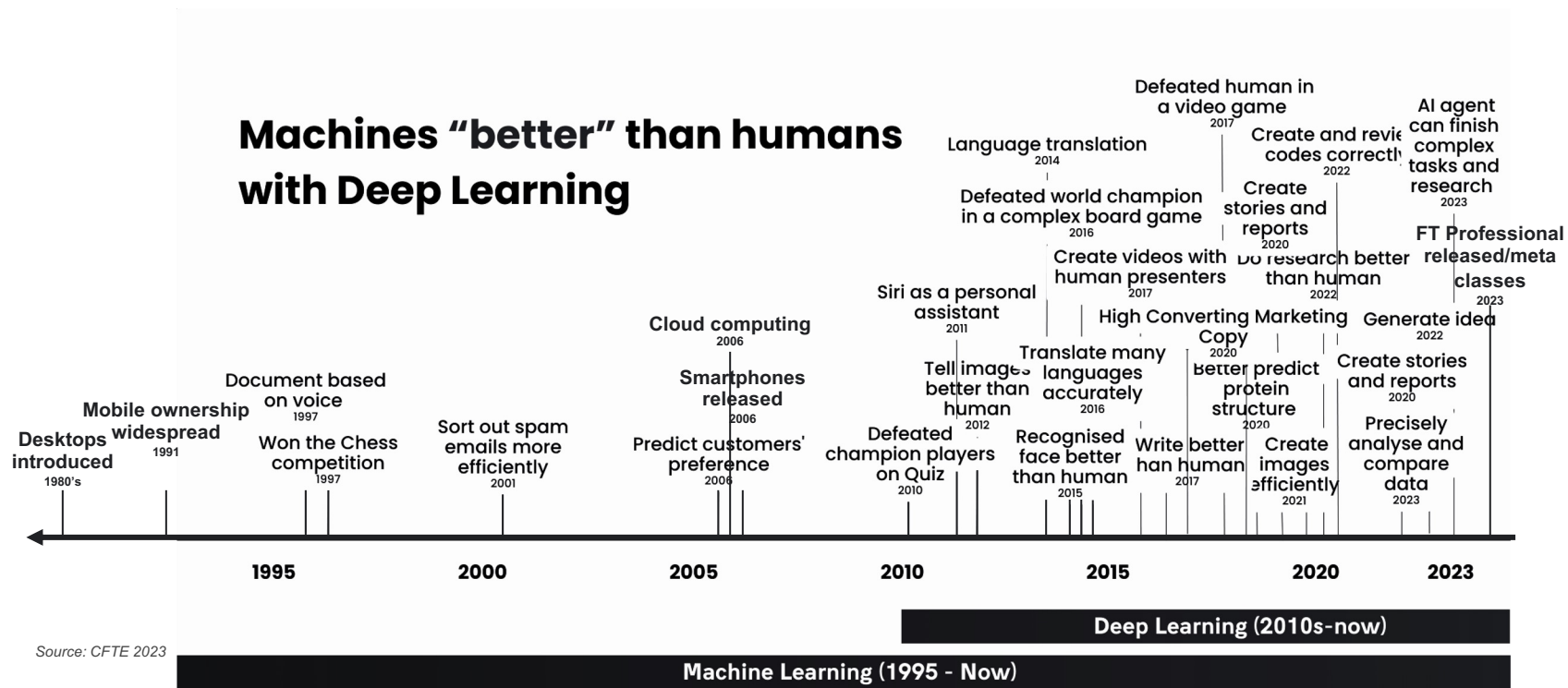


So far that work has revealed emerging threads; with most ideas focused on personalisation of content experiences



> Lessons from the Financial Times

Where do you begin when, by the time you've started, the technology has moved on?



At the FT, we approach this challenge via a set of key questions

1

Can we use AI to **understand the world better / do better journalism?**

2

How do we use AI to **amplify or accelerate the creation of value we sell?**

3

How can AI **benefit our employees?** e.g. *distribution of knowledge*

Semantic search at the FT leverages AI to provide more relevant results for readers' search queries

The Situation

FINANCIAL TIMES

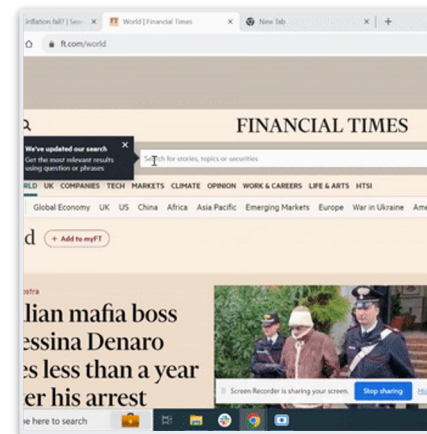
Feedback from readers showed they were missing out on articles and they wanted to access information as quickly as possible

Internal research shows that users typically shift between passively reading articles (serendipitous discovery) and seeking answers to their questions - the 'deep-dive' phase

The Initiative

- **Semantic search** was introduced to help readers find specific information they need more easily
- Semantic search provides readers with a search tool that is **versatile, relevant and useful**

The Outcome



Source: FT

How FT's semantic search works

Example: The FT's Semantic Search leverages AI to provide more relevant results for search queries [internal experiment]

FT

Search...

Sign Out

what are the trends in the electric vehicle industry

Generated response

The electric vehicle industry is ex

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A Nikkei Company

Source: FT

The Financial Times launched FT Definitions that aim to increase engagement among students

The Situation

FINANCIAL TIMES

Research shows that FT content is valuable for students, but students mentioned that it is not written in an accessible way

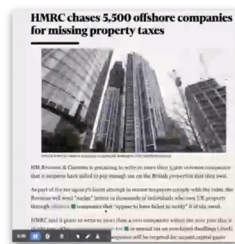
The FT's content is editorially created and reviewed, and some explainer content can be repurposed to make otherwise jargon-heavy content more easy to understand

The Initiative

The Financial Times built FT Definitions - a new feature that will **provide explanations of terminology and jargon inside the FT article**

An initial set of 200 definitions were manually created and **A/B tested to validate the user need**

With the need and value proven, an LLM leveraging historic content and editorial guardrails may be able to **generate definitions at scale**



The Outcome

The A/B tests conducted yielded the following results:

FT Definitions increased avg. quality reads and avg. counted content per student by approximately 3%

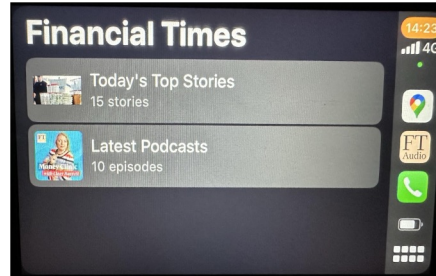
Students who clicked at least on one definition were even more engaged with 200% more 'quality reads' and 'counted content' (views)

FT Car App - Main User Journey

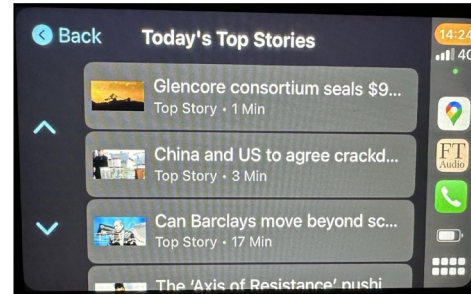
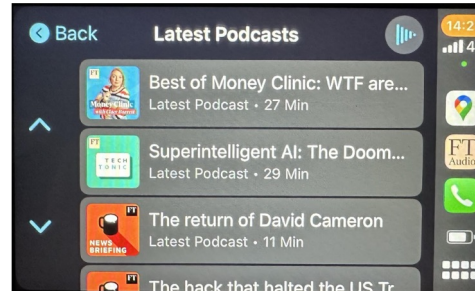
Users who connect to their car via a cable or Bluetooth will see the FT Audio app on their car screen



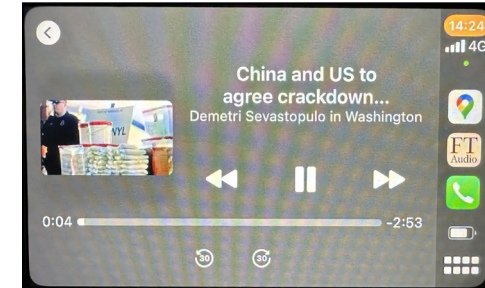
In this MVP, users have the option to select between 'Top Stories' (featured on home page) or 'Latest podcasts'.



Once they make their selection, they will arrive on a page with a list of all items to play



Tapping on these, will play the item and a player screen will load:





Renzo Veenstra
Editor in Chief



B Home Voor mij Media Uitgaan + Meer

Nieuws Carnaval Net binnen Meest gelezen Sport 112

Advertentie
Belastingssamenwerking West-Brabant
Meer weten? [Klik hier](#)

Video
Man reed fietsers aan en liet hen zwaargewond achter: cel dreigt

Liveblog
112-nieuws: 70 boetes om vasthouden telefoon • hennepkwekerij in flat

1:03
Brabantse wereldprimeur: draadloze riem voor veel te vroeg geboren baby's

Net binnen

Tim geflitst door slimme camera: 380 euro voor krabben aan oor
2 uur geleden

Meest gelezen

15 uur geleden
Dieven rijden nu naar binnen en p...

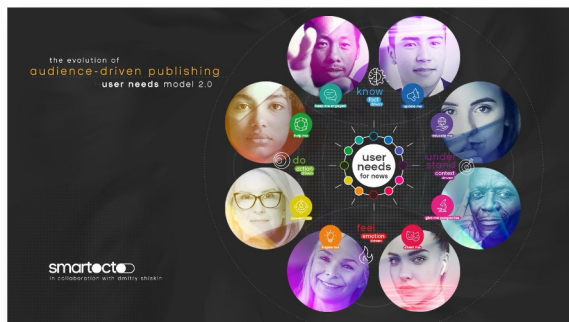
10 uur geleden
Inge en Bart zoe maar mogen ge...

Gisteren
Maayke kocht dr 'Dan schrik je j...

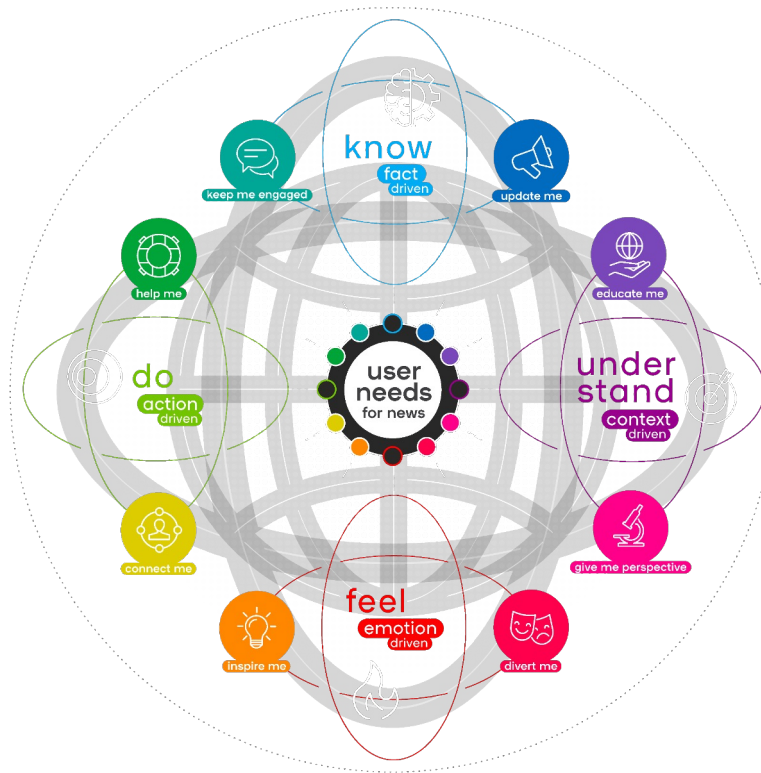
2 uur geleden
Tim geflitst door euro voor krabb...

Zojuist
112-nieuws: 70 t telefoon • henn...

Introduction to Smartocto's user needs model 2.0

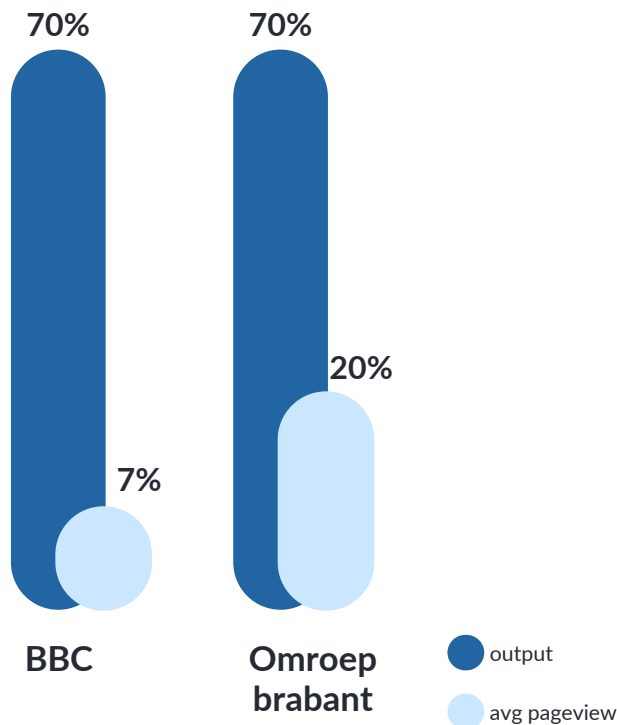


whitepaper download at smartocto.com



Note: Supported by capabilities including people and tech

Update me articles highlighted a huge misalignment between outsized output and audience needs



! Overproduction of Update Me articles (70% of total output) not matched by percentage of actual reads by user need

! Newsroom not producing content users actually needed or wanted

There are four main considerations for applying user needs for covering news and media content

1

'Hard' news is not enough to attract people regularly or with sufficient engagement

2

Commoditised, 'agenda' news are everywhere, **relevancy and engagement become the differentiator**

3

There is **misalignment** between what audience wants in digital and what it currently gets from media outlets
*(they desire information, but also **understanding, inspiration, utility, fun**)*

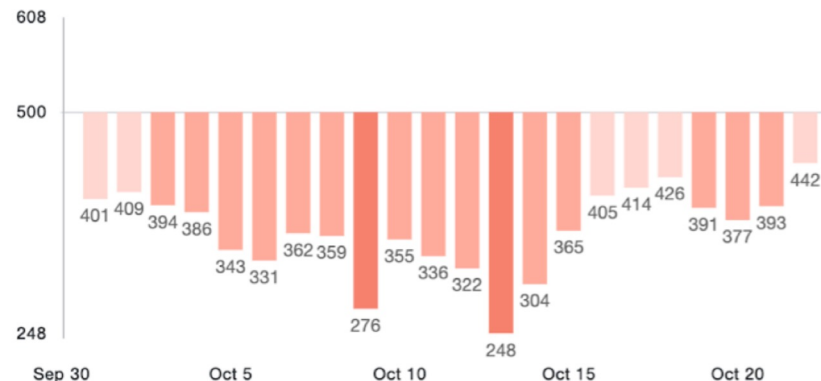
4

Growth comes when different user needs are **addressed consistently, creatively and strategically**

Prior to the user needs model being introduced, there was a below average CPI for newly published articles

Daily performance

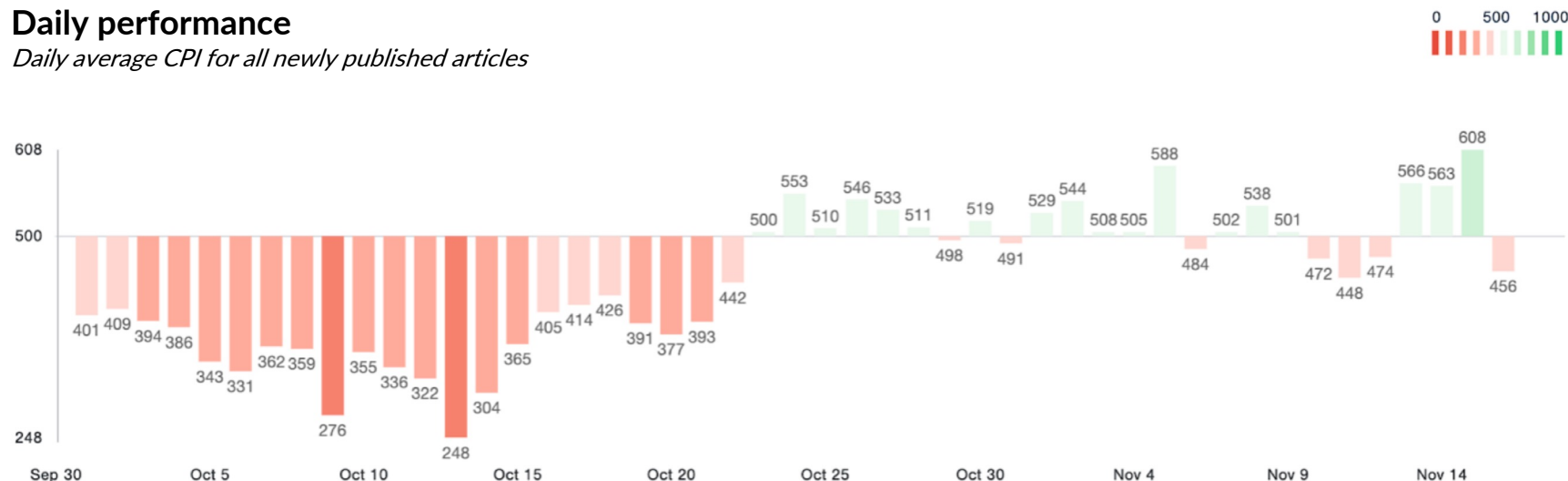
Daily average CPI for all newly published articles



Following the introduction of the user needs model, the newsroom saw great success in improving daily average CPI for newly published articles

Daily performance

Daily average CPI for all newly published articles



Example 1: User needs stories to 'educate'

OMROEP BRABANT Home Lokaal Media + Meer 6° 0 km TIP ONS

Wolves do not harm humans, but another danger for humans lurks in the forests of Brabant.

11 oktober om 13:35 • Aangepast 14 oktober om 13:21

WhatsApp Twitter Facebook LinkedIn Link



Foto: Andre Bonga

De wolf is terug en waart zich voortaan in de Brabantse bossen. Waar schapen al tientallen keren slachtoffer werden van het roofdier, is de kans dat je als mens de

Advertentie

25% KORTING op de hele collectie

livera

*Kijk voor de acties op de website van livera

educate me

Meest gelezen

- Coronanieuws: voorzitters veiligheidsregio's:...
- Geen carbirdschietsen in Brabant komende jaarwisseling,...

Example 2: User needs stories to 'inspire'

[Home](#)[Lokaal](#)[Media](#)[Meer](#)[6°](#) [0 km](#)[TIP](#)[ONS](#)

That's how contradictory the corona measures are: A day in the life of Jan and Marieke

2 oktober om 06:00 • Aangepast 2 oktober om 21:04



ArchiefFoto: Anna Shvets/Pexels

De aangescherpte coronamaatregelen en afwijkende regels per veiligheidsregio zorgen voor verwarring. Want wat mag nou wel, en wat niet? We schetsen een dag in het leven van de fictieve Jan en Marieke, die zich een woensdag lang zo goed



Meest gelezen



Coronanieuws: voorzitters veiligheidsregio's:...



Geen carbidshieten in Brabant komende jaarwisseling,...

Example 3: User needs stories to 'give me perspective'

OMROEP BRABANT Home Lokaal Media Meer 6° 0 km TIP ONS

12.5 million euros stored in 'Uncle Scrooge's' cash box, resident faces long jail term, prosecutors say

4 november om 16:38 • Aangepast 12 november om 14:36

WhatsApp Twitter Facebook LinkedIn Link



De volgeladen boodschappentassen (foto: politie)

255 kilo aan bankbiljetten in big shoppers. De politie vond deze berg geld dit voorjaar in een appartement aan de Paradijslaan in Eindhoven. De man die daar met zijn katten gratis woonde, zeet van niks te weten. Maar justitie noemt hem de

Advertentie

25% KORTING op de hele collectie

livera

Meest gelezen

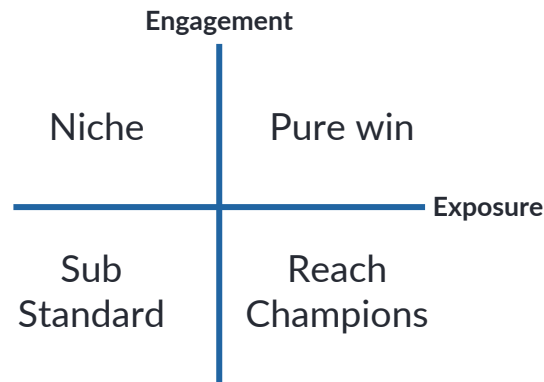
- Coronanieuws: voorzitters veiligheidsregio's:...
- Geen carbidischieten in Brabant komende jaarwisseling,...



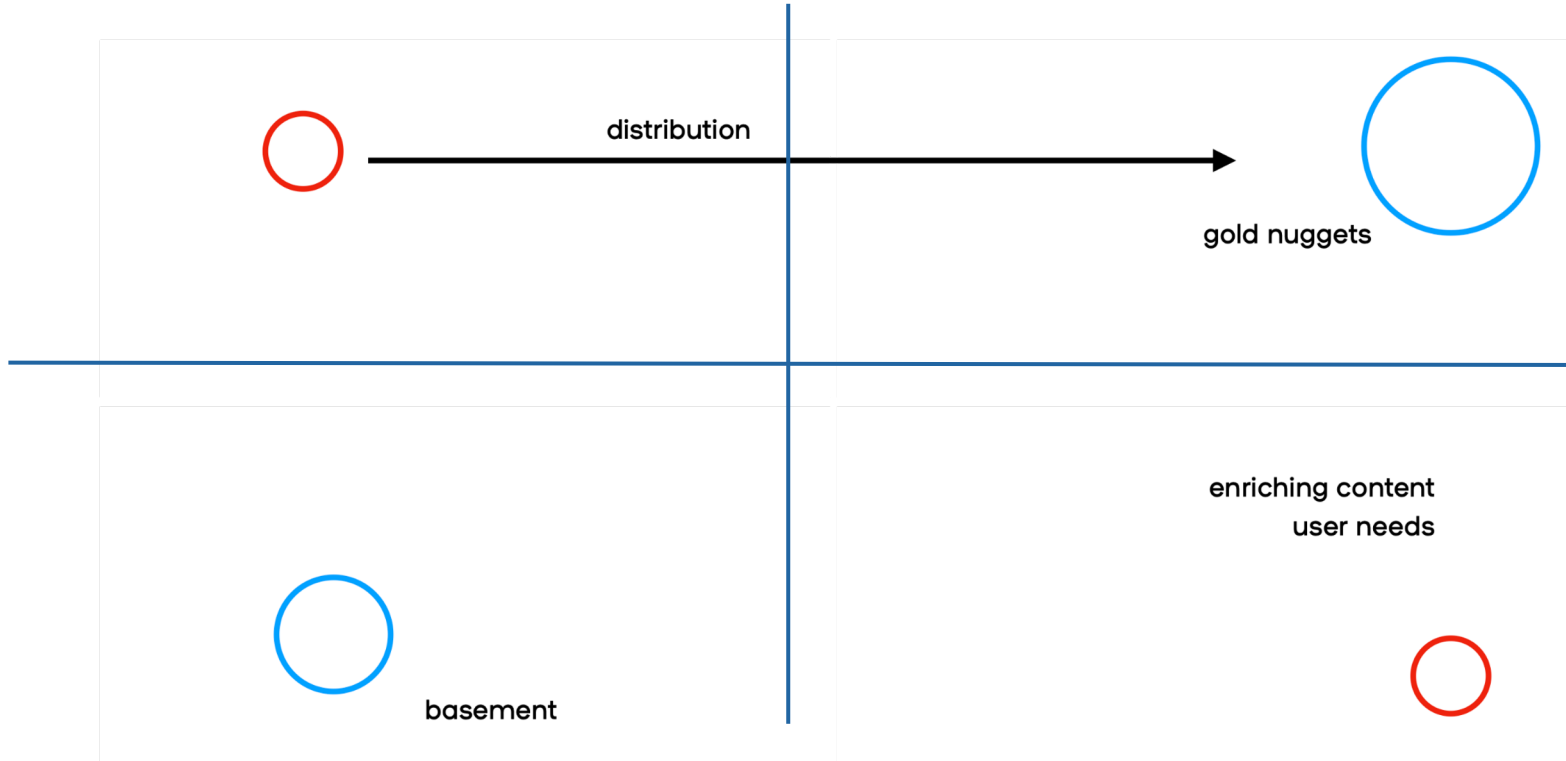
Quadrant analysis showed how user needs tagged articles were performing...

Quadrant analysis

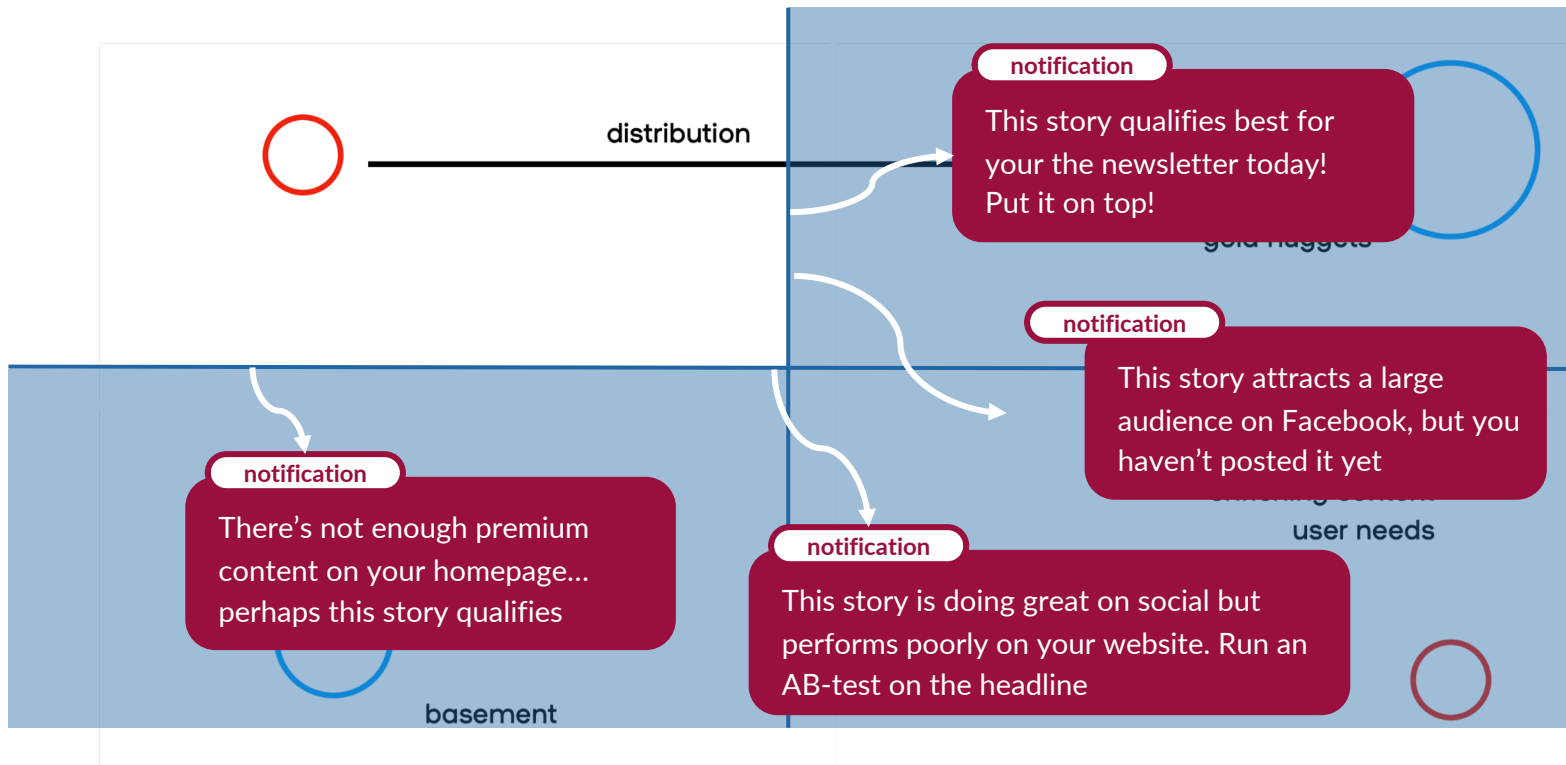
— Filter your articles and find out which articles to distribute more (left top quadrant) and which to enrich (right bottom quadrant). Find the patterns, and check your content strategy.



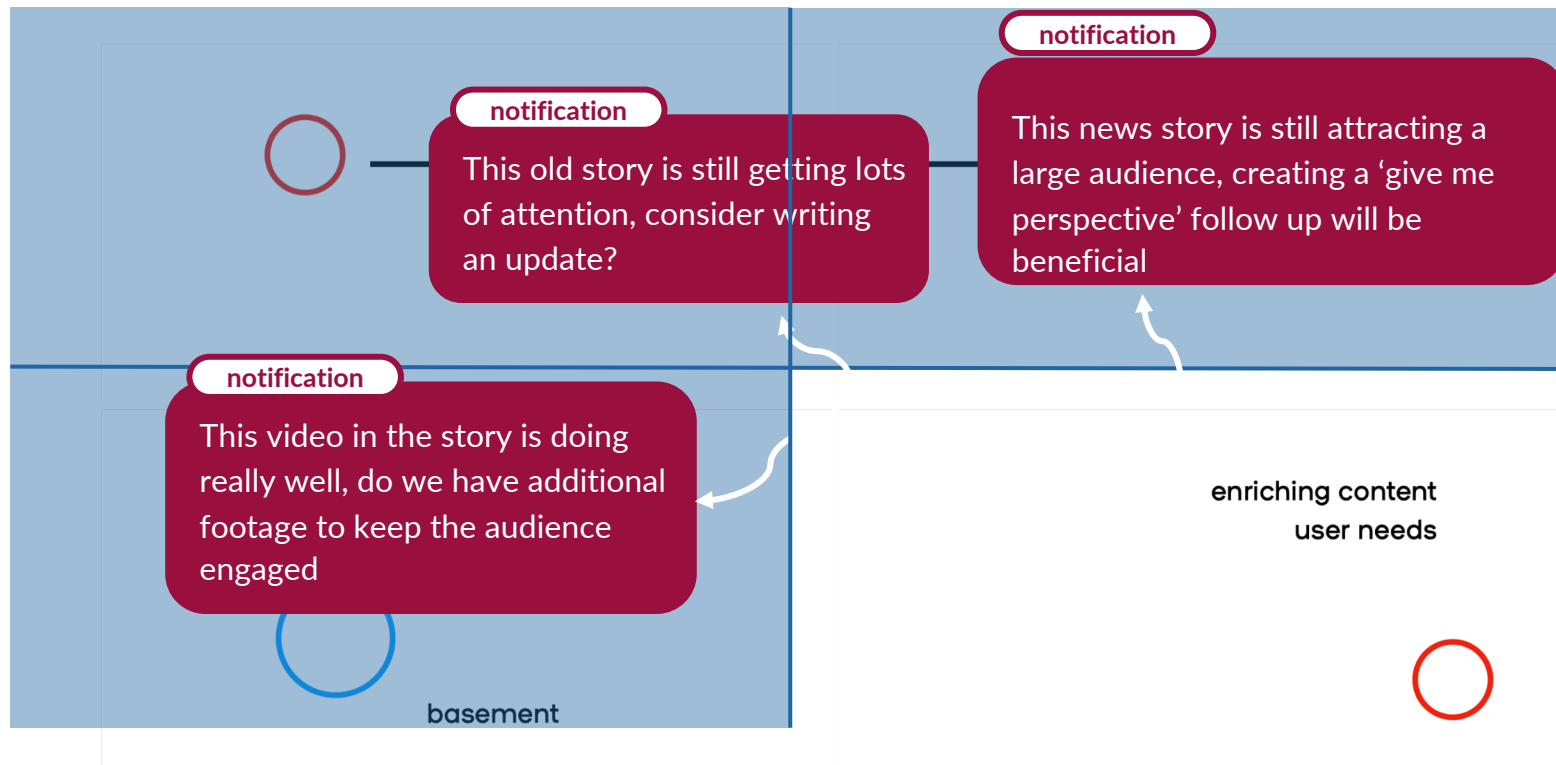
...And identified which needed to be distributed more, or enriched



The analysis provided notifications on ways to distribute articles that have the potential to perform better...



...As well as guidance on articles that need to be enriched as they are performing well



SmartOcto's AI solution allows us to set a north star metric for each article

The image shows a mobile application interface displaying a news article. The article is from a source marked with a 'B' logo and is titled "Man reed fietsers aan en liet hen zwaargewond achter: cel dreigt". It includes a video thumbnail showing a police car at night and a paragraph of text about a traffic accident in Eindhoven. A SmartOcto AI overlay is visible on the right side of the screen, showing metrics for the article.

Article Content:

Video
Man reed fietsers aan en liet hen zwaargewond achter: cel dreigt
Vandaag om 22:01

Hoe de aanrijding kon plaatsvinden, werd direct onderzocht (foto: SQ Vision).

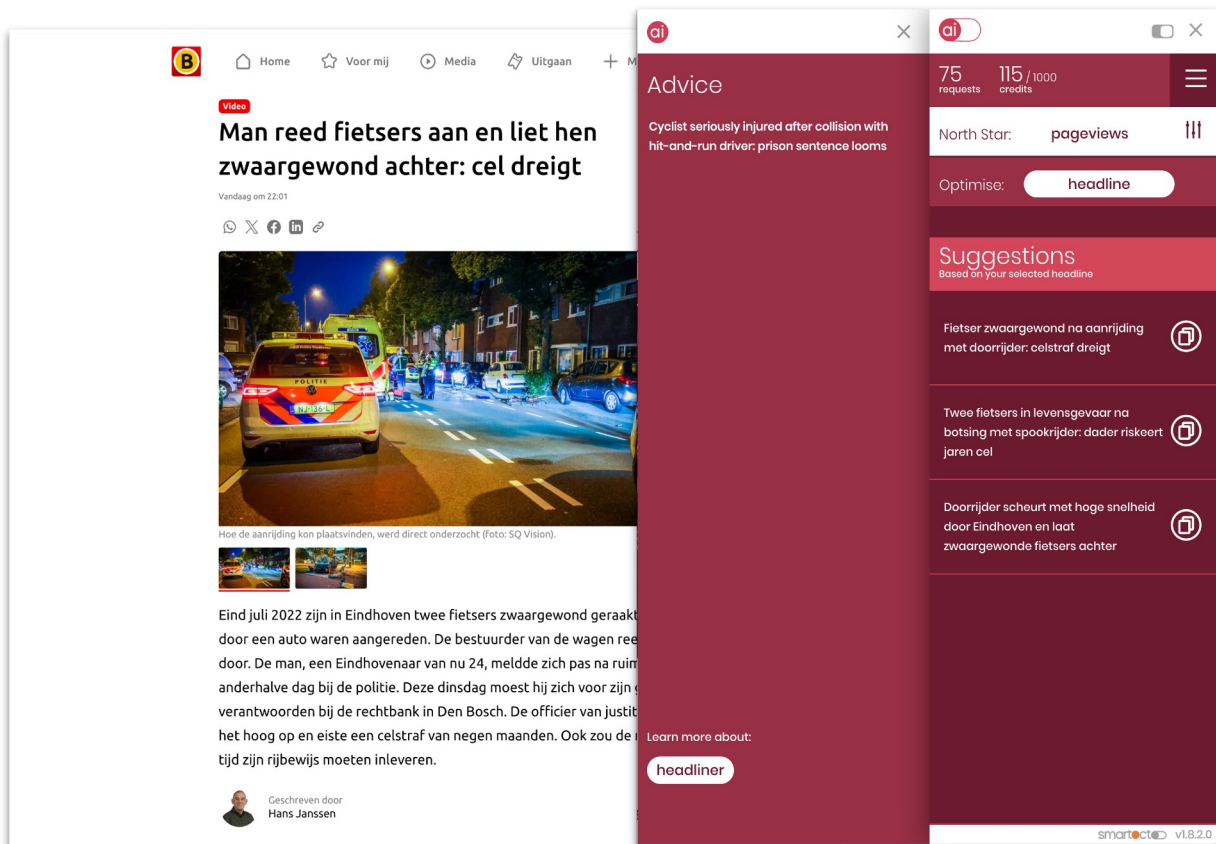
Eind juli 2022 zijn in Eindhoven twee fietsers zwaargewond geraakt nadat ze door een auto waren aangerezen. De bestuurder van de wagen reed daarna door. De man, een Eindhovenenaar van nu 24, meldde zich pas na ruim anderhalve dag bij de politie. Deze dinsdag moest hij zich voor zijn gedrag verantwoorden bij de rechtbank in Den Bosch. De officier van justitie nam het hoog op en eiste een celstraf van negen maanden. Ook zou de man een tijd zijn rijbewijs moeten inleveren.

Geschreven door
Hans Janssen

SmartOcto AI Overlay:

- ai
- 230 requests
- 588 credits
- North Star: pageviews, conversions, attention time, social
- smartocto v2.4

It also provides headline suggestions taking the north star into account



... And advises on how to optimise for user needs


Home Voor mij Media Uitgaan + M

Man reed fietsers aan en liet hen zwaargewond achter: cel dreigt

Vandaag om 22:01





Hoe de aanrijding kon plaatsvinden, werd direct onderzocht (Foto: SQ Vision).



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Geschreven door
Hans Janssen



Advice

To make the text more emotional, more personal details and experiences of the victims can be added. For example, how they experienced the collision and how the accident affected their lives. Quotes from family members or friends can also create more emotion. Furthermore, the writing style can be made more lively and compelling by using more colorful descriptions and metaphors.

To help you out, let smartocto AI give you some examples here:
For example: instead of stating that the victims were 'seriously injured', it can be described more concretely what injuries they suffered and how their recovery is progressing. Or details can be given about how the accident has changed their daily lives, such as whether they can still do their work. Quotes from loved ones telling how much they suffered from what happened can strengthen the emotional impact. Metaphors such as 'their lives were in ruins after the collision' can also help make the tragedy tangible for the reader.

Learn more about:

user need: emotion driven



70 requests 109 / 1000 credits

North Star: pageviews

Optimise: story

Goal: user needs

User need: emotion driven

Suggestions

Based on pageviews

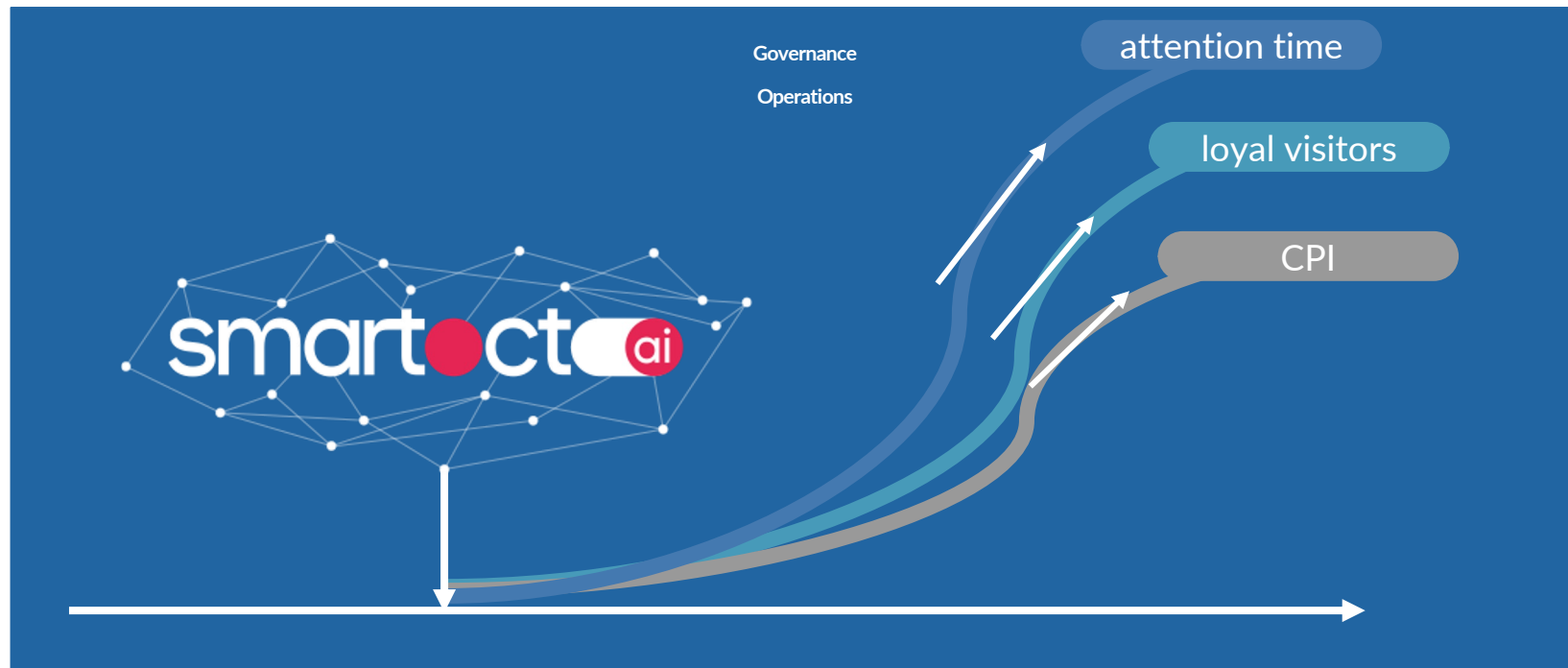
Mensen klikken in het afgelopen uur relatief weinig door van onze FB-post naar het artikel. Geven we te veel weg?

Mensen klikken in het afgelopen uur relatief weinig door van onze FB-post naar het artikel. Geven we te veel weg?

Mensen klikken in het afgelopen uur relatief weinig door van onze FB-post naar het artikel. Geven we te veel weg?

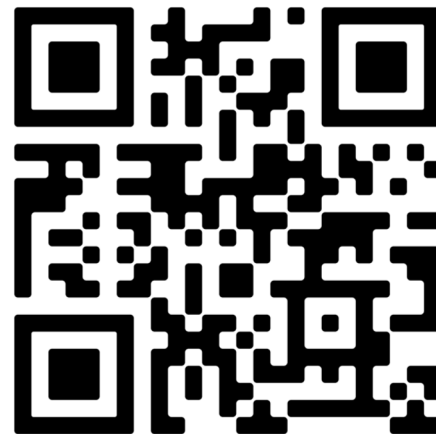
smartocto v1.8.2.0

The adoption of the user needs framework, and AI-enabled content optimisation, has driven increased attention time, loyal visitors and CPI



Supercharge your content strategy with **User Needs Labs**, a comprehensive programme from FT Strategies & smartocto

- **Content research:** the analysis of one thousand articles followed by the implementation of 'growth hacks'
- **User needs-driven strategy:** an explanation and training in the quadrant model, the creation of unique dashboards, and the evaluation of the outcomes of the 'growth hacks'
- **User needs reporting:** customised and automatised dashboards and reports, based on a thorough analysis of collected data
- **Workflow integration:** newsrooms will receive practical guidance on how to seamlessly integrate the user needs approach into their daily workflow
- **€2000 worth of credits for smartocto.ai**



ftstrategies.com/user-needs

User Needs Labs

Designed to supercharge
your content strategy
and drive audience growth



ftstrategies.com/user-needs

Thank you

Any
questions?



> Graveyard