Growing Audience

WITHOUT THE HELP OF SEARCH & SOCIAL

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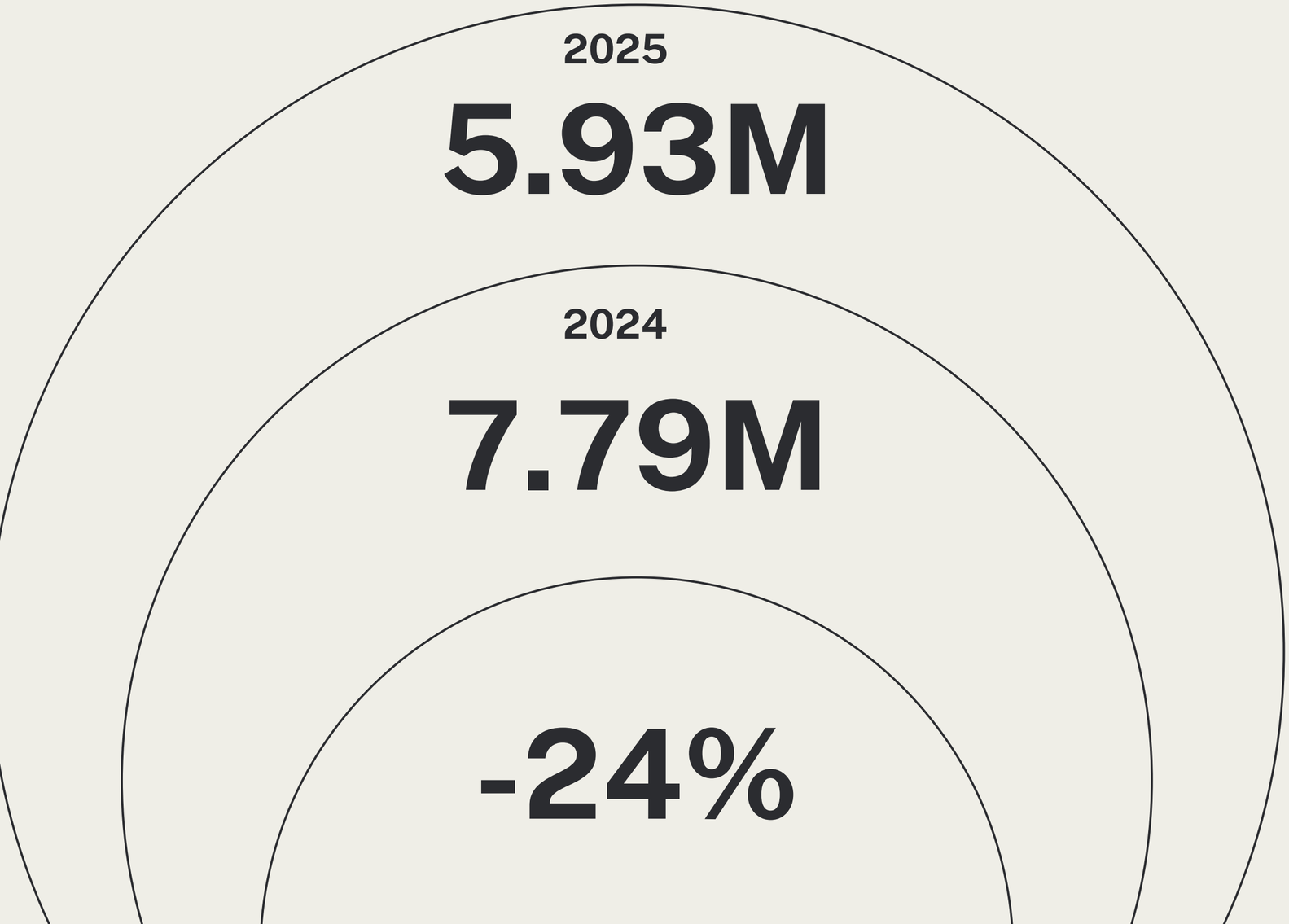
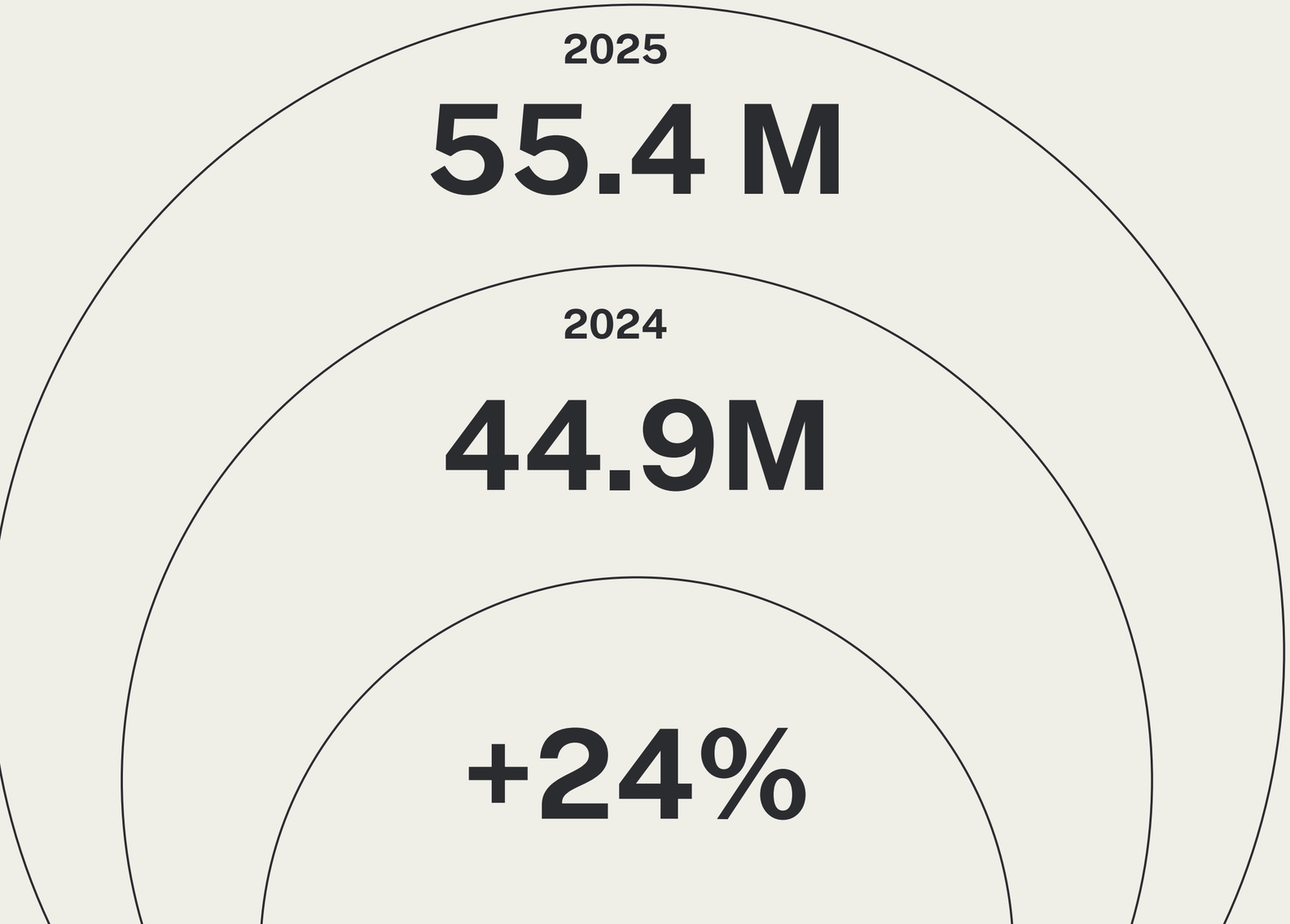
The media landscape is constantly evolving, and in 2025 the odds can feel stacked against local publishers.

But we have to embrace the change. And we have to put into focus the strategies we can control.

SOCIAL REFERRAL TRAFFIC



OWNED AND OPERATED TRAFFIC



Here’s how we did it – and why it’s vital to our success.

LOOK AT YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY

1

Service journalism

Since 2024, we've added a service journalism editor and reporter to our team who focus on swarming, +1 strategy, stories of interest to local readers, utility, evergreen and explainer content. This team has also led our video sprint in 2025.

2

Do more of what works

We've doubled down on sense of place enterprise, expanded to a new region (the Gulf Coast) and have added resources to our food and dining team, which is our highest performing content vertical at the top and bottom of the funnel.

3

Publish time & day

Work with your analytics team or pull the data on when you're publishing your best and most engaging content and if it's when your readers are most actively online.

We have seen dramatic increases in traffic when we publish stories earlier in the day (7 a.m. to 12 p.m.), with a focus on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

4

Listen to the data

Use data to your advantage, and evolve your content strategy to fit what the trends show. This could mean tough conversations, reshaping of beats, or experimentation.

THE HOMEPAGE

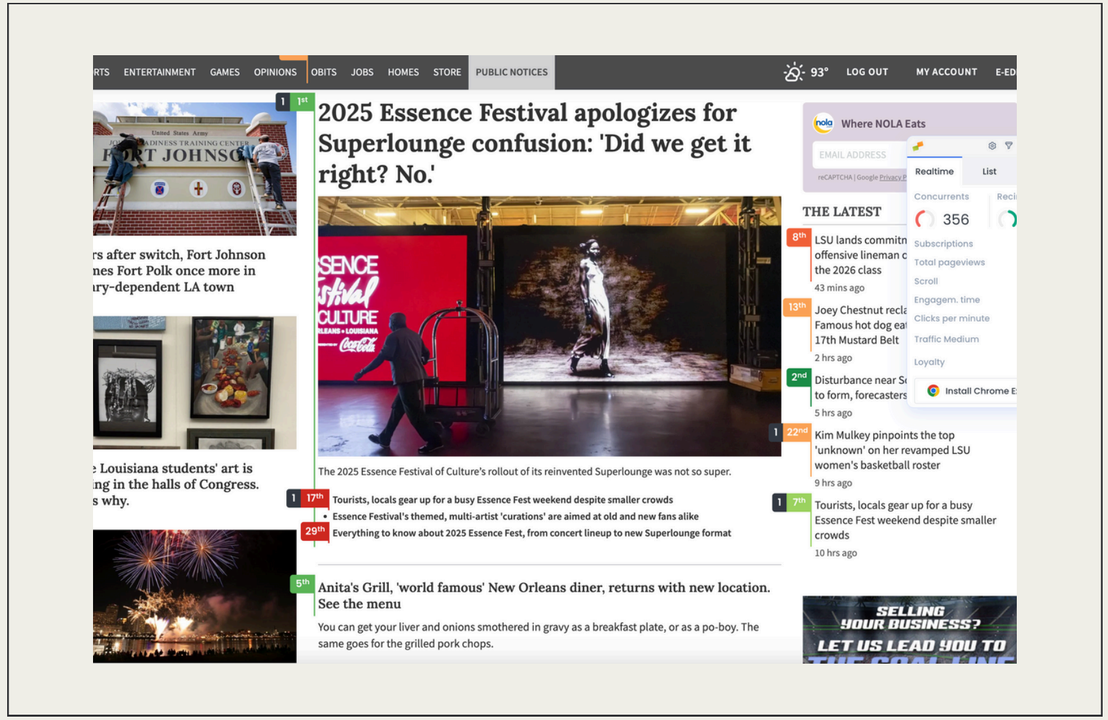
Use your analytics tool’s homepage overlay to see performance in real time.

All homepage stories should have engaging headlines.

Stories in featured spots should have engaging art (breaking news can be the exception here).

Change it more often than you think during peak times.

Your “best” story or “print centerpiece” might not be the best homepage centerpiece.



PUSH ALERTS

If breaking news is competitive, push as fast as you can.

Examine CTR on pushes weekly and look for trends. (Example: 8 p.m. has really high CTR, statewide content performs lower than market specific content)

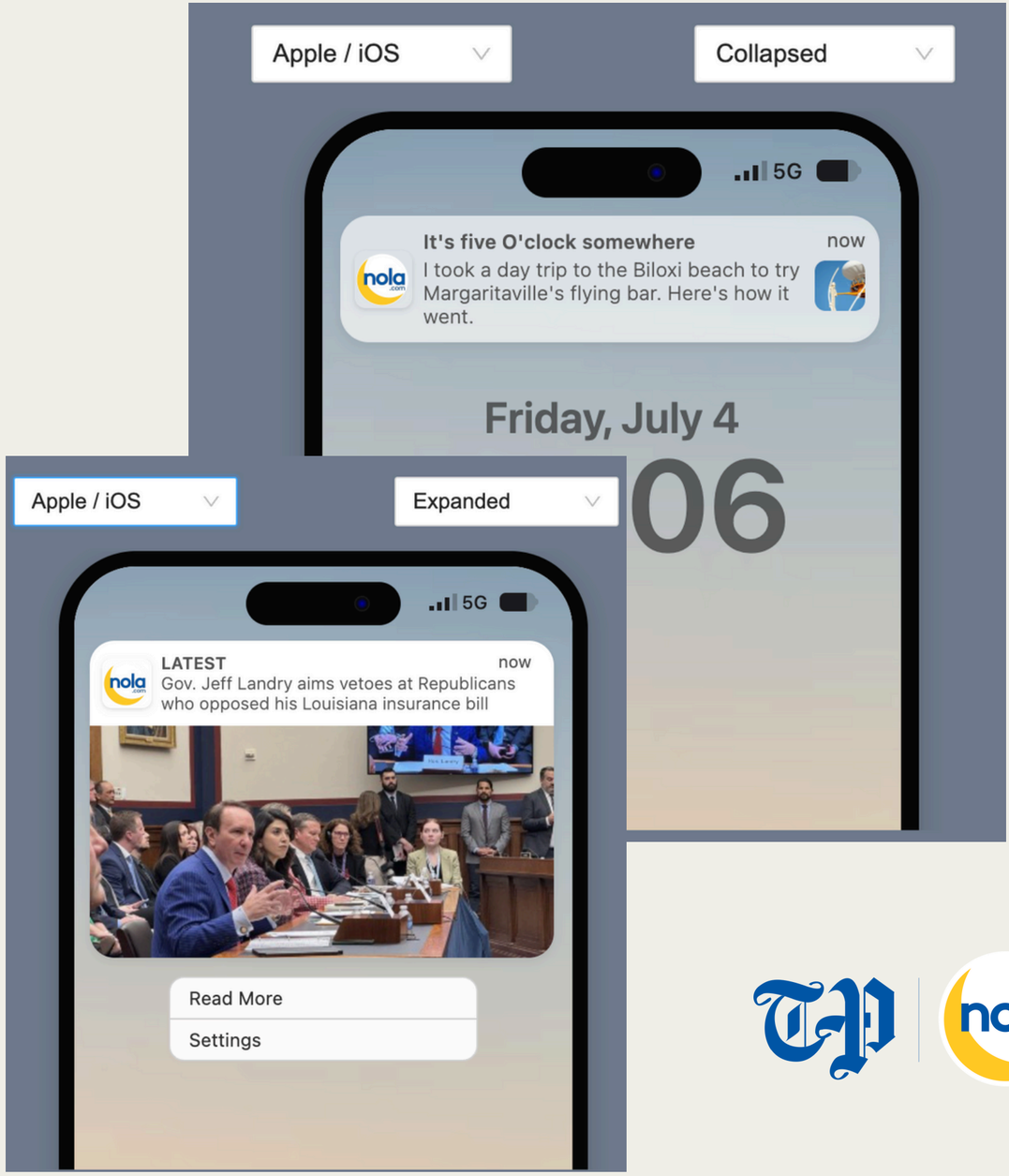
Segments can be your friend, but make sure the scope isn't too narrow.

People tend to opt out of e-mail at a far higher rate than push alerts. Don't be afraid to send 3-5 per day for a small market, 5-8 for medium and 8-12 for a large market. But make them count.

The content is key! The title text is also vital.

Test send times, language, and art.

Have an audience producer lead your push strategy.



NEWSLETTERS

How do you define “breaking news” in your market?

Clear, clean, short subject lines.

Keep it conversational and concise!

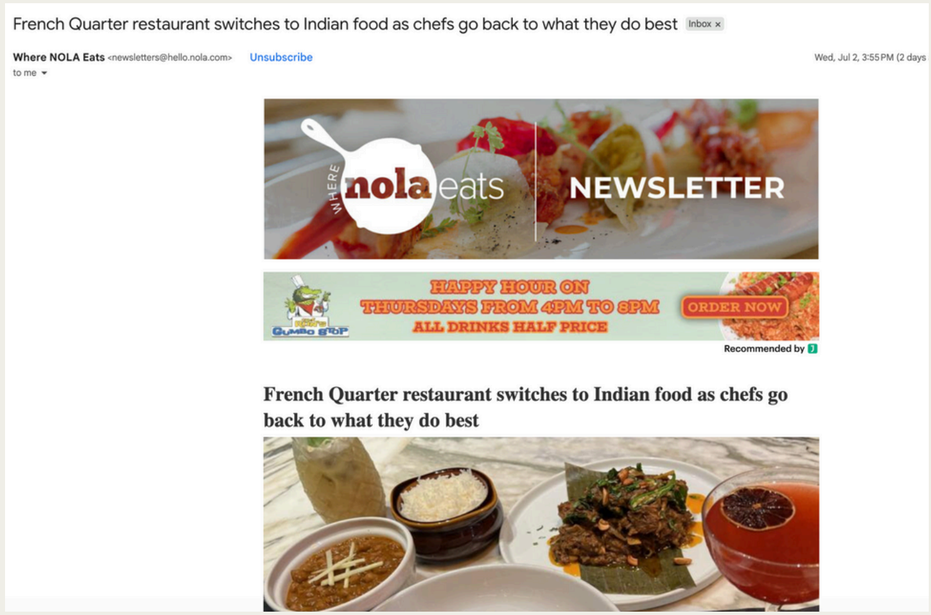
Look at the data: Does your audience prefer long form or listicle style updates?

If you’re sending a morning and afternoon newsletter in a small market, you could be sending too much.

Double down on high performing newsletters. Breaking news, food & dining, Saints, LSU and business work well in New Orleans, so we tried some new things this year!

Use your subscriber list to build trust with your audience.

You should have a newsletter stragegy for your biggest/best stories and projects.



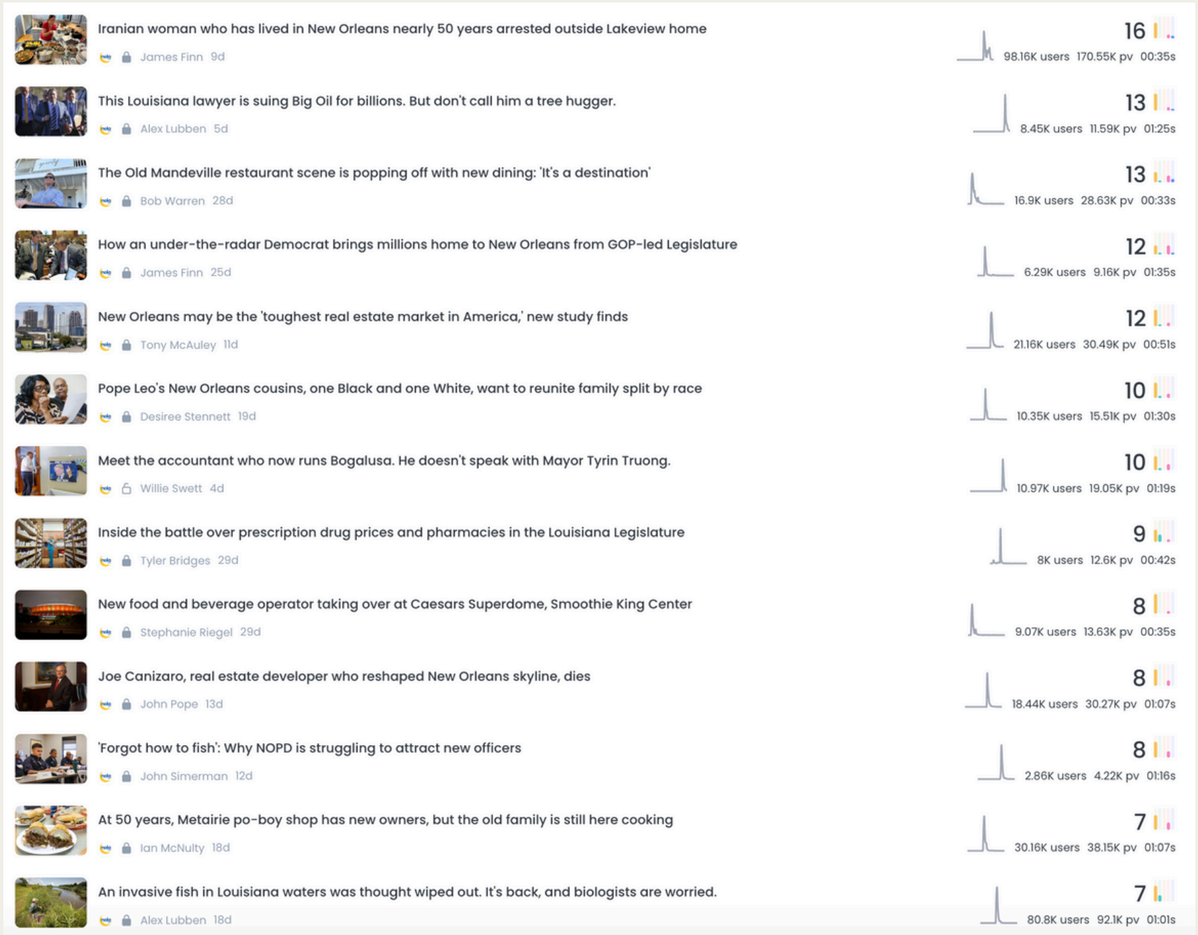
SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVES

The repeat visitors who are visiting the homepage and your app have a higher propensity to subscribe and advocate for your brand.

Your unique, exclusive content could also be a tool at the top of funnel. Are you giving it homepage play and pushing it?

Check your **efficiency rate** on stories that are subscriber only.

Are you checking to see what types of stories convert, or do you just think you know?



HEADLINES AND SEO

SEO is still important. I repeat, SEO IS STILL IMPORTANT.

Print and online headlines should very rarely be the same.

Headlines should be conversational, can break AP style, and should be written like your audience speaks.

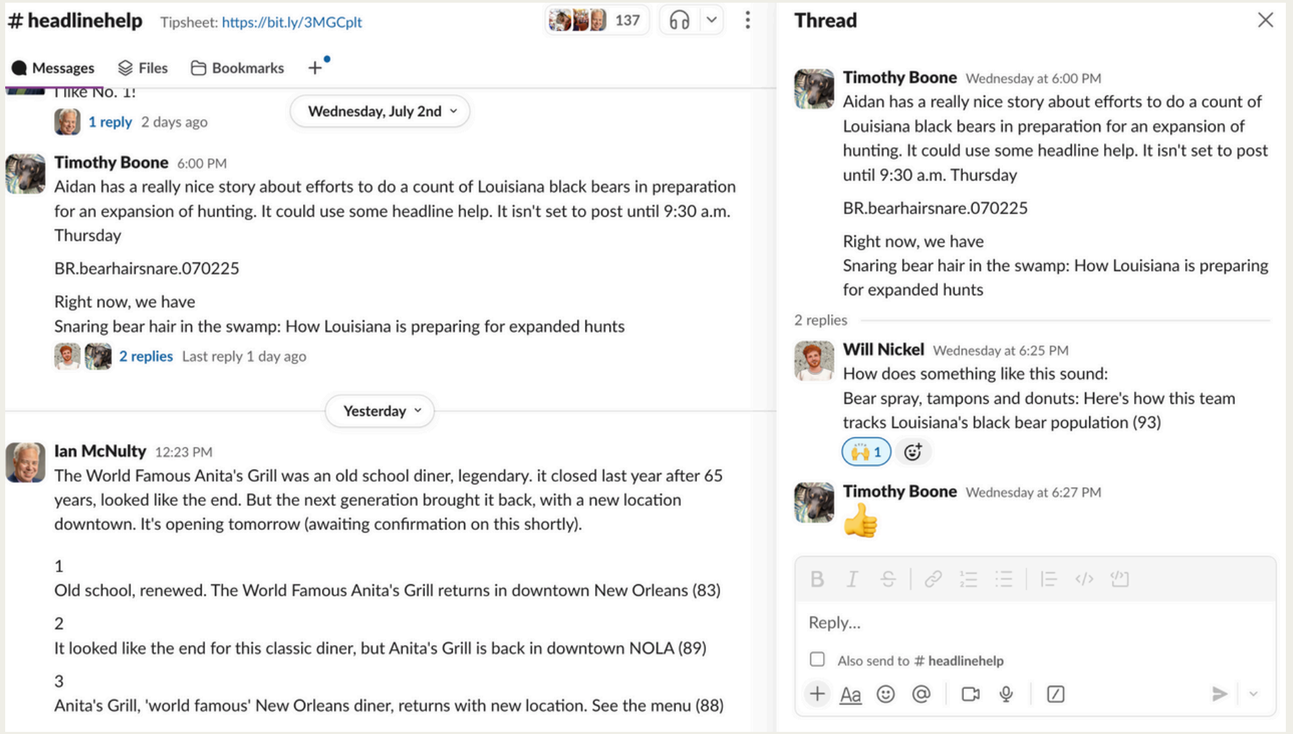
In most cases, don’t give everything away (breaking news could be the exception here).

Headline types vary per story type.

Create a headline channel in Slack. Make it mandatory your reporters and editors use it, especially the repeat offenders or those who need headline help.

Think about how headlines and social media share text compliment each other.

“It took me one hour to write this story and one hour to workshop this headline.”



VIDEO

We’ve had on-site video for two months and have attained 1 million video views just from embedding them inside stories.

Stories with videos, especially breaking news and feature stories, have longer engage time on the page.

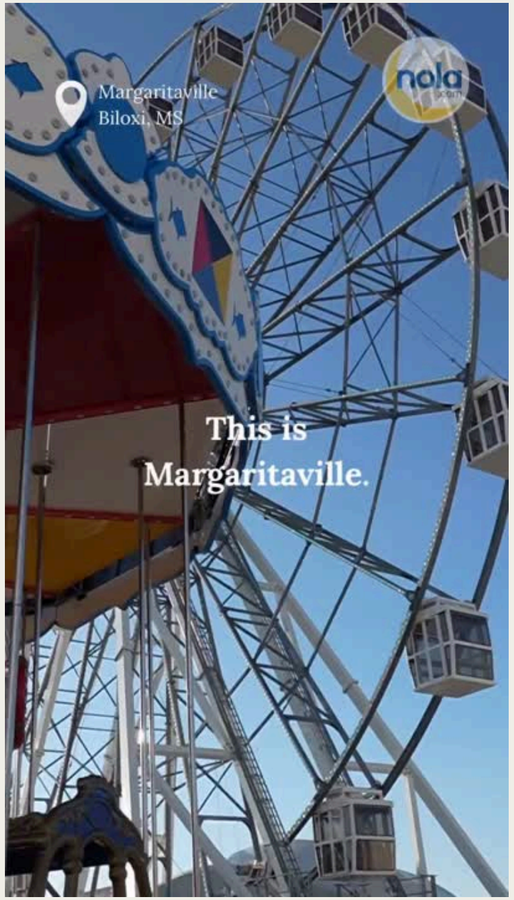
Engage time is important because the longer someone reads, the more likely they are to return, read another article on site, and subscribe.

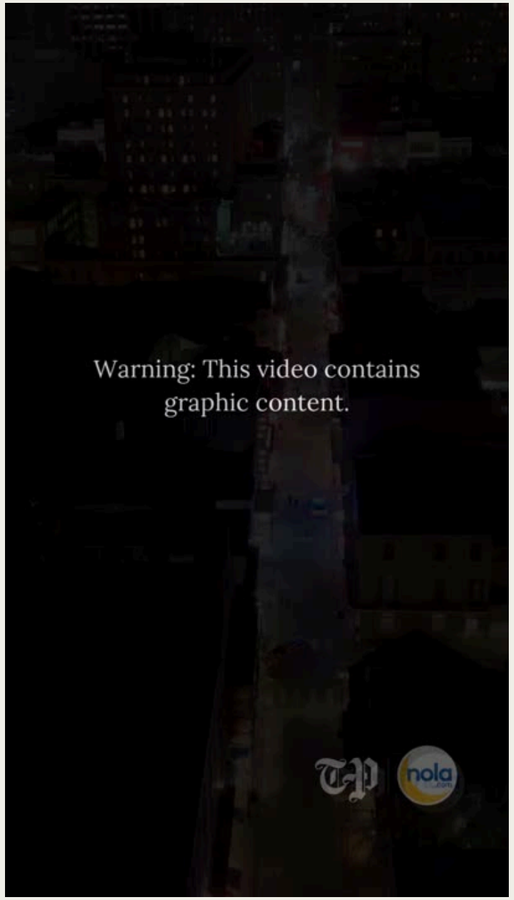
Videos can also help build trust with your audience, especially when they help explain a big topic or compelling case.

Raw video from breaking news scenes work great on site, as does weather, food and business development.

Keep them 30-90 seconds. Vertical is the way to go.

We found that vertical video got organic buy-in from editors, visual journalists and reporters.





Questions?