Using data to inform and improve your journalism

AMERICAN PRESS
institute

API's 4 areas of focus

Understanding your audience	Growing subscribers
Advancing cultural change	Renewing watchdog role

Meet the Metrics for News team

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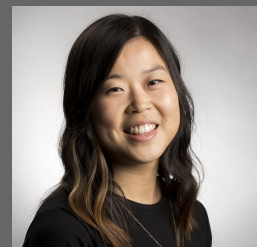
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Thank you

Now, more than ever, it's important to know what in your coverage is connecting with your communities

Newsrooms are:

- **Doing incredible work**
- **Focusing on core audiences**
- **Welcoming new audiences**
- **Serving readers in new ways**
- **Asking for support**

We're here to share what we've learned and offer resources

The problem:
Web analytics measure web pages

Journalists don't make web pages

We make journalism experiences stories relationships

11 lessons on using metrics for newsroom change

1. Bad metrics lead to bad decisions

Pageview-focus leads to clickbait

HOW WE GET 434,886 PAGEVIEWS PER MONTH

This is why many journalists dislike and distrust 'metrics'

2. Keep the "K" in KPI

Don't settle for metrics just because they are available

Decide what is important, then look for relevant metrics

A focus on conversions

Dallas Morning News learned unexpected content could lead to new subscriptions.

- SMU sports coverage performed poorly in general but converted subscribers at a much higher rate than any other sports coverage

- Now building similar franchise and marketing around high school sports

Example: Learn what works across the state

For the Anchorage Daily News, growing engagement across Alaska is important.

Alaskans Score
Measures the level of engagement by Alaskans

213

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WEIGHT ⓘ	METRIC	THIS STORY'S PERFORMANCE		SOURCE
40%	Alaskans pageviews per story	43.2K	.ᵃ▮▮ Excellent	Google Analytics
35%	Alaskans average reading minutes per story	4.17	.ᵃ▮▮ Excellent	Google Analytics
15%	Percent of traffic from alaskans segment	51.2%	.ᵃ▮▮ Average	Google Analytics

In practice: Coverage reimagined

Analyzing coverage of Iditarod across the state helped ADN learn:

- To do: Unique stories, analysis and important updates

- To stop doing: Incremental updates and photo galleries

- The result? More page views, more readers, more engaged users and more digital subscriptions than the previous year

Measure your greatest priorities

Coronavirus

Coverage of the coronavirus outbreak and COVID-19 infections

Feb 27 to Mar 28

Select from your newsroom's priorities: ⓘ

| Growing online audiences | 📊 224 | Building loyalty | 📊 212 | Building our membership base | 📊 135 |

3. Use several key indicators, but don't overwhelm

Every metric has a perspective

You need more than one
to capture everything that matters

Beware: The Cherrypicking Problem

What it is:

- Give people multiple metrics and they choose whichever one makes them look good in each case, ignoring the others

How to solve it:

- Don't give *too many* metrics to choose from
- Agree in advance which metric(s) matter for a given objective, and what counts as success
- Communicate to the newsroom often

Engagement Scores

Simple
Comprehensive
Customizable

How this score is calculated

145

📊 Excellent

Total Engagement Score
A blend of pageviews, time spent and social engagement by all users

WEIGHT	METRIC	THIS STORY'S PERFORMANCE	SOURCE
	Pageviews per story	7.96K Excellent	Adobe Analytics
	Local People pageviews per story	5.83K Excellent	Adobe Analytics
	Average reading minutes	4.39 Excellent	Chartbeat
	Average local people reading minutes per story	5.38 Excellent	Adobe Analytics
	Social interaction rate per visit	2% Good	Facebook and Twitter interactions, Adobe Analytics visits
	Social interactions per story	106 Excellent	Facebook and Twitter
	Percent of traffic from mobile users segment	56.2% Average	Adobe Analytics

4. Different people may have different primary KPIs

Washington Post example

- "Morning Mix" team is tasked with aggregating, driving large pageview counts and story volume. "Top of the funnel"

- Investigative or local teams are expected to serve loyal readers and convert subscribers. "Bottom of the funnel"

5. Isolate key audience segments

Serving potential subscribers

The Minneapolis Star Tribune used Metrics for News to track reading habits of potential subscribers it calls "intenders."

- Found *religion and philanthropy* among untapped beats
- Went from part-time religion writer to two full-time beats
- Coverage performs 50 percent better than content on average
- Email newsletters have played a big role in converting intenders to paying subscribers

Be selective about what to cover

A Florida newsroom made coverage of environment, development and dining high priorities in the newsroom. This led to:

- A focused newsroom
- New revenue
- Lifted engagement across all topics
  (+40% views, +77% time, +115% shares in one year)

Subscribers read different topics

Topic	Subscribers rank	Casuals rank
State Government	#1	#1
State Workers	#2	#6
Local Government	#3	#5
Business	#4	#8
Disasters / accidents	#5	#2
Nearest NFL team	#26	#3
Local NBA team	#7	#11

METRICS FOR NEWS data from a major newspaper in a state capital

Subscribers read different story forms

Story form	Subscribers Score	Casuals Score
Major enterprise reports	177	217
Daily news stories	153	205
Op-Eds	125	116
Columns	116	62
Editorial cartoons	99	79
Letter to the editor	57	47

METRICS FOR NEWS data from a major newspaper in a state capital

6. Taxonomies bring metrics to life

Why apply a taxonomy?

- Knowing how different types of content perform collectively gives you more strategic insight

- Shows you what kinds of content to do more or less of

- Compares apples to apples

- Allows you to learn WHY people engage with your journalism

Journalistic categories & analysis

Tell you which characteristics are working and not

Trends in these stories

Click on a trend to filter the list of sto...

What is working best
with Growing Online Audiences

DEFINED TOPICS

○ Education (21 stories)

○ Public Safety - Crime (30 stories)

○ Public Safety - Fires (16 stories)

ENTERPRISE LEVEL

○ Longform (39 stories)

AUTHOR TYPE

○ Producer (33 stories)

○ Reporter (52 stories)

DETECTED ENTITIES

○ California (40 stories)

○ Central San Diego (14 stories)

○ Central San Diego Region (22 stories)

About this Story

AUTHOR	City News Service #1 out of 101 stories	>
DEFINED TOPIC	Coronavirus #2 out of 271 stories	>
DEFINED TOPIC	Health #2 out of 264 stories	>
DEFINED TOPIC	Public Safety - Fires #1 out of 25 stories	>
DEFINED TOPIC	Quality of Life #2 out of 277 stories	>
AUTHOR TYPE	Wire Service #2 out of 197 stories	>
ENTERPRISE LEVEL	Longform #1 out of 64 stories	>
DETECTED ENTITY	beaches #1 out of 5 stories	>
DETECTED ENTITY	city #1 out of 21 stories	>

Entity detection

Entities are the things you write about — people, places, companies or organizations automatically detected in your stories.

examples:

Donald Trump	China	universities
nursing homes	health officials	banks

Coronavirus stories   all 7 stories in this timeframe

🔍 Search for a story...

Trends in these stories ❓

Click on a trend to filter the list of stories.

What is working best ⬆
with Engaging Returning Readers

LOCATION

⚪ Anchorage (35 stories)

⚪ Statewide / elsewhere in Alaska (72 stories)

DEFINED TOPICS

⚪ Anchorage city government (6 stories)

⚪ Aviation (4 stories)

⚪ Health care / medicine / public health (50 stories)

⚫ Homelessness (7 stories)

ENTERPRISE LEVEL

⚪ Daily news story (82 stories)

HEADLINE	RETURNING USERS SCORE ▼ ❓	TOPIC	
Bigger crowds than expected flock to Anchorage's new mass shelter complex Paula Dobbyn March 23, 2020 `RETURNING FAVORITE` `SUBSCRIBERS FAVORITE`	**209**	Coronavirus Homelessness	❯

As virus spreads, homeless take shelter at Anchorage arenas
 Paula Dobbyn March 21, 2020
 `EVENING VISITORS FAVORITE` `RETURNING FAVORITE`
 `SUBSCRIBERS FAVORITE`
	187	Coronavirus Homelessness	❯

Anchorage officials eye ice arena as emergency homeless shelter as they brace for coronavirus impact Paula Dobbyn March 15, 2020 `RETURNING FAVORITE` `SUBSCRIBERS FAVORITE`	**176**	Coronavirus Health care / medicine / public health Homelessness	❯
Anchorage prepares to open arenas to homeless Paula Dobbyn March 20, 2020			

Example: Thematic thinking

Erie Times News transformed crime coverage

- More enterprise, explainers, photos, initiative

- Created a franchise focused on solutions for making the community a better and safer place to live

- Grew views by 200% and shares by 250% in one year

7. Everyone should be empowered with data

Everyone needs their own data

This:

Not this:

How to get everyone into data

- DO: Relevant, personalized reports for each person / role

- DO: Weekly newsletter from analyst to staff

- DO: Use data to start one-on-one conversations

- DON'T: Automatic, sitewide, basic reports

- DON'T: Rely on TV screen dashboards that aren't actionable

- DON'T: Don't replace human feedback with data tools

Example: Buffalo News

"Most reporters appreciate having their editors' blessing to avoid some stories and pursue others. So reward the enterprise stories."

- Start with a culture of learning and using analytics
- Simplify the data with blended metrics
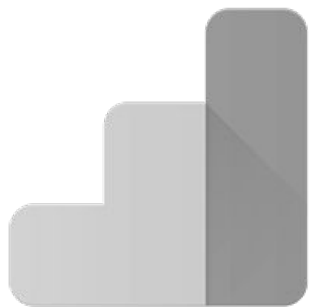- Give freedom to STOP DOING things

The result: Enterprise team stopped doing meeting and regional stories, incremental updates on the school board, crime and narcotics coverage. Engagement increased 22%.

8. Combine multiple data sources whenever possible

Engagement is fragmented

Why we centralize all the data

- One place to see all of an article's engagement

- Able to mix all sources into one Engagement Score

9. Supplement data with qualitative surveys & discussion

The "analytics blind spot"

Analytics only give you feedback about what you've done, not what you might do.

Analytics rarely tell you "why"

Human insights added to data

Use surveys, focus groups, interviews , community listening to layer in other insights about why the numbers say what they say

Example: API's audience survey

- Designed to learn what your audiences SAY they care most about

- Questions are not about you but about them.

- Match it with your analytics to see if what
they SAY is what they DO

- Identify opportunities analytics alone may have not revealed

10. Identify new target audiences, and test them rapidly

Identify coverage opportunities

The Sacramento Bee identifies what it calls "audience sprints" — new content areas around which it believes it can build digital subscriptions. These audiences include:

- Health care workers
- Pub & grub
- Homeowners

Short cycles of test and learn, powered by Metrics for News

11. When to 'stop doing'

Popular-Important Matrix

|	Popular	Not popular
High importance	Do it all	Do enough
Low importance	Do enough	Stop doing

5 steps to evaluate content

1. Does it matter to everyone?

2. Does it matter to someone? (A key segment)

3. Can we make it matter to someone? (Change the approach)

4. Is it essential to other business strategies?

5. Is it mission-critical anyway?

If all "no" — stop doing it.

Learn more about us

Metrics for News analytics for your editorial values and business models

metricsfornews.com
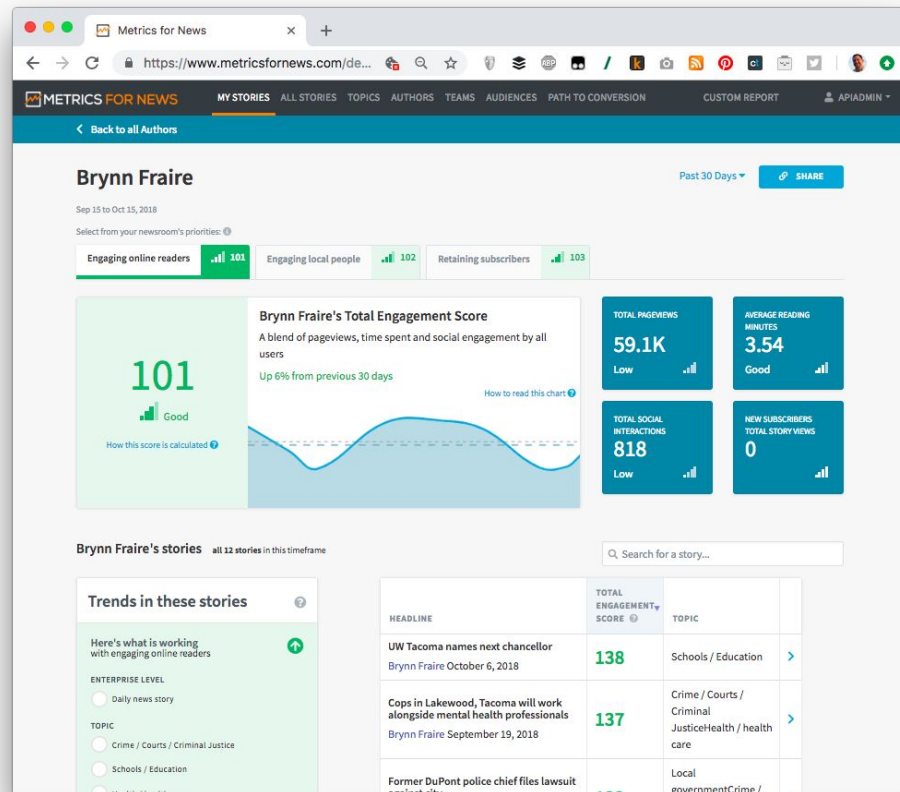
Thank you!

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