



2024 EDITION

Local Publisher Content Strategies in Australia



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About the Report

Welcome to State of Digital Publishing's (SODP) inaugural study of independent, locally focused publishers in Australia.

This study examines small-scale publishers' strategies to grow their businesses to provide others with insights they can apply to their operations.

The local publishing industry worldwide has been under the microscope for the better part of two decades, with the generally held consensus being that it's experiencing a crisis.

Thousands of smaller publishers have already shuttered their doors, owing to an inability to grow and monetize their audiences.

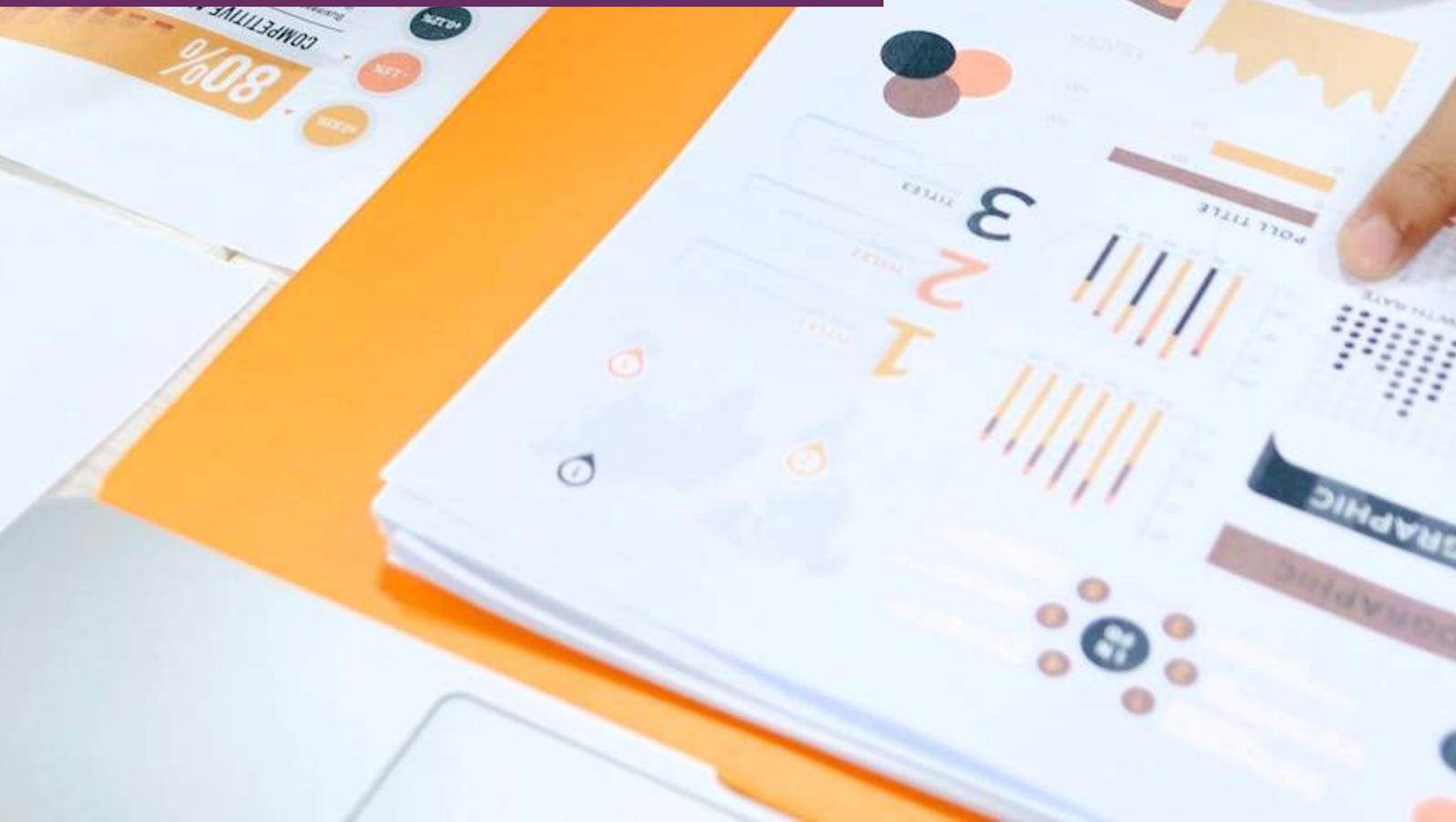
And yet, while the segment is struggling under profound challenges — such as tech giants' rising competition for audience mindshare and an ever-growing distrust of the news media in general — that's not to say local publishing is doomed.

Some small publishers — new and old — are enjoying success.

Following these case studies, we were inspired to expand our research into a broader study of the industry to shed some light on what's working for publishers of different sizes and show how to move up a level. We're using third-party data and qualitative analysis to identify these strategies. Please keep reading to see our full methodology in the next section.



Research Methodology





Before diving into the results of our research, it's essential to understand how we approached the data-gathering phase.

Benchmarking

We used a mixture of third-party tools to collect data on the estimated total and organic traffic of the publishers we wanted to cover in this study.

It's important to acknowledge that this approach is less accurate than first-party audience data. After all, no third-party tool can access first-party publisher data, relying instead on a mix of sources such as clickstream, Google Search Console (GSC) and Google Keyword Planner (GKP) to arrive at their estimates.

There were a couple of notable examples of an up to fourfold gap between reported first-party and third-party data. The problem we encountered was that not all publishers disclose their first-party data.

This makes third-party data incredibly valuable in ordering our selection of publishers into appropriate buckets, shaping our analysis process, with a sample set of

Speaking of selection, at less than 100 publishers, this study is pulling from a relatively limited data set.

Filtering

The reason for this was that our selection criteria required that publishers be:

- **Independently owned:** This meant excluding locally focused publications owned and operated by a national holding company. ACM, for example, holds more than 160 regional publications. But the knowledge, opportunities and challenges an independent publisher faces are markedly different from those of a national holding company.
- **Locally focused:** We excluded independent publishers specializing in geographically agnostic niches, like fashion or adventures. Publishers that cater to a geographically constrained audience will have different strategies and objectives.

These two parameters filtered out the overwhelming majority of Australia's small publishers.

Country of Origin

Another point worth addressing is the country selection in this study. We selected Australia for our inaugural study owing to its similarities with the US and UK markets.

Australia may only have a population of 25 million, but the country shares social, political, technological, media, cultural and economic similarities with these more significant markets. This means lessons learned here are analogous with other overseas markets.

Traffic Categories



Traffic Categories

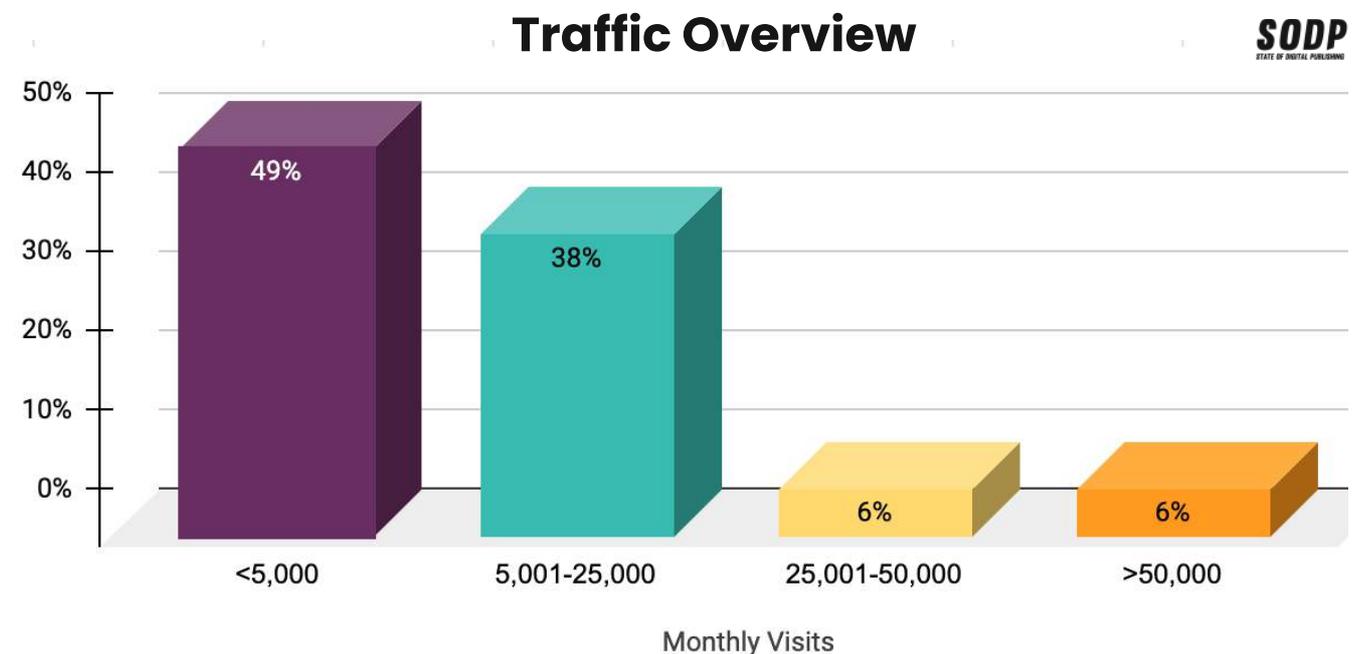
We separated our list of publishers into four groups based on their overall estimated monthly traffic from March 2023. These groups are as follows:

- **Low:** <5,000
- **Lower-Mid:** 5,001-25,000
- **Upper-Mid:** 25,001-50,000
- **Top:** >50,000

was on local and hyperlocal publishers, we saw very few publishers in the top two brackets.

Indeed, 49% of our list attracted less than 5,000 visits per month, another 38% attracted 5,001-25,000 visits, 6% attracted 25,001-50,000 visits and 6% attracted more than 50,000 visits.

Unsurprisingly, given that our focus



We separated the publishers into different traffic brackets to understand their business models. For example, a poorly optimized website isn't the only factor behind low "digital footfall".

Some publishers we studied rely heavily on print models to reach their audiences, tying their digital publishing date to their print edition's release. Others opted to publish immediately. Both paths impact potential digital traffic and we've examined these cases as they occur.

We're not here to analyze the print

business model, given that our expertise lies in digital publishing, but we do acknowledge that publishers worldwide are pivoting back into this space.

However, we would note that shifting demographics and consumption patterns (younger audiences preferring digital content consumed on mobile devices), not to mention the higher costs associated with physical production and distribution, and we'd say there's a strong case for these publishers to think about a transition to a digital-first model.

Monetization Models

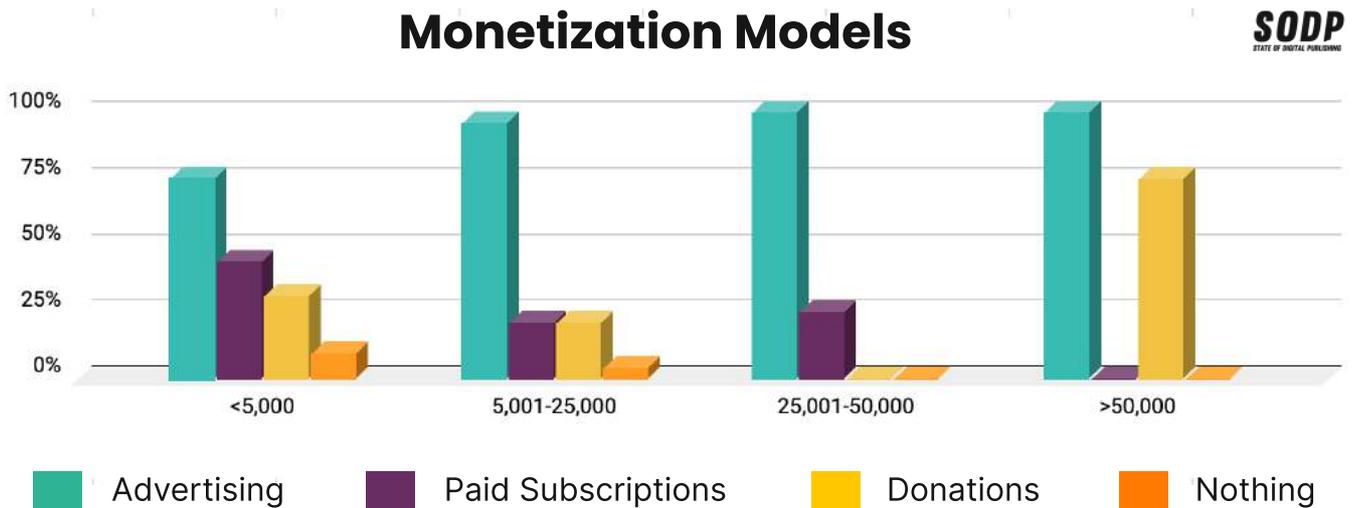


While our qualitative analysis focused on publisher content strategies, evaluating their various revenue models was also beneficial.

The ability to systematically produce content at scale often boils down to whether or not a publisher can overcome resource bottlenecks. Higher revenues generally translate into more significant

opportunities for content creation. This, in turn, opens the door for higher audience figures, given the increased content offer.

We chose not to break down each publisher's content monetization methods, as such granularity lies outside the scope of this study. Instead, we decided to provide an overview of each bracket.



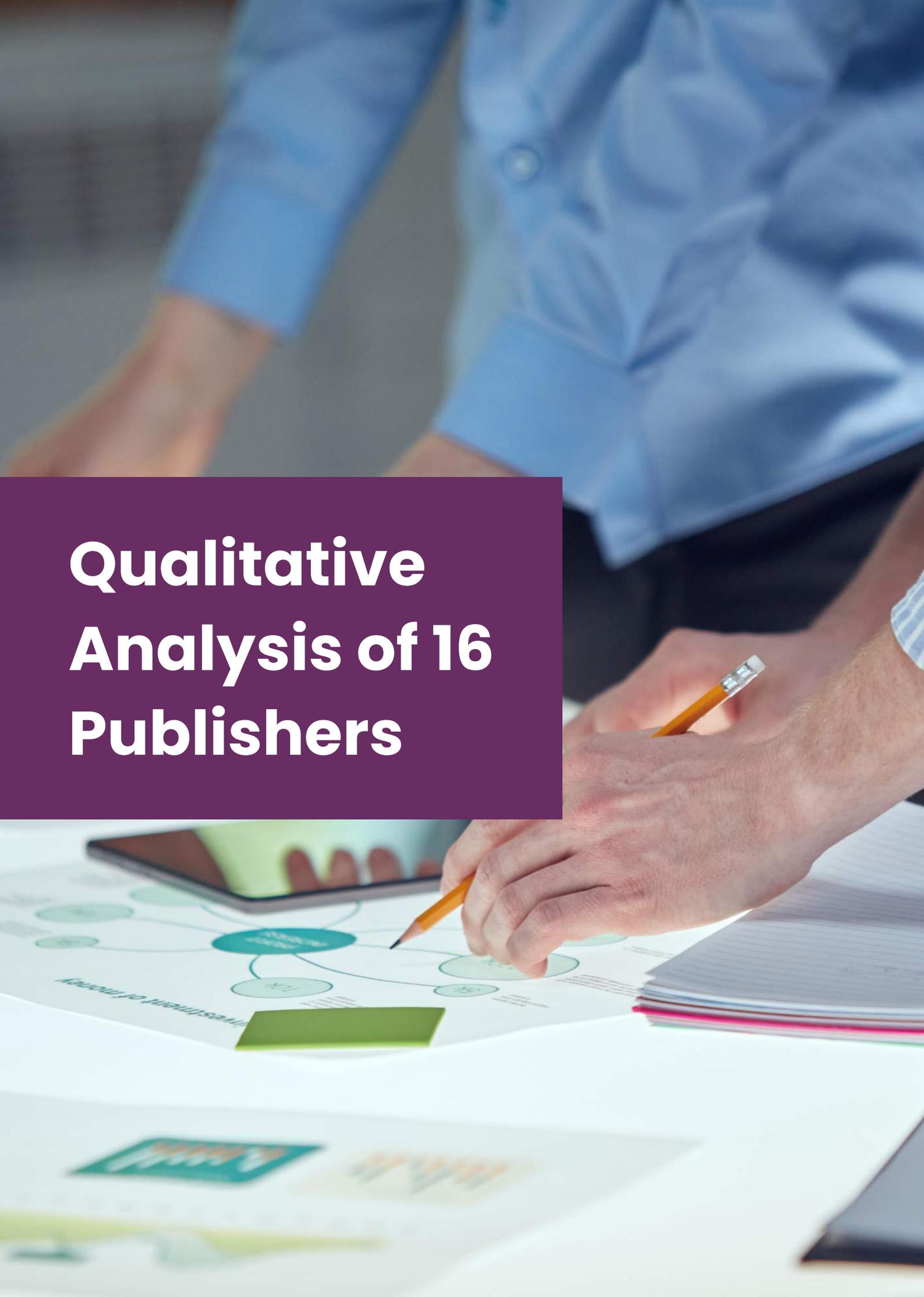
! **Note: As many publishers used more than one revenue model, the above percentages do not add up to 100%.**

The results were broadly in line with our expectations, with advertising (print and digital combined) strongly represented across all brackets. Of interest to us was that several publishers, which lacked a media sales team, outsourced responsibility for direct ad sales to Regional Media Connect, an agency owned by Victoria Country Press Associated (VCP).

We also saw more paywalls in the lowest brackets, which makes sense,

given that lower traffic levels would curb ad revenue opportunities. We were surprised by the number of local publishers inviting their audiences to support them through donations, either directly or via platforms such as PressPatron.

While we were aware of the growing popularity of this model among smaller publishers at a global level, this was the first time we saw the data on this for Australian publishers.

A person wearing a light blue button-down shirt is leaning over a table. Their right hand is holding a yellow pencil and pointing at a diagram on a white sheet of paper. The diagram consists of several green circles connected by lines, with some text inside the circles. To the left of the diagram, there is a smartphone. In the foreground, there are several other sheets of paper, some with colorful graphics. The background is slightly blurred, showing a grey wall.

Qualitative Analysis of 16 Publishers



After segmenting based on total traffic, we examined four publishers from each section — the top and bottom two — to understand what strategies carried publishers to the top of their brackets.



Please know that our analysis for each publisher below is not a complete content strategy audit, which would require a multidisciplinary team of individuals to flesh out. Instead, these are a bird's eye view of each publisher's strategic approach.

Low Traffic

(**<5,000 Monthly Visits**)

Ordering this tier was challenging, given the lack of clarity on total site traffic. This forced us to organize the publishers using third-party estimates for organic traffic.

While a somewhat imprecise approach, organic traffic does speak to a publisher's ability to create audience-relevant content that search engines want to show their users. This requires experience and an understanding of the search engine landscape.

Bottom of the Bracket

Bayside Beacon



Geographical coverage:
Bayside (NSW)



Population
175,184



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The funding will contribute towards riverbank stabilisation, tree planting and the installation of litter traps.

Bayside Council scraps parking meter plans for licence plate recognition to boost revenue in Brighton Le Sands

The total value of Penalty Infringement Notices issued last financial year increased by approximately \$700,000 compared to 2021/22.

A quick look at [Bayside Beacon's](#) homepage immediately reveals several key issues with its content strategy.

When we visited Bayside Beacon's homepage, it had been 16 days since it received an update. Content velocity is a proven strategy for improving SERP visibility and driving traffic, but the Bayside Beacon is capacity-bound, with a single journalist overseeing content creation.

Content categorization isn't a focus for the publisher, which has opted for a system of tags to filter content rather than a more traditional hierarchical taxonomy, which is more user and web crawler-friendly.

We also have to highlight the publisher's lack

of branding, crucial in establishing a connection between potential audiences and the content they read. **Publishing websites must stand out given the rising competition from every corner of the internet; strong branding is part of that process.**

Bayside Beacon also doesn't have any apparent monetization model, lacking any advertising or paid subscription model.

We'd recommend the publisher invest some of its time and resources into creating evergreen content, which it could use to help build SERP visibility through content clusters while opening up new monetization opportunities that could then fund additional news creation.

Bottom of the Bracket

Canungra Times



Geographical coverage:
Tamborine-Canungra (QLD)



Population
15,692



[The Canungra Times](#) has adopted a traditional content categorization model while publishing news content faster. However, its publishing frequency does show signs of interruption, a common issue for news providers that rely on a single journalist.

The challenge for the publisher here is its relatively low addressable audience, with coverage focusing on Canungra, Beechmont and Tamborine Village — the combined coverage for which comes to just shy of 3,000 people, according to the 2021 Australian census.

The publisher distributes 4,000 copies of a monthly freesheet to Canungra, Beechmont, Tamborine Village, Tamborine Mountain and Beaudesert.

[The Canungra Times'](#) print editions will cannibalize some of its online presence unless the publisher can find some way to diversify its content between the two platforms. You'll see us repeatedly recommend news providers provide more evergreen promoting throughout this list, and for good reason.

Evergreen content promoting Tamborine-Canungra tourist hotspots would interest audiences outside the area and only need a few resources for 6-12 month re-optimizations. **This type of content also opens up new monetization opportunities.**

[The Canungra Times'](#) revenue model consists of print and digital business directory ads, print classified ads and donations via PressPatron.

Bracket Leader

Mosman Living



Geographical coverage:
Mosman (NSW)



Population
28,329



Search



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Me-Gal is a gorgeous new dining destination located inside the iconic Taronga Zoo. Don't miss their shared lunch feast this festival season. [Read More](#)

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FIRST NAME

SUBSCRIBE



Aside from its traditional approach to taxonomy, the first thing that's immediately clear about [Mosman Living's](#) content strategy is its focus on lifestyle content over news coverage.

While the publisher's homepage displays a news round-up, this isn't current events coverage but lifestyle content. Indeed, its category bar excludes news, where the focus again lies on events, dining and directory guides. This makes sense, given its roots as a lifestyle focused community group.

Its private Facebook group has attracted 48,000 Facebook members and will be a significant traffic driver for the website.

At the same time, Mosman Living has incorporated user-generated content (UGC) on its website through job vacancies, babysitter placements and

the publisher's version of Facebook Marketplace to improve engagement on the platform itself.

Mosman Living's focus on lifestyle content appeals to search queries with informational, commercial and entertainment intent. Still, it could hone its organic traffic strategy by producing evergreen articles that appeal to educational or comparison search intent. Evergreen pieces help drive traffic year-round, can enhance a publication's topical authority on a particular subject and require relatively few resources to maintain their SERP positioning.

New content offerings can create new ad sales opportunities. Mosman Living offers Facebook post packages, website directory listings, advertorial feature articles, banner ads and event listings.

Bracket Leader

Northern Beaches Living



Geographical coverage:
Northern Beaches (NSW)



Population
263,554



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COURT
BOOKINGS
Northern Beaches
Tennis for Life
Northern Beaches Academy



[Northern Beaches Living](#) has adopted the same content strategy as Mosman Living, which is unsurprising given the shared ownership team.

The focus is once again in lifestyle content ahead of current events, given its roots as a Facebook community page.

What is surprising is their relatively similar estimated traffic levels given the sizable difference in addressable audiences, which would have suggested a more significant potential audience for Northern Beaches Living.

It could be that Mosman Living's hyperfocus on a single community has led to greater

engagement, while Northern Beaches Living's macro beat could be limiting its penetration with micro-communities. Moreover, because it's a broader beat it will face more competition from other players, such as Manly Observer, which leads our Top Bracket.

Northern Beaches Living's private Facebook community page has 52,000 members, just 8% more than Mosman Living's.

Expanding Northern Beaches Living's audience would involve a thorough competitor analysis that would likely lead to growing out evergreen content production as part of flywheel production.

Key Takeaways

Both Mosman Living and Northern Beaches Living are examples of smaller publishers that have built up social media followings before being able to take them off rented platforms. More can be done to build up their evergreen content, but focusing on lifestyle content over news has given them a broader appeal than news provisions.

While targeting different niches, there are certainly lessons other small publishers could learn, including the following strategies:

1

Reduce emphasis on time-sensitive content, given limited reporting opportunities and editorial capacity

2

Increase lifestyle content to appeal to a broader range of audiences

3

Increase focus on evergreen content to drive SERP visibility and traffic

4

Up the emphasis on UGC to increase community engagement

5

Leverage social media to drive traffic

6

Leverage content categorization to simplify navigation

7

Capitalize on monetization opportunities that business directories afford

Lower-Mid Analysis

(5,001-25,000 Monthly Visits)

With total traffic levels now at a level where third-party tools could provide more granular data, we shifted to using this metric to organize the remaining three brackets.

Bottom of the Bracket

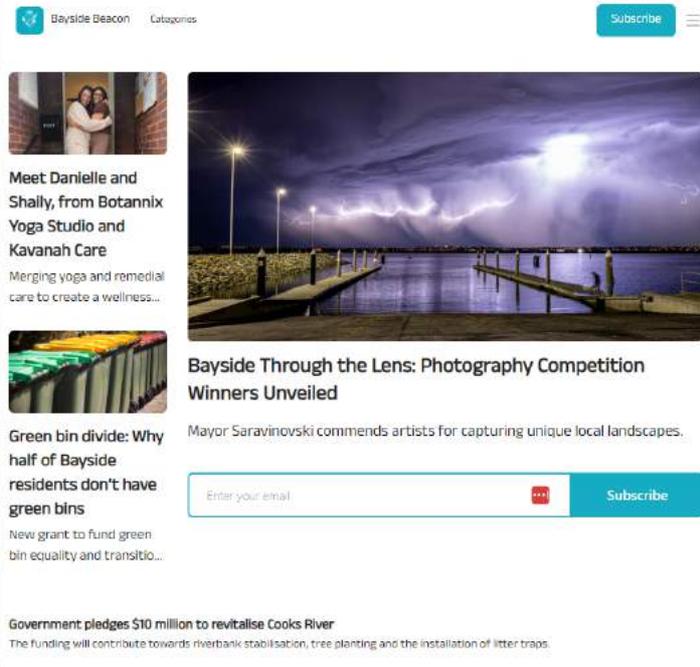
Central Coast Council Watch



Geographical coverage:
Central Coast (NSW)



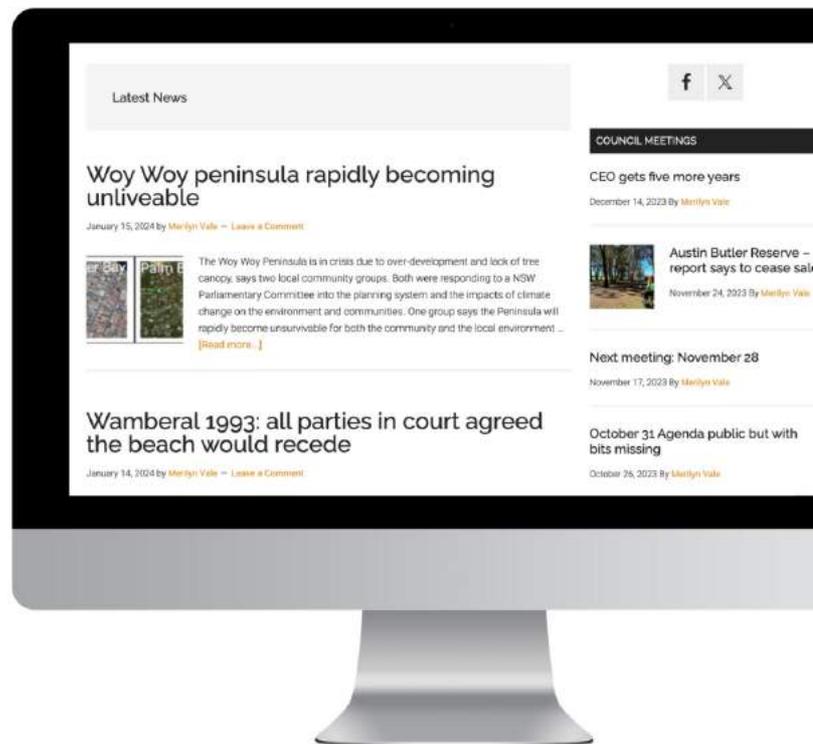
Population
346,596



[Central Coast Council Watch](#) provides niche coverage of the Central Coast region's political and economic developments.

For example, the site's Latest News category lacks general interest pieces, focusing primarily on local government decision making. There are pros and cons to such an approach.

The most immediate upside is that providing comprehensive and independent coverage of one news niche has turned the Central Coast Council Watch into an authoritative source for this one subject. As such, the Central Coast Council Watch can drive direct traffic to its site from users looking for the latest updates on local matters.





The downside of this approach is that audiences interested in other topics will look to other publishers. This presents a missed opportunity to engage existing audiences after their news needs are met. This singular focus on a particular news niche also results in limited exposure in search results.

The Central Coast Council Watch's narrow focus has also limited the opportunities on how frequently it can publish, bottlenecking opportunities for growth. **There are opportunities to expand coverage of non-time sensitive material such as historical perspectives, comparative analyses, explainer content and interview series.** Such material would bolster the Central Coast Council Watch's editorial calendar.

This would also open the door to a broader range of monetization options, currently limited to direct display ad sales. While the publisher can secure a premium for the space on its site, it represents just one of several monetization options.

Bottom of the Bracket

Logan West News



Geographical coverage:
Logan (QLD)



Population
345,098



Joshua Lucey announces Division 4 council election candidacy
Logan Reserve resident Joshua Lucey has thrown his hat into the ring for the 2024 Council election race, officially declaring his

Revolutionary hysterectomy surgery comes to Springhold
A new hysterectomy procedure that leaves no scars and causes little pain has been performed at Mater Private Hospital

Great Weather And ADF Roll In For Logan Clean Up
Ten days after Mother Nature turned nasty, the City of Logan today finally got the upperhand. The post-Christmas period

Logan West News' digital publication serves more of a support role to its monthly freesheet, with a circulation of 25,000 copies.

Logan West News focuses more on community features and time-sensitive news content, which makes sense given its large print circulation. Unlike other hybrid publishers, however, Logan West News publishes its digital stories as completed rather than tying their release to its print edition.

While the publisher's broader coverage — including news, sports, events, business, etc — will increase its audience appeal

to residents, it lacks UGC or evergreen content that could increase traffic and engagement.

While Logan West News uses internal linking, the lack of relevant evergreen content makes building topic clusters a challenge. As such, **we recommend diverting some resources towards creating pillar content** — such as expert interview series, community round-ups and case study showcases — that news stories can link to for greater context.

The site monetizes its content through print and digital advertising and a dedicated journalist sponsorship.

Bracket Leader

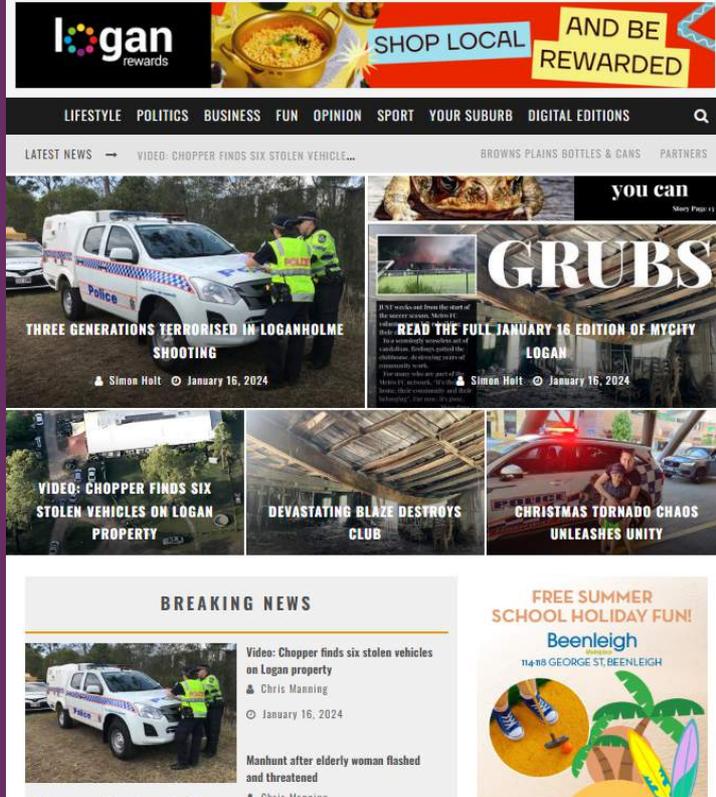
MyCity Logan



Geographical coverage:
Logan (QLD)



Population
345,098



[MyCity Logan](#) circulates 10,000 copies of its weekly physical freesheet, providing news coverage across a range of topics, including lifestyle, politics and business, to name a few.

The publisher focuses on news content, a highly competitive space, and lacks evergreen content to appeal to a broader audience. This focus and widespread print circulation could limit the publisher's digital growth potential.

Organic traffic will be affected by a focus on news production, while the print edition could cannibalize direct traffic potential. With that said, MyCity Logan has opted to publish stories between physical publication cycles, creating more of a reason for audiences to visit the site rather than wait for the physical version.

As with other news publishers, we'd recommend creating digital content clusters consisting of non-time sensitive material that wouldn't necessarily make a good fit within a physical freesheet.

The more lifestyle focused publishers on this list feature event calendars on their sites, which is a great way to generate sustained local interest in the website. These calendars highlight local events — such as festivals and markets — and include links to information pages that the publisher could host. Another option is an interactive map of the community with clickable points that lead to related articles.

These add new sponsorship opportunities to MyCity Logan's print and digital advertising mix and company directory listings.

Bracket Leader

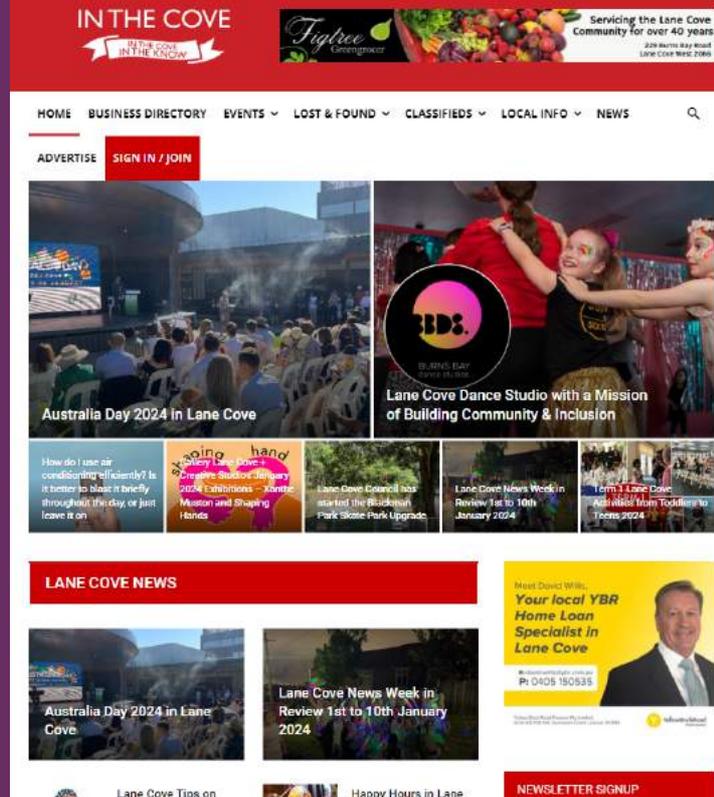
In The Cove



Geographical coverage:
Lane Cove (NSW)



Population
39,438



[In The Cove](#) serves as a local community publisher for the residents of Lane Cove, providing some general news coverage but focusing more on lifestyle content.

In The Cove's publishing schedule adheres to the content velocity model, publishing new articles nearly daily. The content mixes public interest pieces, lifestyle stories, weekly round-ups and evergreen guides. The publisher also uses an events calendar to highlight local events and encourage repeat visits to the site. Beyond its site, In The Cove has built an extensive social media presence, with 23,000 Instagram and Facebook followers.

In addition to the typical hierarchical taxonomy that is now the staple of publishers with this level of reach, In The Cove also uses tags on its seasonal stories.



The benefits of tagging articles include improved navigation, enhanced discoverability and content recommendations. These tags create clusters of themed content that lead to a hub page that links to related content. However, the publisher isn't using this strategy to the fullest.

Content clusters work best when each cluster article links to every other cluster piece and the central pillar piece. As mentioned above, this is easiest done with evergreen content as seasonal content has a much shorter lifespan. While In The Cove does have a mix of evergreen content, we'd like to see greater use of the pillar-cluster strategy.

In The Cove monetizes its content through a full suite of advertising options, including a local business directory, sponsored posts on Facebook and Instagram pages, event promotions on its site and social media, and more. In addition, it also accepts donations through PressPatron.

Key Takeaways

In The Cove leads this bracket by carefully applying several best practices. It builds engagement through content velocity while mixing its coverage between news, features and seasonal lifestyle content collated on hub pages. It provides interactive assets (event calendars) and evergreen content to increase engagement and repeat visits.

While publishers lower in the bracket won't find a one-to-one fit for all these strategies — given different business models, resources and experience — specific tactics can be adapted.

These include:

1

Increase publishing frequency

2

Increase lifestyle content to appeal to a broader range of audiences

3

Use interactive elements to encourage repeat visits

4

Use story tags to create content hubs

5

Create evergreen and seasonal content to drive SERP visibility and traffic

6

Leverage social media to drive traffic

Upper-Mid Analysis

(25,001-50,000 Monthly Visitors)

In this bracket, we see widespread adoption of some of the publishing strategies the leaders of the previous bracket used. Evergreen articles, content velocity and interactive assets, such as event calendars, are more common occurrences.

Bottom of the Bracket

The Fold Illawarra



Geographical coverage:
Illawarra (NSW)



Population
313,842

THE FOLD
ILLAWARRA

FIND. PLAY. SHOP. EXPLORE. EAT. DRINK. WORK.
ENTERTAIN. #LOVELIVINGLOCAL

EXPLORE THE ILLAWARRA



LATEST READS

JOIN OUR SOCIALS



[The Fold Illawarra](#) is the first of two entries in this bracket owned by independent publishing house The Fold Media. The other, The Fold Southern Highlands, leads the bracket and will be discussed later.

The Fold Illawarra is a lifestyle magazine focusing on local events and businesses while avoiding news coverage.

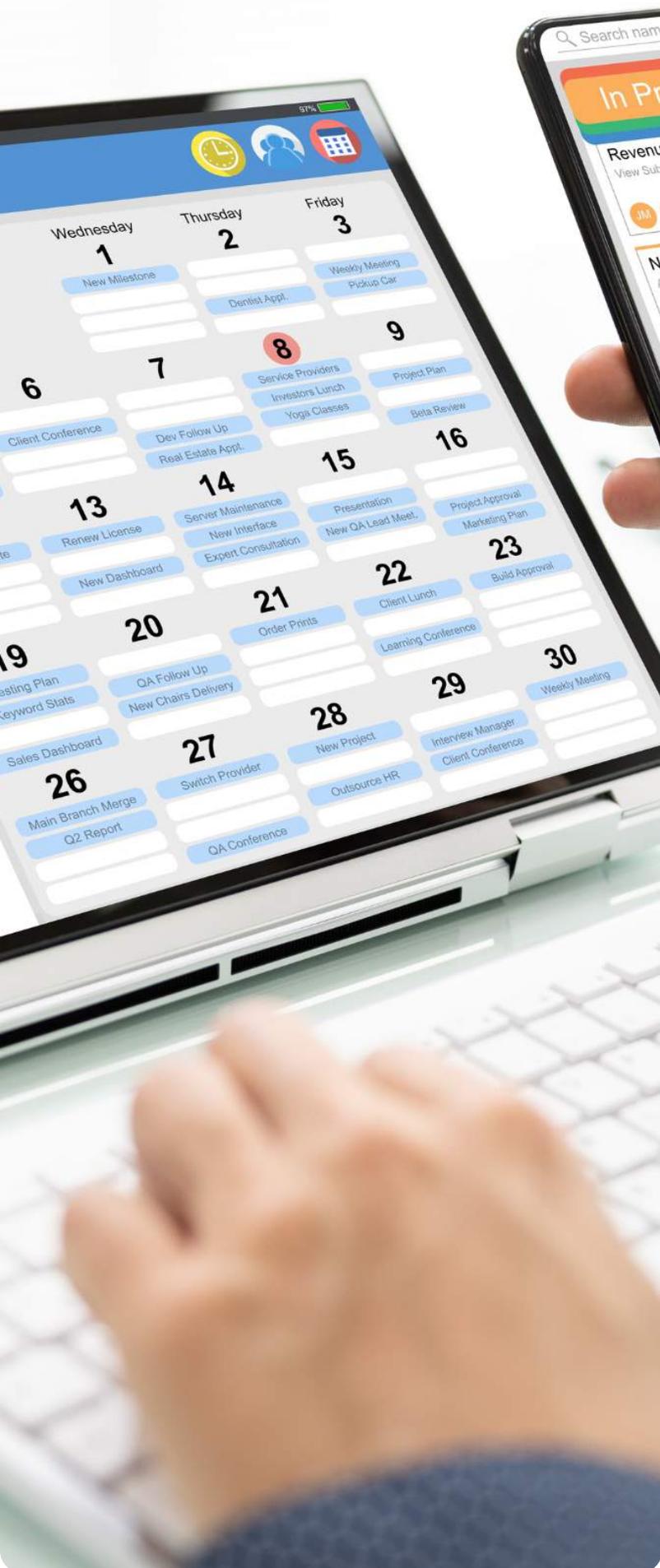
The publisher uses a hierarchical taxonomy of at most three folders deep for any page. This means both users and search engine crawlers can navigate the site easily.

In addition to providing guides to local events the publisher's content strategy also includes evergreen content such as listicles, to-do lists and local business directories. While we've mentioned the

value of evergreen content in driving SERP traffic, we should also highlight its value in terms of reduced resource cost.

Because evergreen content doesn't date quickly, audiences can derive value from it over an extended period. At the same time, while such content requires a higher upfront cost than news and event reporting, such posts don't need continuous updates to provide value.

By dedicating a portion of their budget to consistently creating evergreen content, publishers can increase the pool of relevant material available to their audience at any moment. This approach alleviates the need to constantly align with the news cycle, allowing publishers to build a portfolio of content that provides value over an extended period.



The Fold Illawarra's focus on evergreen and lifestyle content, a local business directory and event calendar, and geographical guides has allowed it to climb to the middle of the traffic rankings even though it publishes less frequently than others lower on the list.

With that said, **a more frequent publishing schedule incorporating Publisher SEO fundamentals would help The Fold Illawarra gain greater online visibility and drive additional organic traffic.**

Additional traffic would allow the publisher to maximize its existing monetization channels, including programmatic display ads, business, event and job listings, email features, category sponsorships and branded website and social media content.

Bottom of the Bracket

South Burnett



Geographical coverage:
South Burnett (QLD)



Population
32,996



southburnett
.com.au



Murgon

[South Burnett](#) is an outlier on this list, being a successful hyperlocal news publisher focusing almost entirely on programmatic display advertising to monetize its content.

The publisher provides comprehensive local political and general news coverage, eschewing evergreen content. Its choice of a clean, shallow hierarchical taxonomy was hardly surprising, though the site's design is beginning to show its age from a design perspective.

South Burnett publishes multiple new stories daily, building a loyal audience while telling search engines that it regularly provides fresh content and that the site is a topical authority on local events.

While content freshness isn't a ranking factor for Google Search, it is for Google News. The more immediate a news story is after an

event the more likely Google's algorithm will display it to relevant search queries.

Google also considers publishers that provide a large amount of original content on a specific topic a sign of topical authority, meaning stories on those subjects become more likely to rank. Another reason why linking news stories to and from high-traffic evergreen content adds value.

One surprise was South Burnett's lack of bylines and author profiles, an increasingly important piece of E-E-A-T strategies. More than that, **bylines and profiles help build a human connection with the audience while promoting accountability and transparency.**

Despite its focus on news reporting, the publisher also has an event calendar, giving its audience a reason to return to the site regularly.

Bracket Leader

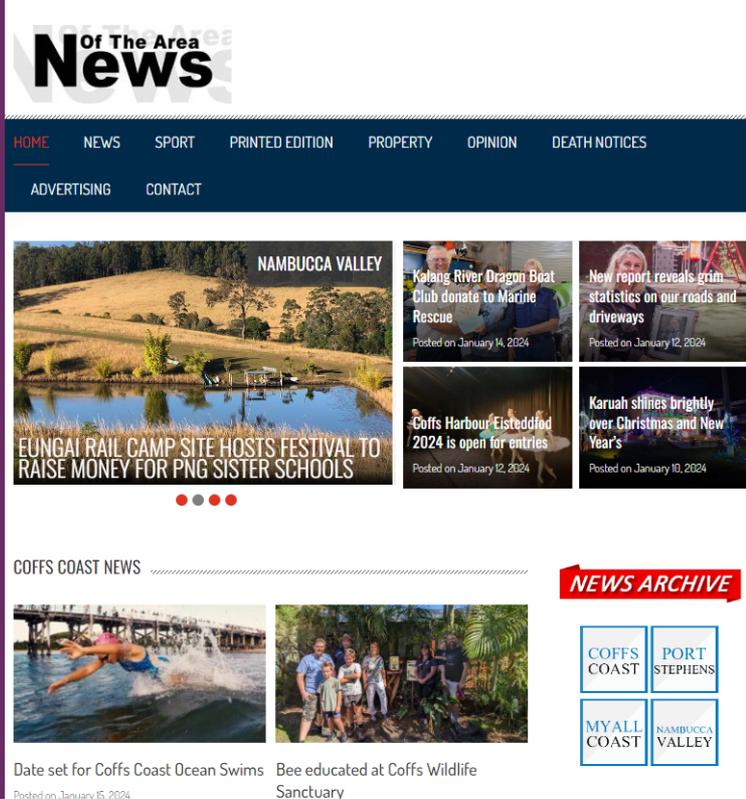
News of the Area



Geographical coverage:
Coffs Harbour, Myall Lakes,
Nambucca Valley, Port Stephens
(NSW)



Population
250,021



[News of the Area](#) is the digital face of four physical freesheets: Myall Coast News of the Area, Port Stephens News of the Area, Coffs Coast News of the Area and Nambucca Valley News of the Area.

These four papers have a combined circulation of 35,000 copies, according to the publisher. In addition the publisher also provides digital access to them via Flipbook embeds.

News of the Area has adopted a more modern design in its approach to digital news coverage, including a carousel on its homepage. This is a design choice commonly associated with larger news publishers.

Unlike major news outlets, however, News of the Area's digital site serves as

an alternative to its print business, publishing stories on the same day they appear in their respective print publications rather than immediately.

By syncing the digital edition to the print edition's weekly publishing schedule, News of the Area prevents the website from overshadowing its print business and potentially eroding readership and print ad revenue. This means that the publisher sacrifices some of the traffic potential that the daily publishing of digital stories would attract.

This strategy will affect the publisher's organic traffic, with the slow pace of publishing diminishing its topical authority in the locations it covers.



Unsurprisingly, the publisher's monetization strategy revolves around print advertising. With that said, it does offer direct sales display ads while appearing to avoid programmatic advertising. This approach has pros and cons, including greater control over the ads the audience sees and the ability to sell ad space at a premium but at the cost of lower fill rates.

Beyond advertising the publisher also uses pop ups to encourage its audience to donate via PayPal or "subscribe" to the free papers for a fixed fee. While the rationale behind the print subscription is that it's posted directly to the consumer's door, the News of the Area offers a bundle that includes an email edition — despite the fact it has CTAs encouraging its digital audience to subscribe to the email edition for free.

Bracket Leader

The Fold Southern Highlands

 **Geographical coverage:**
Southern Highlands (NSW)

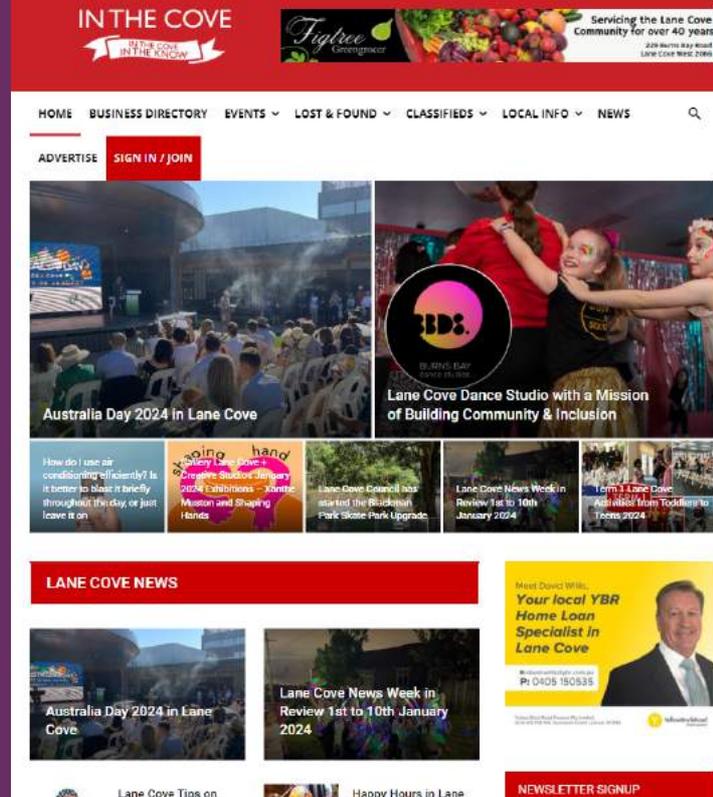
 **Population**
52,678

The Fold Southern Highlands stands out in overall estimated traffic, surpassing the other publishers by more than 10,000 monthly visits.

Much like Fold Media's other local lifestyle magazine, The Fold Illawarra, The Fold Southern Highlands highlights local events and businesses while avoiding hard news coverage. This approach has also allowed the publisher to grow its readership without maintaining the content velocity of a news site. However, the publisher still produces multiple posts every week.

However, one thing that's immediately apparent when comparing the two Fold Media sites is the dramatically different design approach The Fold Southern Highlands has taken.

Unlike the traditional layout most publishers adopt for their homepages, even seen on The Fold Illawarra, The Fold Southern Highlands uses a 3x5 grid of category cards.



The layout immediately positions the site as a cultural guide. The publisher focuses primarily on promotional articles, either showcasing events or services local businesses offer or profiling the businesses themselves. The advantage of this approach is that the publisher appeals to a broader demographic than those living within the boundaries of its beat. The publication effectively becomes a tourism guide for audiences in neighboring locations looking for weekend escapes and activities.

While promotional content is excellent at serving audiences looking for information about goods or services, it doesn't serve audiences looking for educational or entertaining content. This means its visibility to organic audiences could be better. **Search engines value informative, educational and engaging content and a heavy focus on promotional content will limit the site's ability to rank across multiple search intent categories.**



As such, we'd recommend investing in more editorial content as the basis of evergreen cluster content that can also add link authority to existing promotional content.

We also couldn't help but notice its relatively limited social media presence, at just 12,000 Facebook followers and almost 17,000 Instagram followers. Other lifestyle publishers with lower traffic levels build more significant followings.

While this isn't an examination of the publisher's social media presence, we couldn't help but notice the heavy promotional focus of its Facebook posts. Overusing these types of posts can hurt social media growth for several reasons, including that they gradually rob the account of a sense of authenticity, which will affect engagement. And given that social media algorithms are built around engagement, it becomes clear why challenges in growing a following can occur.

The promotional nature of The Fold Southern Highlands' strategy, however, does give it various monetization options, most of which it has taken advantage of.

While the site avoids programmatic display ads in favor of direct ad sales, it has several category sponsorships in place. It monetizes its business directory. It offers event and recruitment marketing. It also provides event promotions from its business directory partners and offers sponsored articles, microsites, social media posts and stories.

Key Takeaways

The Fold Southern Highlands has ticked most strategic boxes we want to see. At this point, we'd recommend creating more editorial content clusters to improve organic visibility while building a social media presence geared toward posting engaging content.

For other publishers looking to improve their traffic levels, some of The Fold Southern Highlands' strategies they should consider include:

1

Increase publishing frequency

2

Produce lifestyle content that appeals to locals and tourists

3

Publish promotional and editorial evergreen content to boost SERP visibility

4

Consider a UX overhaul to promote content that performs well

Top Analysis

(>50,000 Monthly Visitors)

While our final bracket contains publishers that ticked most of the content strategy boxes we've been looking for, it is also home to publishers that have focused on excelling in a few core areas.

Bottom of the Bracket

Northern Beaches
Advocate

Geographical coverage:
Northern Beaches (NSW)



Population
263,554

[Northern Beaches Advocate](#) is another pure play news provider that has enjoyed considerable success in reaching audiences without relying on evergreen content.

The publisher has adopted a grid system that eschews more traditional layouts prioritizing bigger stories by giving them more screen real estate for images and text. Coverage is regular, with at least one new story posted daily. Stories focus on local events and are accompanied by unique imagery taken by the publisher.

Northern Beaches Advocate's content strategy is based around a "boots on the ground" reporting style devoid of contextual color and commentary. This style builds the publisher's authority as a news



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Jan 15, 2024

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Writers' Festival line-up announced

Jan 14, 2024

The inaugural Manly Writers' Festival is set to host over 50 authors this March...

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provider. **This approach also bleeds over into the publisher's Facebook account which it uses to announce when new articles have been published and for public service announcements.**

It makes Northern Beaches Advocate a reliable news source for the local community that mainstream regional and national publishers might struggle to justify. The publishers' lack of evergreen content can be considered a strategic necessity and a missed opportunity.

Northern Beaches Advocate's singular focus allows resources to be dedicated to building topical authority. Expanding coverage to other niches would strain those resources and may cause a degradation in existing coverage.



Northern Beaches Advocate's singular focus allows resources to be dedicated to building topical authority. Expanding coverage to other niches would strain those resources and may cause a degradation in existing coverage.

At the same time, by only focusing on news, new audiences have fewer opportunities to discover Northern Beaches Advocate through other niches. Evergreen culture guides, for example, can introduce a news division to residents initially uninterested in such coverage. This lack of content diversity is arguably also part of why the publisher only has 14,000 Facebook followers.

Northern Beaches Advocate's monetization model relies on a mix of direct ad sales, for both the website and weekly email newsletter, as well as public donations through PressPatron. The publisher doesn't engage in sponsored content.

Bottom of the Bracket

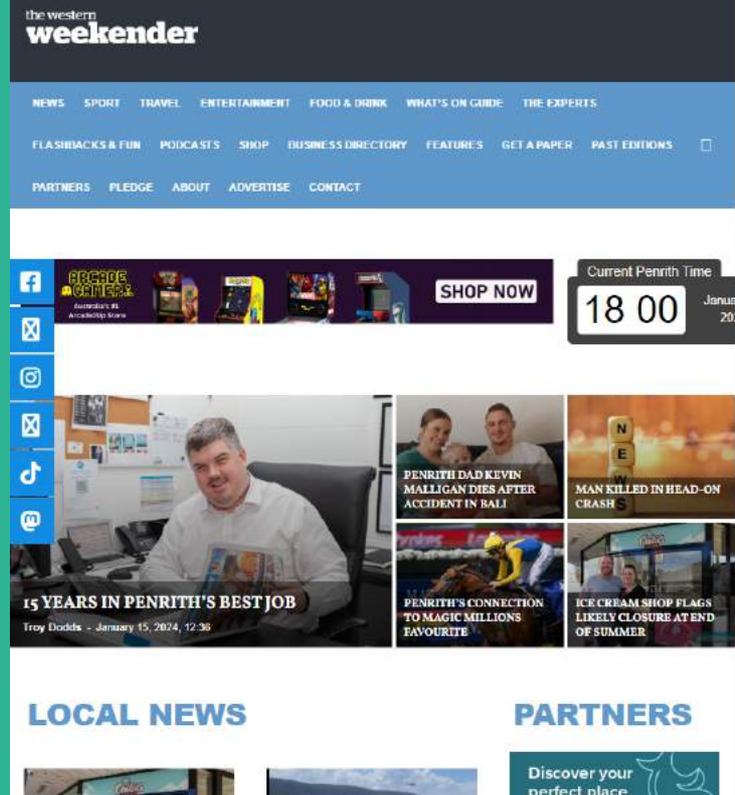
The Western Weekender



Geographical coverage:
Penrith (WA)



Population
217,664



[The Western Weekender](#) adopts a content strategy more akin to mainstream media outlets, blending breaking news coverage with lifestyle and culture guides and evergreen content.

While the publisher offers a weekly freesheet, its focus on physical media has contracted owing to rising production costs. The publisher decided in 2022 to stop mass deliveries of the paper to homes, with interested readers now required to pay for direct deliveries.

The Western Weekender publishes a high volume of local news content, cementing its position as an authoritative

news source through content velocity and freshness. At the same time, it provides original reporting on local matters.

Interestingly, the publisher's news team rarely publishes digital content on the weekends, suggesting it doesn't believe there's an audience for local news content during this time.

The Western Weekender has integrated the popular Disqus comment-hosting service into its publishing platform, allowing its audience to comment on stories and articles. **UGC is a tried and tested means of bolstering audience engagement and a site's SEO.**



The publisher has opted against programmatic advertising, preferring direct ad sales. The Western Weekender offers a range of direct ad sales options, including display and newsletter ads, Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) posts, sponsored articles, and podcast sponsorships and mentions.

This has allowed the publisher to create "ad collections" that occupy several pages of its print and digital editions by selling thematic campaigns to multiple advertisers. These themes are as diverse as intentional observance days or location based.

Bracket Leader

Newsport Daily



Geographical coverage:
Douglas, Far North Queensland (QLD)



Population
297,406



16/01/2024

EDGING CLOSER

YOU BEAUTY: TMR boss reaffirms Captain Cook Highway remains on track to re-open between Douglas and Cairns this Saturday

LATEST NEWS



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16/01/2024

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15/01/2024

UPGRADES NEEDED

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15/01/2024

VERY LUCKY

RECOUNTING THE TALE: Gigantic landslide stops just short of demolishing Cape Trib

[Newsport Daily](#) is the first publisher on our analysis shortlist to include notification elements similar to those seen on mobile devices in its website's categorization.

The site displays red dots in each category that has new content. **Not only does Newsport Daily use a hierarchical taxonomy that makes navigating content easy for crawlers and visitors, but the notification system helps flag which categories have the latest posts without relying on homepage updates.**

Newsport Daily is a news publisher first and foremost.

It avoids evergreen content, which limits its ability to create pillar cluster content that can support its news presence from an SEO perspective.

Interlinking to reference material helps publishers build topical authority without rehashing the same content in multiple stories. Centralized resources on topics that affect communities over

several years — a major public works project or the closure of healthcare facilities — allow publishers to write small stories on new developments that link to the backstory.



This streamlines the editorial workflow while providing evergreen content that can be expanded over time into an authoritative source that search engines are more likely to display in search results.

Newsport Daily posts several news stories daily, with the publisher acknowledging the role of content velocity in its success. After being founded in 2007 to provide tourism advice for the area, Newsport Daily's decision to publish five industry and local stories per day was the key to its transformation as a leading independent local news service.

Unlike many other publishers on this list, Newsport Daily shuttered its print edition in 2020, shifting to a purely digital presence.

Bracket Leader

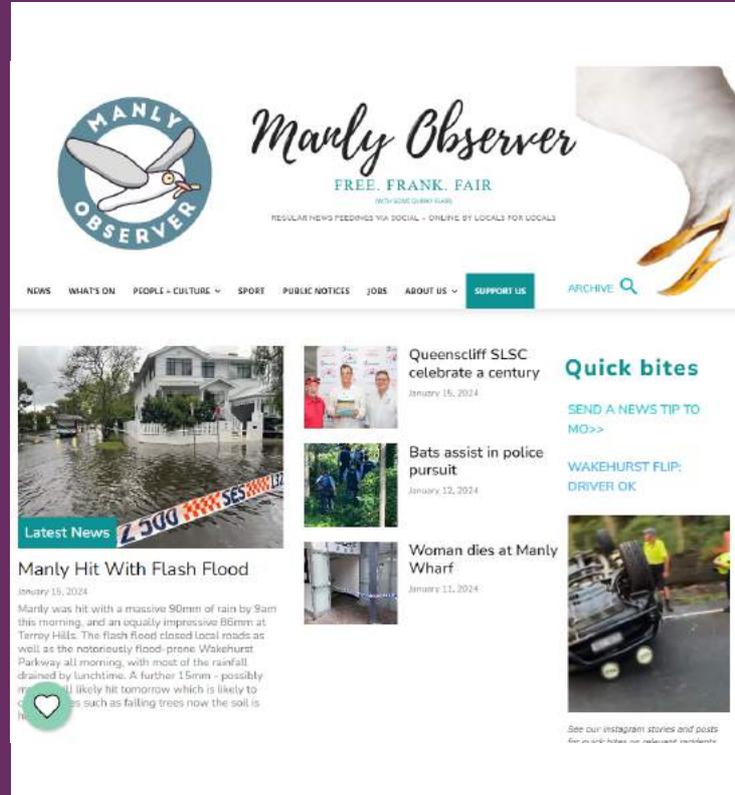
Manly Observer



Geographical coverage:
Northern Beaches (NSW)



Population
263,554



Manly Observer is a hyperlocal news publisher that, unlike other media outlets on this list, doesn't focus heavily on content velocity.

The publisher only posted a few times a week, so we were curious about its robust traffic estimates. However, a closer look at its social media activity reveals that Manly Observer has closely intertwined its extremely active Facebook account with its website, driving traffic from the former to the latter.

The publisher doesn't just use Facebook to post story summaries and alerts but takes a more active role in engaging its audience. The account receives multiple posts a day, including announcements around planned stories, requests for interviews, follow-ups

on existing stories and prize giveaways, to name a few.

These posts draw high levels of engagement from the publisher's followers, which number more than 40,000. Manly Observer has turned its Facebook page into a bulletin board, successfully driving traffic to its website.

This prioritization has come at the expense of website-focused strategies that would deliver greater SERP visibility and more organic visitors. Evergreen content is a key missing component that would allow the publisher to build out content clusters. Content, such as listicles and guides, could appeal to residents in suburbs neighboring the Northern Beaches, turning the publisher into a tourism information hub.

Key Takeaways

All publishers in this final bracket have unique content strategies that have delivered considerable success. For some it's been to focus on content velocity, while for others the key deliverable has been high social media engagement.

For publishers looking to this bracket for strategies to fold into their operations, consider the following:

1

Create original "boots on the ground" content to stand out

2

Publish high volumes of content quickly, budget-dependent

3

Use evergreen content to help with topical authority while cutting costs

4

Pick your channels (direct, organic or social) to target and have a plan to diversify

5

Weave advertising creatively into content

6

Once editorial workflows are in place expand categorical coverage

A woman with reddish-brown hair tied back, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a white sweater with colorful horizontal stripes, is sitting on a bright yellow sofa. She is smiling and looking at a silver tablet computer she is holding in her hands. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor space with a window and some greenery.

Closing Insights



A great deal of ground has been covered in the above analysis, and most of what is to be learned can be found there rather than in this recap.

But if there is a thought we'd like to leave on, it's this: The journey to success in publishing is diverse and multifaceted. There are multiple paths to publishing success rather than a singular model. Finding the right one requires a keen understanding of the audience, geographical beat and competition. These three components will guide future editorial decisions, business strategies and overall approach to content creation.

Review the publishers above, see what's working for them and look for areas they may have missed that can be built upon. Feel free to look at larger or smaller publishers for any valuable insights.

We hope this inaugural study provides value to the broader publishing industry. Please send us any thoughts and feedback, as these perspectives will help shape the evolution of our research studies.

Findings at a Glance

Monthly Traffic Range	Recommendations to move up to the next bracket
<5,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce emphasis on time-sensitive content, given limited reporting opportunities and editorial capacity• Increase lifestyle content to appeal to a broader range of audiences• Increase focus on evergreen content to drive SERP visibility and traffic• Up the emphasis on UGC to increase community engagement• Leverage social media to drive traffic• Leverage content categorization to simplify navigation• Capitalize on monetization opportunities that business directories afford
5,001 : 25,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase publishing frequency• Increase lifestyle content to appeal to a broader range of audiences• Use interactive elements to encourage repeat visits• Use story tags to create content hubs• Create evergreen and seasonal content to drive SERP visibility and traffic• Leverage social media to drive traffic
25,001-50,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase publishing frequency• Produce lifestyle content that appeals to locals and tourists• Publish promotional and editorial evergreen content to boost SERP visibility• Consider a UX overhaul to promote content that performs well
>5,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create original "boots on the ground" content to stand out• Publish high volumes of content quickly, budget-dependent• Use evergreen content to help with topical authority while cutting costs• Pick your channels (direct, organic or social) to target and have a plan to diversify• Repurpose existing content across multiple channels• Weave advertising creatively into content• Once editorial workflows are in place expand categorical coverage

About the Report Producer

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