

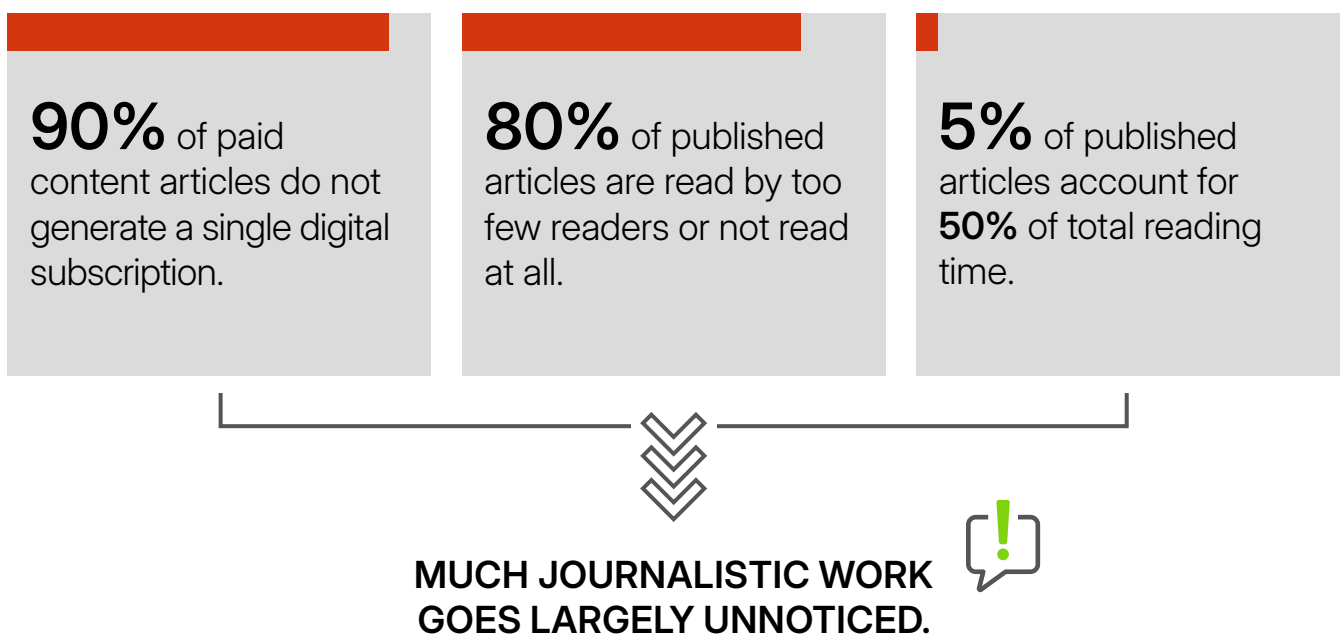
USER NEEDS IN DAILY EDITORIAL WORK

How publishers increase user
engagement and subscriptions
with tailored content

DATA SHOWS: MANY STORIES FAIL TO FIND AN AUDIENCE

Relevance is a key success factor in digital journalism. Content that specifically addresses readers' interests and expectations has been shown to increase their willingness to pay.

The problem is that the majority of stories published do not meet this requirement, according to data on user behaviour on regional websites.



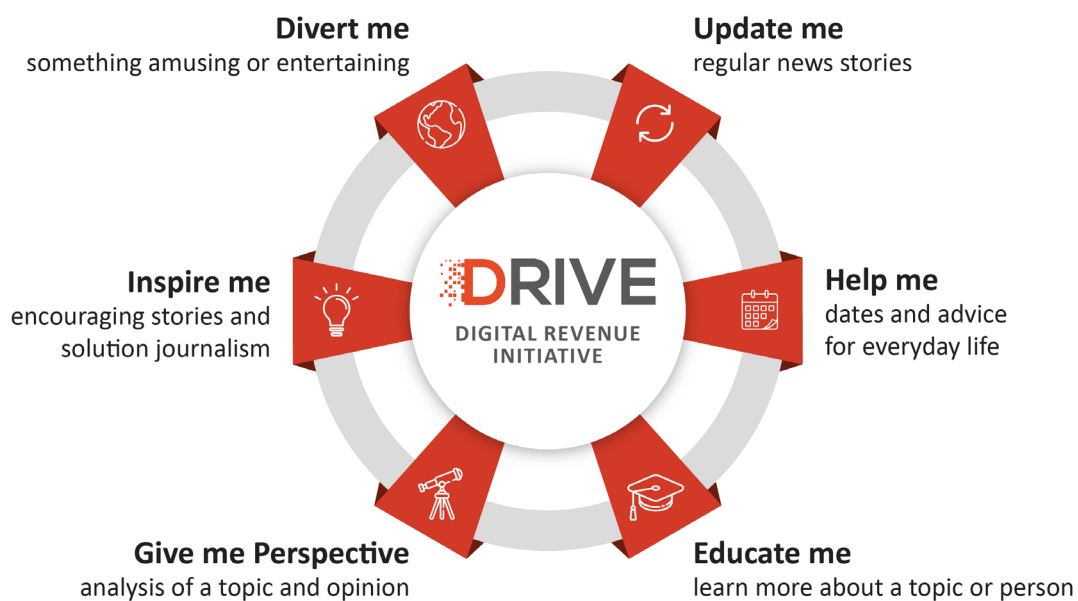
What is DRIVE?

The Digital Revenue Initiative (DRIVE) of the German Press Agency (dpa) and the management consultancy Highberg supports regional publishers in aligning their stories with the needs of their readers and increasing digital subscriptions. This is achieved with the help of proven user needs models and a special implementation programme.

UNDERSTANDING READER NEEDS WITH **USER NEEDS MODELS**

People use regional news for different reasons. They don't become loyal readers and paying customers simply by receiving information. They want to develop a deeper understanding of what is happening locally and in the world.

To capture these needs systematically, newsrooms rely on reader needs or user needs models. Dmitry Shishkin developed one of the first for the BBC. Fredric Karén of the Schibsted media group has also developed a system known as the bucket model.



The DRIVE User Needs Model is based on the system developed by Dmitry Shishkin.



Bucket model by Fredric Karén for the Norwegian business newspaper E24.

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS FROM CONTENT ANALYSIS

The first content analysis, based on more than five million archived pieces of content, revealed which categories of needs DRIVE publishers have addressed and which have achieved high engagement and conversion rates. Here is an overview of the key findings.



Mismatch between Supply and Demand

Regional publishers largely offer traditional news on their sites. However, the data shows that readers don't demand this level of coverage.



Engagement Drivers

Emotional and inspiring stories generate the highest user engagement. But these are rarely found on regional sites.

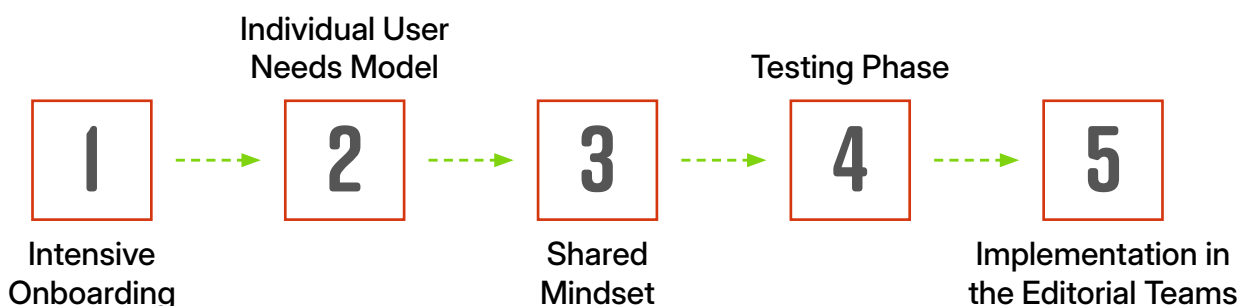


Conversion Stars

Visitors to regional sites are more likely than average to read inspiring and opinionated articles before subscribing to a digital subscription.

■ NEXT STEP: WORKING WITH USER NEEDS

Over the course of the nine-month DRIVE implementation programme, editors learned step-by-step how to integrate user needs into their day-to-day newsroom operations. They went through five phases:



WRITING TO USER NEEDS **INCREASES** **MEDIA TIME AND SUBSCRIBERS**

After nine months, the DRIVE implementation programme came to an end. The final performance analysis focused on two key performance indicators: Media Time, which measures the time readers spend on the website or app, and Conversion Rate, which measures the proportion of readers who subscribe.

The analysis shows that the integration of tailored content had a **remarkable impact and results**.

Content quality was **significantly improved**.



Reader engagement has more than doubled, **increasing by 125%**.



The number of subscribers **increased by 75%**.



Editors are focusing on **digital content** and moving away from the "print mindset".



STRONG MEDIA TIME FOR SPECIFIC USER NEEDS CATEGORIES

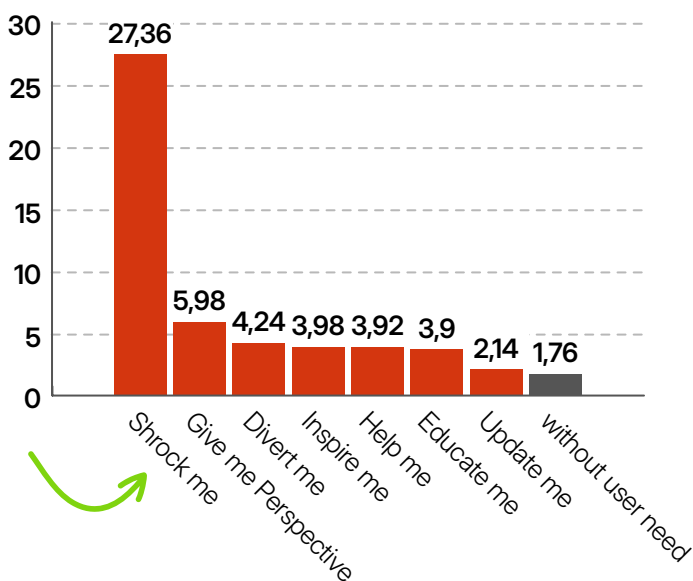
Data analysis shows: The more time readers spend on the website or app, the more likely they are to subscribe. Over the course of the nine-month implementation programme, it became clear that certain user need categories generated above-average media time.

The category "shrock me" stood out in the **Freie Presse** for its regional and emotional stories. The name is a combination of "shock me" and "rock me".

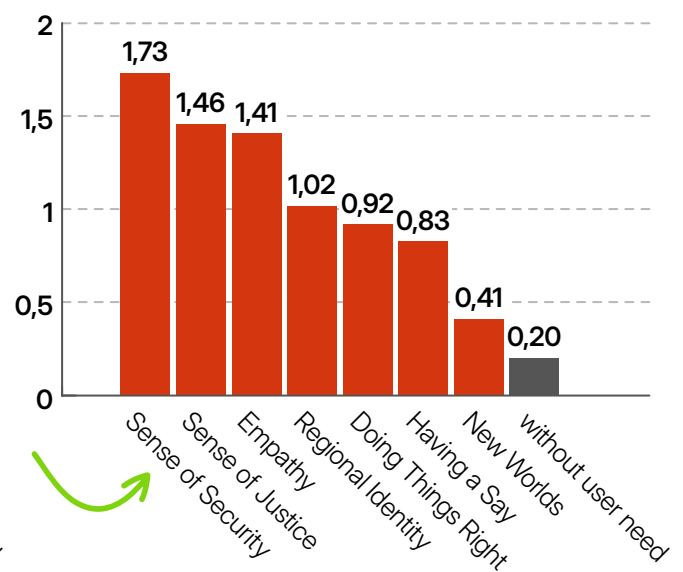
The stories that scored particularly well in the **Rheinpfalz** were those that addressed people's worries and fears, thus satisfying their need for security and stability.

Freie Presse

SACHSENS GROSSTE ZEITUNG



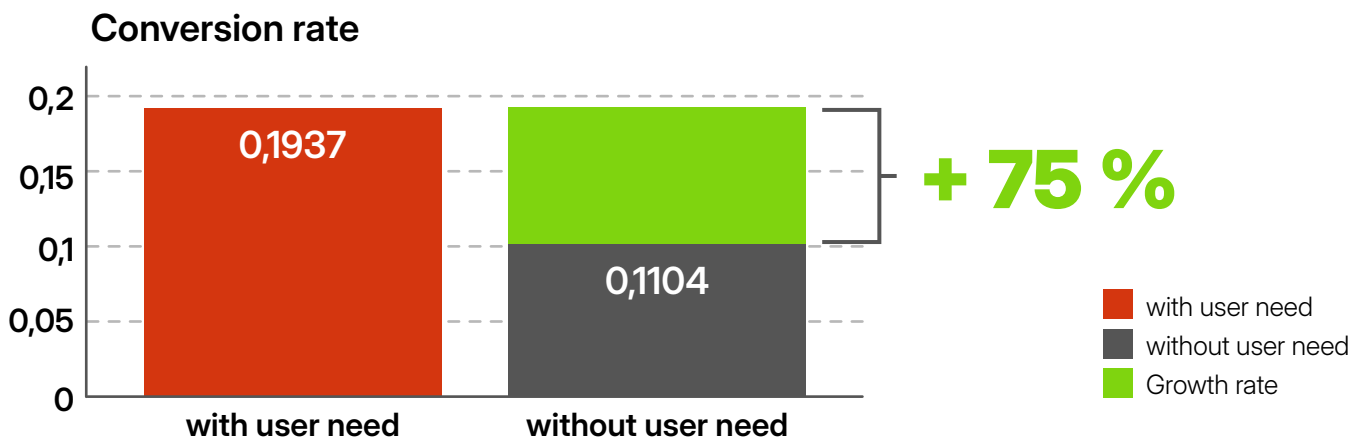
DIE RHEINPFALZ



■ average media time ■ without user need

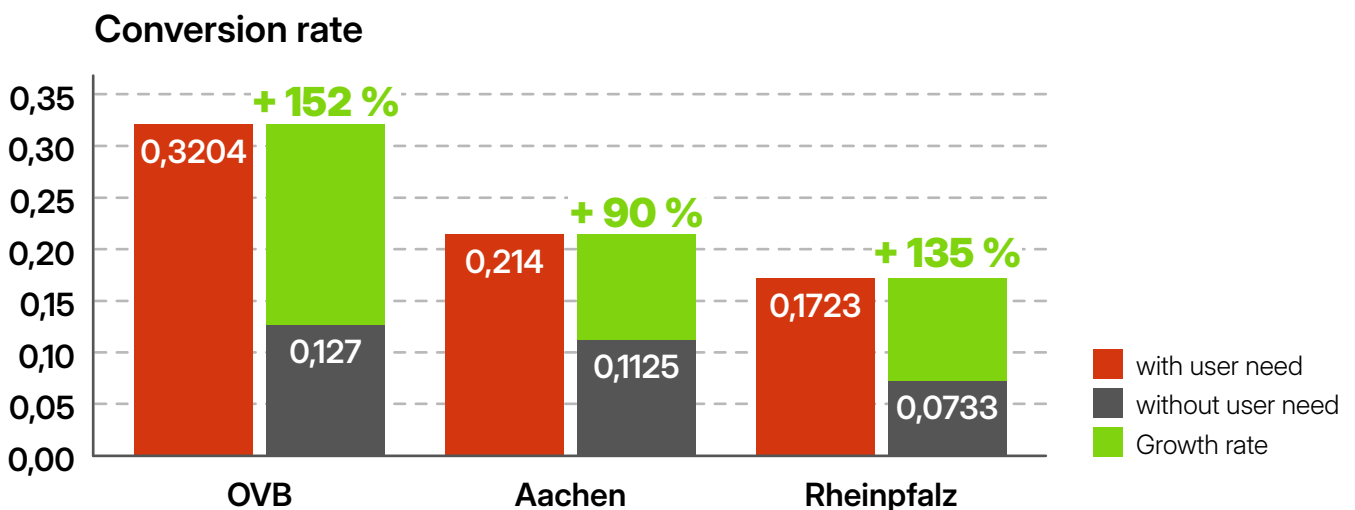
NEEDS-DRIVEN STORYTELLING DRIVES DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

The new editorial approach is paying off. Publishers have gained an average of 75 percent more subscribers with needs-based stories than with traditional articles.



User need-based content generated an average of 0.19 conversions – measured over the life of the implementation programme. Articles without user need generated only 0.11 conversions.

THE OBERBAYERISCHES VOLKSBLATT (OVV), AACHENER ZEITUNG AND RHEINPFALZ HAVE PARTICULARLY STRONG CONVERSION EFFECTS



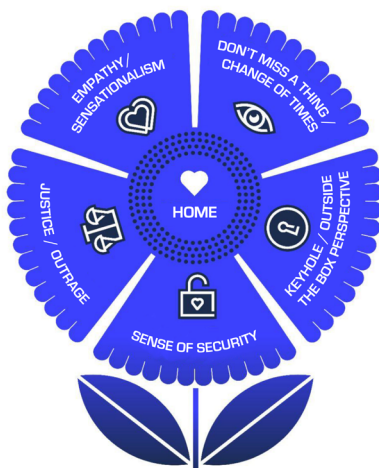
FIVE KEY POINTS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF USER NEEDS MODELS



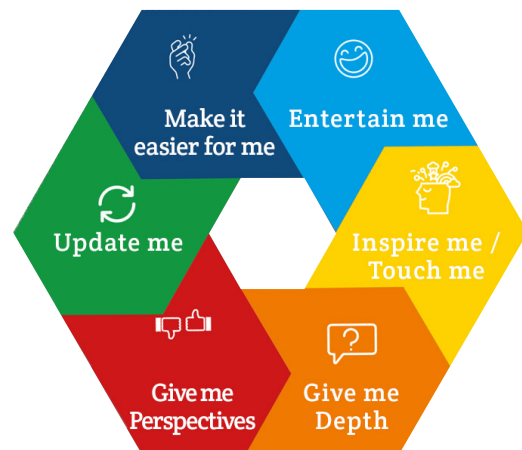
Develop Your Own User Needs Model

Dmitry Shishkin's and Fredric Karén's user needs models are the ideal basis for creating an own user needs model. Individual categories, terms and language can be adapted to suit the user needs of your newsroom.

Tip: Acceptance in the newsroom is higher when the newsroom itself decides on adaptations.



The Oberbayerisches Volksblatt model is based on Fredric Karén's bucket system.



Lensing Media's user needs model is based on Dmitry Shishkin's system.



Intensive Training Leads to Higher Quality

The introduction of user needs models has shown that intensive support of editorial teams by a training team has a maximum learning effect. The stories produced were also of higher quality and performance.

3

Define Rules and Goals

A clear definition of rules and goals is important for editors so that writing according to needs categories becomes a routine.

Tip I: Each story needs to be assigned a needs category in the content management system. This not only trains the eye, but also enables accurate data evaluation and success measurement.

Tip II: Quotas encourage diversity in need categories. For example, a possible ratio could be ten percent of 'Inspire me' stories per month. But be careful not to set targets and expectations too high. It takes time to think, research and write according to readers' needs.

4

Building Editorial Topic Careers

User needs models are particularly useful for building up ongoing coverage of a topic. Instead of writing one comprehensive article covering all facets, it is a good idea to produce and publish several articles that correspond to the respective user needs categories. This creates a "career" of articles that draws the reader deeper and deeper into the topic.

Tip: Editors should ensure that career articles are linked within or below the article. This improves the reading experience and increases media time.

5

Broadcasting Schedules Based on User Needs

Broadcasting and production schedules based on user needs are an important part of the editorial change process. They are based on DRIVE data analysis, which shows publishers what readers want most at what time and day of the week.

Note: News has long been considered the most important format in the morning. However, the data shows that readers are increasingly looking for explanatory and opinionated stories rather than pure "Update me" stories.

DRIVE - A PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Once the new, reader-focused way of working has been implemented in the newsroom, DRIVE ensures that it is sustained over the long term. In regular virtual meetings, publishers use data analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of the processes implemented and to ensure that they are achieving the goals set. At the same time, they share information about successful and unsuccessful applications and methods. The experience gained helps all publishers with their individual paid content strategies.

VOICES FROM THE DRIVE EDITORS



Christoph Meurer

Chief Reporter of the
General-Anzeiger Bonn

Working with user needs is actually nothing new in the world of journalism. But in a way it is a revolution in thinking. You have to flip a switch, and once you've done that, you see things from a completely new perspective."



Martin Vodermaier

Editor-in-Chief of OVB24 GmbH

In my opinion, the key to success with user needs categories is to get everyone on the same page: from management to freelancers. There needs to be a clear internal strategy that is continually communicated to the editorial teams. Ongoing training and feedback sessions are also essential!"

DRIVE: DRIVING REGIONAL PUBLISHERS' DIGITAL BUSINESS TOGETHER

The biggest challenges in digital transformation for regional publishers are adapting editorial workflows and data science resources. The latter is particularly difficult for small and medium-sized publishers to tackle on their own. DRIVE provides a perfect infrastructure where publishers work together to build a sustainable digital business. They benefit from all kinds of tools, data expertise and intelligent algorithms.

AI-BASED TAGGING

Publishers use DRIVE's proprietary AI-based tagging for content and performance analysis. All published articles are collected in DRIVE's data warehouse and automatically assigned an appropriate category based on user needs.

Benefits:

- Continuous, cross-publisher data analysis according to user need categories
- Multi-dimensional analysis of user needs, e.g. by journalistic format, location, sentiment, publication time, etc.
- Systematic cross-publisher benchmarking

DRIVE's practical tools to support the integration of user needs into day-to-day editorial work:

- Step-by-step instructions for developing your own user needs model
- Stop doing lists for more freedom in the implementation process
- Story pitch deck for developing user needs stories
- Templates for user needs broadcast plans
- Best practices for building topic careers
- Ideas for mugs, posters, games and more: these things bring user needs right into the newsroom and encourage rapid knowledge transfer.

BECOME PART OF DRIVE ...

The Digital Revenue Initiative (DRIVE) is a unique data initiative launched in 2020 by German Press Agency (dpa) and management consultancy Highberg. They are working with around 30 regional publishers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland to increase digital subscriptions and grow the digital business.

Smart Data Team

Data scientists support publishers with data analysis, dashboards and reports.



Agile Way of Working

After a kick-off workshop, publishers work iteratively on the implementation programme.



Strong Community

DRIVE publishers help each other to implement user needs. We are strong together.



... YOU ARE IN GOOD COMPANY



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