

The NATIVE ADVERTISING PLAYBOOK

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1. Executive Summary and Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Generating income is crucial to the viability of any news media, whether they are non-profit or for-profit organisations. Quality journalism costs money to produce. But finding diversified revenue sources to pay for it is a fundamental challenge. We need to continue to delve into the different ways quality news and information can make money. By focussing on income, we bring the economic problems facing journalism to the fore, providing a starting point for media viability that is focussed on business practices.

[IMS](#) is committed to strengthening our media partners as organisations and businesses so that they can defend and assert their editorial independence. Finding workable revenues is a key component of this work – revenues plural, because research and experience indicate that in most media ecosystems today, media need to draw on a variety

of income streams in order to survive. Our approach to business viability is to ignite interest and enable capabilities in local contexts for future-oriented responses, so that our media partners can harness their entrepreneurial spirit and feel more confident in the business side of their operations. Our support is tailored to each media partner’s needs and where they are in their development.

In the politically pressured and fragile economies in which our partners operate, the barriers to starting a media organisation are relatively low, but the barriers to sustainability are anything but that; a challenge too often exacerbated by ethnocentrism. Little research into what makes journalism sustainable is focussed on these kinds of economies. In particular, native advertising, sponsored content and advertorials are poorly evidenced as revenue streams and the terms are often used

interchangeably. There is little known about how to conceptualise such revenue opportunities and to deliver on them thereafter. Yet we know they hold promise. Grant income aside, the creation of content for non-media clients, followed by sponsored content or native advertising were found to be the two most promising revenue streams for digital media across Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia¹.

Therefore, we have brought together relevant case studies to illustrate how content production and business relations can be reconfigured to generate fresh revenue sources, and to demonstrate which tools may be helpful along the way. These cases include special thematic projects, creative agency models, and native-only formats in digital and multimedia form that revisit the boundary negotiation between editorial and business departments.

The Native Advertising Playbook casts new light on the complex, overlapping and increasingly coupled relations between consumers and clients that require significant alignment and coordination to succeed.

This is the first in a series of Revenue Playbooks where we will look under the hood of more unconventional revenue streams, with an emphasis on timely and useful steps to adoption.

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¹ SembraMedia (2021) Inflection Point International. Based on 141 digital native media in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia

INTRODUCTION

Around the globe, major and niche media have embraced native advertising. The Native Advertising Institute (NAI) defines the approach as “paid advertising where the ad matches the look, feel, and function of the media platform on which it appears... Native advertising should be great content, that looks and reads as organic content, but is, in fact, paid content.”¹ Native advertising has proven to be effective; the NAI estimated that more than a third of overall revenue of news media groups in 2021 were derived from it.² But native advertising remains less known or practiced by smaller independent outlets in unfree or developing markets. Its lack of use may be due not only to a scarcity of information but also to misperceptions shaped by challenging political, economic and media environments.

The Native Advertising Playbook hopes to change this situation. It provides “how-to” knowledge, step-by-step approaches, concrete examples, case studies, best

practices, performance indicators and useful links to (often free) tools for native advertising. Most of all, it offers inspiration and encouragement to online outlets struggling to survive or expand their mission to inform their readers.

The Playbook also addresses the common views that “this can’t work here” or “our situation is different.” Native advertising can be effectively used anywhere there are basic components of a market economy. This publication draws on the experiences of [CityDog](#), an independent digital magazine and a leader of native advertising in Belarus, a country with an authoritarian government, a poor media environment and a “socialist market economy.” The examples spotlight successful native advertising models employed by dynamic independent outlets in Ukraine, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – countries with serious but diverse political, economic and media challenges.

Virtually any media outlet producing and distributing quality content to targeted audiences can try native advertising. The first steps don’t necessarily require additional staff or resources. Companies everywhere want to engage with their customers on a long-term basis and increase their brand affinity. Consumers believe that companies providing or sponsoring custom content seek to build better relationships with them. For media outlets, native advertising not only diversifies their revenues but also allows them to create more interesting and valuable content on topics that matter to them and their readers, build profitable long-term partnerships with businesses, and develop new skills and technologies for the publication as a whole. In virtually every way, native advertising offers a “win-win” proposition.

This Playbook will hopefully encourage and help struggling and expanding outlets to take up this doable, affordable and

effective advertising approach. It should also be useful for organisations and foundations promoting and supporting the sustainability of independent media. Finally, the guide can assist researchers in better understanding some innovative and creative responses developed by media outlets to the specific challenges of the post-Soviet space.

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CityDog Media

¹ The Ultimate Native ads guide, Native Advertising Institute, <https://blog.nativeadvertisinginstitute.com/native-advertising-ultimate-guide>

² Ibid

2. What Is Native Advertising?

WHAT IS NATIVE ADVERTISING?

This Playbook is about native advertising. What is it? Native advertising comes in many different forms and is sometimes called sponsored, paid or content advertising. The term “native” reflects the idea that this type of advertising looks, reads and feels like any other content on a website or social network where it appears; hence, it is “native” to the publishing platform’s regular content and visual style. Unlike display ads, native advertising is non-disruptive for users and should offer content that readers choose to consume.

Native ads can be created by a third party or the media outlet itself. Examples of the former include “in feed” ads, promoted listings, and content recommendations on a web or social media page. In this case, the advertiser creates the ad and pays the media outlet to distribute it. The main concern – and criticism – regarding this approach are that, since the native ad

resembles organic content, readers may not realize they are consuming paid advertising. More about this type of native advertising can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

This Playbook focuses on the second type of native advertising model, where the media publisher is fully in control of the process of planning, creating and distributing paid content. This native advertising can be defined as:

Paid content produced by the editorial team in the same style as organic editorial content and distributed by the publisher; such content should be of value to the target audience and must be clearly and transparently marked as sponsored content.

This type of native advertising can be in the form of an article, report, interview, explainer, infographic, video, podcast, quiz or other interactive format or

multimedia publication. It can be a one-time piece or a series of publications. Native advertising pieces can (but are not obliged to) include branding or product integration. If the publication is a series united by a theme, published over a longer period of time and has one sponsor, it is known as a special project or a partnership model ([see Section 3](#)).

Native advertising content can be created by the same editorial team working on unpaid content. To further preserve editorial independence, it also can be produced by a separate commercial department or outsourced to freelancers. Case studies in [Section 5](#) offer different configurations and rationales for these approaches. Whatever model is chosen, it is crucial that the native advertising team and its workflow are optimally structured and managed ([see Section 4](#)).

Native advertising has proven to be most effective when:

- The media outlet knows and targets its audience well.
- The outlet and the client share similar values and work together as partners.
- The outlet’s editorial team and the client arrive at a common understanding of the objectives of the advertising campaign.
- The campaign’s content is of high quality, native to the outlet, and relevant for its audience.

While this Playbook will specifically focus on understanding and achieving these and the above points in the following sections, more general information on definitions of native advertising can be found at:

- [The Ultimate Native Advertising Guide](#)
- [Check Out our Native Ad Examples](#)
- [What is Native Advertising?](#)

3. The CityDog.by Example

THE CITYDOG.BY EXAMPLE

Belarus is a former Soviet republic in Eastern Europe with a population of 9.4 million. Freedom House’s 2021 [Freedom in the World](#) report rated the country as “Not Free” in terms of political rights and civil liberties. In 2020-2021, the government launched a severe crackdown on the country’s political opposition, civil society and independent media. Reporters without Borders’ [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#) ranked Belarus 158 of 180 countries, calling it the “most dangerous country in Europe for media personnel.” Freedom House’s [2021 Freedom on the Net](#) report assessed the country as “Not Free,” noting a “dramatic decline in internet freedom.” It stressed that the Covid-19 pandemic, the country’s economic stagnation and government repression have made the country’s independent media “less financially viable.” IREX’s final [Media Sustainability Index](#) in 2019 found Belarus’s indicator for business management by independent media to rank in the “Unsustainable Mixed System” category. According to [Statista](#), ad spending in the digital advertising market was projected to reach \$76 million in 2021, a growth of 0.3%. The average ad spending per user for banner advertising, the market’s largest segment, was projected to amount to \$5.22 in 2021.



CityDog.by

City: Minsk, the capital of Belarus

Languages: Russian, Belarusian

Launch: 2012

Team: 15 people

Type of media: Digital city magazine

Audience:

- Website: 1.1–1.3 million users/month
- Facebook: 39,000 followers
- Instagram: 17,700+ followers
- Telegram: 5,500 subscribers
- Twitter: 55,400 followers
- Vkontatke (regional social network): 43,000+ participants

Native Advertising Focus:

Long-term Partnerships

A decade ago, despite Belarus’ difficult political and economic environment, a mission-driven team of media professionals and urban activists saw an opportunity to launch a new type of online outlet – a publication that focused on lifestyle but was civically-oriented, was independent but commercially viable, and was activist but targeted an apolitical audience of young urban professionals. The digital magazine sought to become a hub for Minsk’s creative class by promoting civic pride and inspiring local communities. Nothing like this existed on the market in Belarus.

The magazine’s innovative concept and content, targeted approach, visual style, technological savvy and diversified content distribution generated a fast-growing reader base. But producing catchy content and growing a loyal audience were only part of its success. To be truly independent and sustainable,

the magazine needed to generate stable revenue. At the time, the majority of Belarus’ online media, even the most popular, could not monetize at all or generated only modest revenue via banners due to the country’s challenging economic climate. It became clear that banners alone would not generate enough revenue to cover even basic expenses. At the same time, the publication could not rely on foreign funding, which is criminalized in Belarus.

From the start, CityDog’s founders focused on native advertising, which was a new concept at the time. The magazine became a pioneer of this type of advertising in Belarus. The foundation of CityDog’s business model is developing and implementing longer-term (3-10 month) specialized content projects that target one creative topic in partnership with private companies. For both partners, this proved to be a “win-win” proposition.

THE CITYDOG.BY EXAMPLE

For the client, this type of advertising concentrates on raising brand awareness and building relations with customers, rather than just promoting direct sales. The team saw this concept as a way to link the magazine’s mission with generating revenue, because it facilitates the creation and dissemination of quality content on topics that are also important to society.

Today, native advertising projects generate 85 percent of the magazine’s revenue. The magazine runs approximately 4-6 special projects a year in partnership with local and international brands. Each project focuses on one theme, lasts 3-10 months, comprises 2-4 articles per month, often includes long-read and interactive formats, usually has a dedicated branded section on the magazine’s website, and is broadly distributed across different social media platforms. Special projects with content sponsored by smartphone providers, mobile operators and IT

companies have promoted [local history](#), [urban activism](#), [the environment](#), [the Belarusian language](#), and Belarusian [modern art](#) and [literature](#). At the same time, partnering brands have benefited and the magazine’s audience has grown.

CityDog’s native advertising embraces some key principles:

- Advertisers and the magazine must share the same appreciation for the featured topics and heroes
- Advertisers and the magazine must act as partners
- Most importantly, the magazine must preserve its full editorial independence regarding all the content it produces.

But the publication’s commercial department, consisting of two full-time managers, works hand-in-hand with the editorial team, which produces both editorial and commercial content

This long-term partnership model has proved to be sustainable even during the Covid-19 crisis, economic stagnation and political turmoil in today’s Belarus. The secret to this success is the added value of the special projects and long-term partnerships. For the brands it became a way to stay connected with and show support for their customers during hard times. For CityDog, partnering with the brands allowed both to create and disseminate content that was relevant and meaningful for audiences when they needed it most. While Belarus remained locked down on the ground and in the sky, CityDog’s special projects [explored life in different cities](#) and uncovered [hidden history jewels](#) across the country. As citizens took their daily activities online, CityDog spotlighted [cybersecurity](#) issues. Most importantly, the model has helped the magazine to never stop inspiring its audience [to dream](#) and not to abandon hope.

CityDog is a leader of native advertising not only in Belarus but in the broader post-Soviet region. CityDog’s business model is driven by native advertising revenue. As a result, the magazine’s team is constantly refining its techniques and strategies to improve the model and to make it work more effectively and efficiently with its limited human resources and budget. The magazine is open to sharing its model and know-how with other independent media.

The Playbook’s “Media Outlets and Native Advertising” section ([Section 4](#)) presents CityDog’s model in detail, including how to: build a team, organize workflow, budget for a native advertising project, measure effectiveness and communicate with partners. Moreover, the Playbook’s principles can be easily adapted for different types of native advertising models.

4. Media Outlets and Native Advertising

[4.1 The Team](#)

[4.2 Workflow](#)

[4.3 Budgeting](#)

[4.4 Content Distribution](#)

[4.5 Communication with Clients](#)

[4.6 Key Performance Indicators \(KPIs\)](#)

4.1 THE TEAM



The optimal **native advertising team** should, at a minimum, consist of professionals in the following roles:

- Project manager
- Native project editor
- Content creator (generates ideas and formats to meet clients' objectives) *
- Author *
- Photographer/Videographer*
- Designer/Layout *
- IT specialist *
- Proofreader *
- Content distributor/SMM manager *

* Not all these positions need be full-time; some may be combined with other editorial work or outsourced to freelancers.

The **creative/production team** is a subset of these individuals, including the:

- Native project editor
- Content creator
- Author
- Photographer/Videographer
- Designer/Layout

The composition of every team responsible for creating a specific native project should be determined on a unique basis; each project will be different and the team must reflect the project's objectives, scale, complexity and deadlines, as well as the outlet's editorial and business model, human resources, skills, and technical capacity.

4.1 THE TEAM

ATTENTION:
Project manager ≠ Native editor

The project manager is responsible for the project’s logistics, communication with the client and compliance with all agreements between the client and the media outlet.

The native project editor is in charge of organizing the workflow within the creative team and the production cycle for the outlet.

ATTENTION:
Attempts to combine these fundamentally different roles into one individual is problematic and is a common cause of strain

The project manager’s responsibilities include:

- Processing incoming partnership requests from new or existing clients
- Identifying potential clients/partners and negotiating with them
- Cross-selling different advertising options to maximize benefits for both the client and the outlet
- Managing the project, including:
 - Consulting with clients
 - Preparing contract documents
 - Tasking the project’s creative team
 - Implementing project management
 - Overseeing deadlines and fulfilling the project’s agreements
 - Tracking the project’s Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
 - Assessing the project’s results, impact and effectiveness
 - Preparing a report for the client
 - Debriefing the client and the production team
 - Developing recommendations for future initiatives

The project manager’s qualifications should include:

- Deep understanding of the local advertising market
- Strong communication skills
- Interest in digital media, including digital advertising and publishing
- Understanding the specifics of content advertising and how to assess its effectiveness (client investment vs. KPIs)
- Experience in preparing commercial offers
- Ability to identify clients’ goals and objectives
- Ability to formulate and set tasks for the creative team

In addition, the position should include the following preferences:

- Higher education degree in marketing, management or media
- Work experience as a project manager in media or IT
- Contacts with advertising agencies and sales houses, and/or direct contacts with potential clients

4.1 THE TEAM

Helpful Tips for Effective Team Approaches

Tip 1: If your media team has individuals with different sets of competencies, they can combine several roles.

CityDog has had cases in which one person performed several roles within its native advertising projects. Some possible combinations include:

- Author and photographer
- Author and designer/layout
- Native project editor and proofreader
- Native project editor and content distributor
- Content creator and native project editor

This approach can be effective initially, when an outlet is just entering or beginning to experience growth in the native advertising market. However, as volumes increase, it is crucial to more clearly delineate team roles and/or expand the team. If this is not done in a timely fashion, the outlet

risks confronting a number of serious problems, including team member burnout, missed deadlines, decline in the quality of creative ideas and project implementation, and loss of clients and revenue.

Tip 2: If your client offers existing photo and video materials for use in your joint native advertising project, make sure they match the tone of voice and visual style of your outlet and will not look out of place on your website.

If the client’s visuals are in harmony with your media, integrate them into the project and save money on visual production.

In most cases, however, it is better to create all content in-house using your creative team to ensure that the project is really native for your media outlet and your audience.

Tip 3: When brainstorming creative ideas and formats for a project, be sure to maintain its objectives and the outlet’s user experiences at its core.

Complicated formats and unusual designs might not always be the best solutions in making a project more effective. Consider if any off-the-shelf formats and/or templates that have already proven to be effective for your outlet might work better in achieving the project’s objectives. This strategy can help save time and money on production. Moreover, readers like familiar and user-friendly formats; with them, audiences’ interaction with the project’s content will be more predictable and positive.

If ready-made solutions do not meet the project’s objectives and/or if your client insists on an innovative format and is ready to pay for it, do not limit your creativity. Go for it and don’t be afraid to experiment!

Tip 4: If a client proposes a one-time request for an interactive native advertising format (a quiz, survey, poll, etc.) and you lack an off-the-shelf solution in your portfolio, it might make more sense economically to use one of the many existing external tools (see [TOOLKIT](#) section) instead of investing time and money in developing your own solution.

Tip 5: If your outlet wants to start using new and complex native advertising formats (podcasts, videos, games, etc.) and plans to include them in projects on a regular basis, this might be the right moment to expand your team’s in-house capabilities.

However, you can start this process by outsourcing the production of initial formats – partially or fully – to professional video and sound production teams/studios. This strategy will help your outlet to ensure quality, save on costs, and learn about the process for the future.

4.2 WORKFLOW

A Step-by-Step Guide to Native Advertising

You are part of a dynamic media outlet. Its mission, vision, target audience and content policies are well-defined. Your team is maintaining or building its brand recognition. You are ready to enter the native advertising market and to offer added value to your outlet's audience and potential clients.

This is what you need to do:

- Bring together a creative/production team
- Refocus and reshape the worldview of your sales/commercial department: unlike display ads, native advertising is not about pushing direct and volume sales; it is about building a two-way communication model between your media outlet and its specific audience and commercial partners and brands
- Produce basic guidelines and tools (i.e. a media kit, native advertising brief, contract, email and presentation samples, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems) that will help your project managers

to effectively position your outlet, explain your native advertising offers, and demonstrate successful examples to potential clients – success in sales depends on these steps to a great degree

- Design the process of receiving and processing information from the client about its objectives in and expectations from a native advertising partnership
- Elaborate and fine-tune the creative process of developing project ideas and proposals (project ideas, concepts, content, formats, presentations, etc.)
- Determine a clear, accurate and understandable pricing process

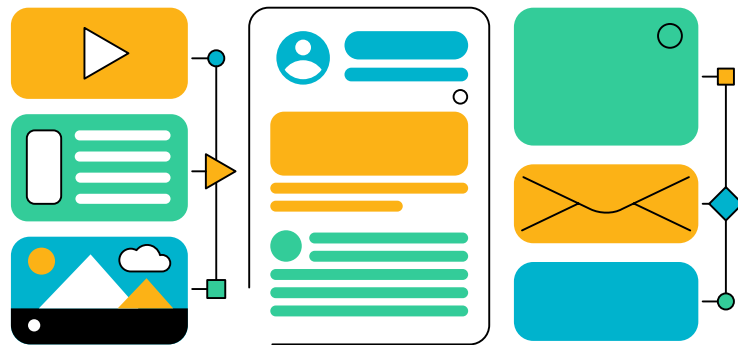
- Always remember that quality content and striking presentation and implementation are the basis of every successful native advertising offer
- Automate and optimize workflow, whenever possible. For content distribution, use Social Media Management (SMM) systems, such as [SMMplanner](#) or [Hootsuite](#), or find other similar services [here](#). For project management, consider using [Slack](#) and [Trello](#)

4.2 WORKFLOW

The Process

STEP 1: Assign a project manager

- If you have several on your team, assign a specific manager to a specific project based on:
 - Workload
 - Experience



STEP 2: Gather information about the potential partner's company/brand

- Ask the client to fill out your native advertising brief (for an example, see [Platfor.ma](#)). Never skip this stage, as a well-completed brief is the foundation for the next steps and a guarantee of productive cooperation
- The brief should include – but not limited to – the following information:
 - The client's name and contact information
 - The name of the company/brand/product
 - A description of the client's target audience
 - A description of the brand/product/service the client would like to advertise
 - What is unique about the brand/product/service or what makes it different from its competitors?
 - What is the overall goal of the advertising campaign?
 - What are the campaign's specific objectives?
 - Does the client have a specific format of native advertising in mind? If so, which? (provide a list of options offered by your media outlet)
 - The client should provide some references to/examples of advertising projects he or she liked
 - What absolutely must be included/mentioned in the native advertising campaign (messages, images, colors, product placement, etc.)?
 - Is there is a strict deadline for when the project should start? Ask the client to indicate a timeline

4.2 WORKFLOW

The Process

STEP 3: Introduce the client and its request to the team

- The project manager organizes a meeting with the core editorial team and introduces the client and the brief
- **CityDog uses the following tools to foster project communication and team coordination:**
 - Trello (with Trello bot integrated into Slack)
 - Slack
 - Email
 - Daily staff meetings
 - Weekly meetings of the project team (project manager, native project editor, key team members)

STEP 4: Brainstorm creative ideas

- Produce a maximum of 3 quality ideas per project
- Decide on format(s) to be used
- Assign a native project editor (based on topic, formats and experience)
- Define the topic for the native advertising material and write a synopsis (or, for a longer-term special project, create a media plan)
- Form a production team, based on the formats and scope of the project
- Develop a detailed project plan and KPIs
- Produce a project budget
- Prepare a project proposal and presentation for the client

STEP 5: Reach agreement with the client

- Present the project proposal to and discuss it with the client
- Once the project plan is initially approved, prepare a contract
- Clearly define payment agreements and procedures in the contract (CityDog normally works via advance payments)
- Sign the contract

4.2 WORKFLOW

The Process

STEP 6: Implement the project

- Responsible team members → project manager and native project editor
- Native project editor → topics and synopsis
- Native project editor → production team
- Questions from production team: content related → native project editor; logistics → project manager
- Production team → draft to native project editor (including all visual materials)
- Native project editor → editing process
- Designer → design and layout
- IT specialist → coding (when needed)
- Native project editor → draft materials to project manager
- Project manager:
 - Reads, checks, corrects
 - Commercial director
 - Lawyer (if needed)
 - Proofreader
 - Link to preview to the client

STEP 7: Gain final client approval and if...

YES

- Assign a publication date
- Inform the native project editor, editor-in-chief and content distribution manager that the material is ready for publication
- Publish

MAYBE

- Client → edits
 - Project manager → discusses edits with native project editor
 - Native project editor and project manager → determine which edits are acceptable and which are not
 - Project manager → communicates and negotiates final edits with the client
- OK → YES / NO → CANCEL

CANCEL

- Manager negotiates the conditions for terminating the contract without publication

4.2 WORKFLOW

The Process

STEP 8:

Start post-production activities

- Distribute the content across different platforms
- Monitor and collect feedback from readers (comments, likes, shares)
- Recommend the client participates in discussions regarding reader feedback
- Gather and analyze KPIs (website and social media)
- Prepare a performance report with KPIs achieved and feedback for the client
- Debrief with the creative/production team and broader editorial team (lessons learned)

STEP 9:

Close the project

- Prepare and sign necessary documentation
- Submit the performance report to the client
- OPTIONAL → debrief with client
- Postmortem: what could we do differently to achieve better results?
- Is there an interest in continuing cooperation?

With longer-term special projects, the brainstorming and project development stage is slightly different:

- Study past client campaigns and examples of similar projects
- Hold a set-up meeting
- Form a project team
- Brainstorm
- Conduct intermediate meetings and exchange ideas
- Finalize the project idea – topic, format, duration
- Prepare budget
- Create a presentation with a project proposal
- Meet with the client

4.2 WORKFLOW

Basic Rules for Project Idea Brainstorming

- Include the project manager, editor, content creator and author
- Focus on discussing why and how the client's product/service/brand can be interesting or useful to your audience
- Don't be afraid to voice your ideas, even if they sound unconventional or obvious – they may stimulate the team's creative thinking. There are no bad ideas at this stage
- While brainstorming general creative ideas, don't do a deep dive as too many details may slow or prevent the generation of alternative ideas. Details should be discussed at a later stage, once the project idea has been formulated

4.2 WORKFLOW

A Media Outlet's Objectives for Native Projects

- Create quality, useful, interesting and relevant content for the audience. Keep readers' interests and pain points in mind
- Use formats native (i.e. typical) for your media outlet
- Write catchy (but not misleading or clickbait) headlines – they should be engaging, emotional and empathic
- Develop visually-rich but user-friendly content (photos, illustrations, infographics, etc.). Readers like this type of content and are more likely to share it, thus organically promoting the project
- Engage readers by using different tools such as promo codes, polls, surveys, interactive formats and micro interactions. Give your readers the possibility to actively participate in, not just passively consume, content
- Use, when possible, existing solutions (your own or external), but always test whether they work correctly on different devices and in different browsers/operating systems before publishing and distributing your native materials

4.3 BUDGETING

ATTENTION: The principles of pricing native projects are fundamentally different from the process of determining the cost of display ads!

Cost components:

- Management costs
- Content creation costs (editor, authors, photographers/ videographers, design, IT solutions, purchasing graphic (and/or audio/ video) materials, etc.
- Costs of placement on your website and content distribution across different platforms
- Paid promotion in social media and/or search engines
- Your profit margins

External factors to consider when planning your budget:

- Competitors’ advertising products
- Competitors’ KPIs
- Competitors’ prices

Other Important Elements:

- Consider account surcharge coefficients (i.e. time-sensitive, holiday season, post payment)
- Limit the number of free editing rounds in the contract (CityDog permits up to three). If the client comes back again with more edits, charge extra
- Offer discounts for loyal clients (mark-downs for advertising agencies and sales houses, bulk discounts for direct contracts with clients, special offers for returning clients, etc.)

4.4 CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

To be visible where your readers are, utilize:

- Browsers (push notifications)
- Email (thematic and personalized e-newsletters – use [Mailchimp](#) or other services)
- Search engines and their services (Google and regional/local ones)
- Social media
- Messengers
- Offline events

Tailor and package your content for your social media pages, public thematic groups and messengers:

- Interact with users on different platforms, using their native engagement tools
- Remind your readers about your project; promote it in several waves but don’t overdo it
- Try organic reach in social media first; use paid promotion for specific targeting needs or to boost the reach of the project later, if necessary

4.5 COMMUNICATION WITH CLIENT

Recommendations to Improve Client/Partner Relations

Reach a Common Understanding:

- Make sure your outlet has developed a detailed native advertising brief
- Explain, convince and insist that every client fill out completely a brief for each native project
- Ask questions to clarify anything that is unclear in the brief
- Indicate a realistic timeframe for the project’s implementation

Promote Effective Communication:

- Develop a professional media kit (see examples at [CityDog](#) and [34travel](#)); it will save you lots of time and is a big step toward signing a contract
- Try to establish direct contact with your client/partner. Avoid intermediaries, if possible
- Promote points of contact by assigning one project manager and one native editor to each project
- Inform your client/partner about any changes in the project beforehand, NOT after the fact
- If your written communication becomes stuck, talk to your client (schedule a telephone call or a personal meeting)

Maintain Professional Commitments:

- Be very attentive and careful when budgeting for the project
- Study, analyze and follow advertising and other laws in your country
- Respect copyright laws in all content production
- Draw up a contract that will protect your outlet and team. Closely read the client’s version of the contract before signing it (if necessary, suggest amendments)

4.5 COMMUNICATION WITH CLIENT

Common Questions from Clients

“We would like to place a native ad on your website. We already have an article prepared. Is this possible and what is the price?”

Ready-made paid articles or press releases are a form of direct advertising. Media outlets – not clients – create and produce native advertising content. As the name suggests, the content is native to the publication and its audience.

“We would like to partner on a special thematic project. How much will it cost?”

There is no standard price – one price does not fit all. The price depends on the scope, length and format of the special project. It is impossible to quote a price upfront, before the client completes the brief, since you can’t know the client’s objectives, what the company wants to promote, and what formats will work

best to meet the objectives. Never give an approximate or average estimate, which might be misleading, until you have properly formulated your project proposal and closely calculated all costs. Once the client approves your project idea and proposal, then you can negotiate the final budget.

“We don’t like your suggested project idea/topic/format. Can you fix it?”

When brainstorming creative ideas for a native advertising project, remember that it should address and meet the client’s objectives, as laid out in the brief, correspond to the style and tone of your media outlet, and serve your audience. The project’s ideas/topics/formats are not supposed to meet the personal tastes of the client. If you face this situation, ask the client for detailed arguments and always refer to the brief. This may help you both to come to an agreement.

“We don’t like your headline. Can you use ours?”

If your headline truly matches the tone of voice of your media outlet, corresponds to the content of the article and is empathic, try your best to defend it, preferably in writing. If the client still insists on dictating another headline, you will be protected against his or her claims should the altered article be less effective or not meet the project’s KPIs.

“We don’t like the style of the native article and have completely rewritten it. Will you publish the attached version?”

This approach is completely unacceptable, as it contradicts the key principles of native advertising. It also might mean that either the brief or the contract, or both, were not prepared correctly. Once the project proposal and plan are approved, the client can

only conduct fact checking and make suggestions for edits, but not change or rewrite the article.

“There are negative comments about the article. That means your editorial team did a bad job. What should we do?”

You cannot control what readers write in comments. Sometimes negative commentators are linked to the client’s competitors. In other cases, the article generates a public discussion and readers may have different opinions on the subject. Try to explain to the client that the best and most productive strategy is to engage with the commentators and to join the discussion constructively, instead of blaming and shaming or, even worse, censoring them. This will strengthen the client’s image in the eyes of the audience and potential customers.

4.6 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

KPIs Your Media Outlet Should Track and Analyze:

- Audience reach on website – unique views, page views, and socio-demographic reader profile
- Engagement – the share of users who read native articles
- Scroll rate – how far internet users read the article (for example, if a scroll rate is below 50 percent, then users read on average less than half of the article)
- Time spent on the post
- Bounce rate
- Number of likes in social media
- Reach on social media – reactions, comments, and shares
- Click Through Rate (CTR) analysis
- Qualitative feedback from readers

The Client’s KPIs:

- Quality of the project’s content and its technical execution
- Referrals from the native article to the client’s website and/or social media pages
- Lead generation
- Sales conversion rate
- LTV (Life Time Value) – total worth to a business of a customer over the entire period of their relationship
- ROAS (Return on Advertising Spend) – amount of revenue earned on every unit of currency (i.e. dollar) spent on advertising

Native Project KPIs to Pitch to the Client:

- Reach on the website (unique views, page views, scroll rate)
- Engagement and reach indicators on social media
- Qualitative feedback from readers (comments, discussions, etc.)

Keep in mind:

- CTR and lead generation are linked directly to the demand for the client’s product or services. Native advertising formats are not designed to and cannot guarantee them
- The same applies to sales conversion. Native advertising is designed to increase brand recognition and build a relationship with customers, not to generate direct sales. However, including promo codes or other forms of user engagement, if possible, might stimulate sales

5. Different Aspects and Examples of Native Advertising

- 5.1 Special Thematic Projects – LOCALS, Moldova
- 5.2 The Annual Contract and Defined Media Plan – Varosh, Ukraine
- 5.3 A Creative Agency for Social Change – Platfor.ma, Ukraine
- 5.4 Native-only Content Monetization – Kloop, Kyrgyzstan
- 5.5 Native Podcasts and Video Stories – YOUR.TJ, Tajikistan

5.1 SPECIAL THEMATIC PROJECTS BY LOCALS (MOLDOVA)



Moldova is a former Soviet republic in Eastern Europe with a population of 2.6 million. Freedom House’s [2021 Freedom in the World](#) report rated the country as “Partly Free” in terms of political rights and civil liberties. Its 2021 [Nations in Transit](#) report noted that a drastic drop in 2020 advertising revenue due to Covid-19 affected the financial stability of the media. Reporters Without Borders’ [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#) ranked Moldova 89 out of 180 countries, stressing the “excessive influence” of oligarchs. IREX’s final [Media Sustainability Index](#) in 2019 found Moldova’s indicator for business management by independent media to rank in the “Unsustainable Mixed System” category due, in part, to the “monopolization” and small size of the advertising market. According to [Statista](#), ad spending in the digital advertising market was projected to reach \$40 million in 2021, a growth of 10%. The average ad spending per user in search advertising, the market’s largest segment, was projected to amount to \$5.36 in 2021.

LOCALS

- City:** Chisinau, the capital of Moldova
- Languages:** Russian, Romanian
- Launch:** 2011
- Team:** 5 full- and 5 part-time/freelancers
- Type of media:** Digital city magazine
- Audience:**
 - Website: 250,000 users/month
 - Facebook: 41,500+ followers
 - Instagram: 10,600 followers

Native Advertising Focus: Special Thematic Projects

In the first decade of the 21st century, post-Soviet cities were undergoing fundamental transformations and modern urban culture was emerging. As part of this process, groups of urban activists and media professionals founded digital city magazines in the capitals of several former Soviet republics. These new media are not only reporting on and documenting the changes taking place in these cities, but are also participating directly in urban

movements and contributing to building urban communities. LOCALS is an example of such a city magazine in Moldova.

LOCALS targets active city residents who are 25-34 years old. The magazine focuses on city news, civic activism, and urban development and culture. LOCALS features urban trendsetters who help make Chisinau an exciting place to live. It publishes 10-15 posts per day, including seven curated city news articles, three journalistic pieces and five updates to its event calendar.

Like city magazine counterparts in other countries, LOCALS centres its business model on native advertising. Its concept looks modern and cool, like the magazine itself. Moreover, native articles provide the publication with another way to produce useful and stylish content, thus serving its mission and its audience’s interests. LOCALS is a pioneer of native advertising in Moldova, where banners and direct ads dominate the market.

The uniqueness of LOCALS is native special projects – a series of articles developed with one partner and united around one theme. For the publication, a special project usually consists of four articles published over a period of two months. The magazine runs a maximum of two special projects at the same time. For some projects, the team creates a dedicated branded section (a landing page) on its website. The magazine also publishes stand-alone advertorials and quizzes; it is currently experimenting with native podcasts.

Native advertising generates 50 percent or more of the magazine’s total revenue. The rest is derived from banners, PR articles and foreign grants. Selling and implementing native special projects is much more profitable than placing banners and publishing paid articles. To be sustainable, the magazine needs to sell one special project per month.

5.1 SPECIAL THEMATIC PROJECTS BY LOCALS (MOLDOVA)

Advertising Market and Clients

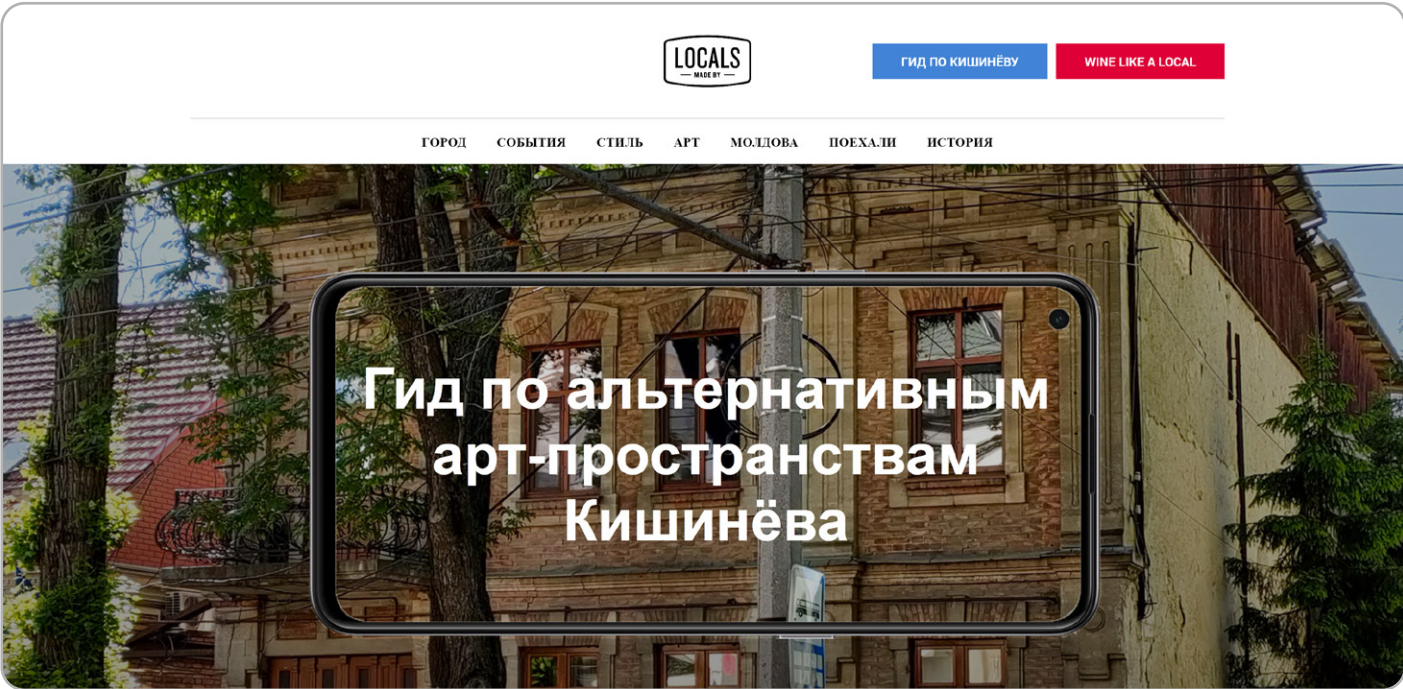
In Moldova, advertising agencies prefer placing paid news, usually in the form of a press release, about the arrival of a new product or service to the market (i.e. a new model of a TV set or a washing machine). This format is the most popular among advertisers and the cheapest type of content advertising. This practice makes it harder to market native advertising formats, such as special projects, contests, or podcasts to potential partners.

Moldova’s advertising market is still underdeveloped. Not many businesses are familiar with native formats and therefore only a few request it. Only bigger companies possessing firm budgets and seeking to increase their public image are ready to invest in native advertising. For media like LOCALS, this situation offers both opportunities and

challenges. The challenge is that it takes much time and effort to convince new clients to partner on and pay for more costly native formats. But the opportunity is that, since the competition is low, if a company wants a special project, it turns to LOCALS.

“
Usually, clients who come with a request for a special project and become our regular partner have a creative and pro-active manager who knows and understands what native advertising is and why a brand needs it. When that manager leaves the company, the partnership often ends as well.
 ”
 Ana Glazkina, editor-in-chief

Regular partners include mobile telephone operators (one of which has commissioned several different thematic special projects over the past year), a local bottled water brand, and a market research agency. Restaurants, shops and other small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) prefer one-time native articles.



The special project “A guide to alternative art spaces in Chisinau”

5.1 SPECIAL THEMATIC PROJECTS BY LOCALS (MOLDOVA)

Content Production

The magazine's team is small and therefore works mainly with incoming requests, rather than seeking out clients. The editor-in-chief is in charge of reviewing advertising applications, suggesting formats, generating ideas for special projects and preparing contracts, including budgets. The magazine's journalists create both editorial and commercial articles, but they are paid higher rates for native formats as there is a separate budget for them and they usually require more work.

The publication's audience treats native content the same as editorial: if an article is interesting and relevant, it gets views and positive feedback. Public perception depends on the topic and quality of the material. LOCALS' "[A Guide to Alternative Art Spaces in Chisinau](#)", sponsored by a mobile telephone operator, is an example

of commercial content that fits completely with the magazine's mission and its audience's interests.

In Moldova, there are no laws regulating how content advertising should be labeled. However, LOCALS marks all its native formats as "Partner material." It does so not only to be transparent to its readers, but also to attract new clients that might get excited by the content and want to do something similar.

Formats:

Thematic special projects (see native case study below).

- "Tell us about..." advertorials in the form of interviews, [human interest stories](#) and [reports](#).
- Quizzes – This format was very popular a couple of years ago, but is less so today.

At the time, the editorial team was passionate about interactive formats and actively offered them to clients. However, it took much time and effort to convince clients to accept them; but they often proved not to be worth it in terms of revenue. Quizzes are labor-intensive and costly to produce but clients were not ready to pay for them and opted for more familiar advertorials. Another problem is that the free or basic packages of external platforms necessary for the creation of quizzes offer only limited functionality. If a client wants something more unique or elaborate, additional programming is needed, which requires coding and, hence, a bigger budget.

- [Podcasts](#) – LOCALS has just started experimenting with native podcasts and is still searching for the right market fit.

Technology:

LOCALS uses paid external services – Tilda for special projects and long-form articles and Ex.co for quizzes. Since the magazine focuses on special projects, which often require creating their own visual style and branded page, the team hired an aspiring UX/UI designer for in-house production, mainly using Tilda.

5.1 SPECIAL THEMATIC PROJECTS BY LOCALS (MOLDOVA)

Content Distribution and KPIs

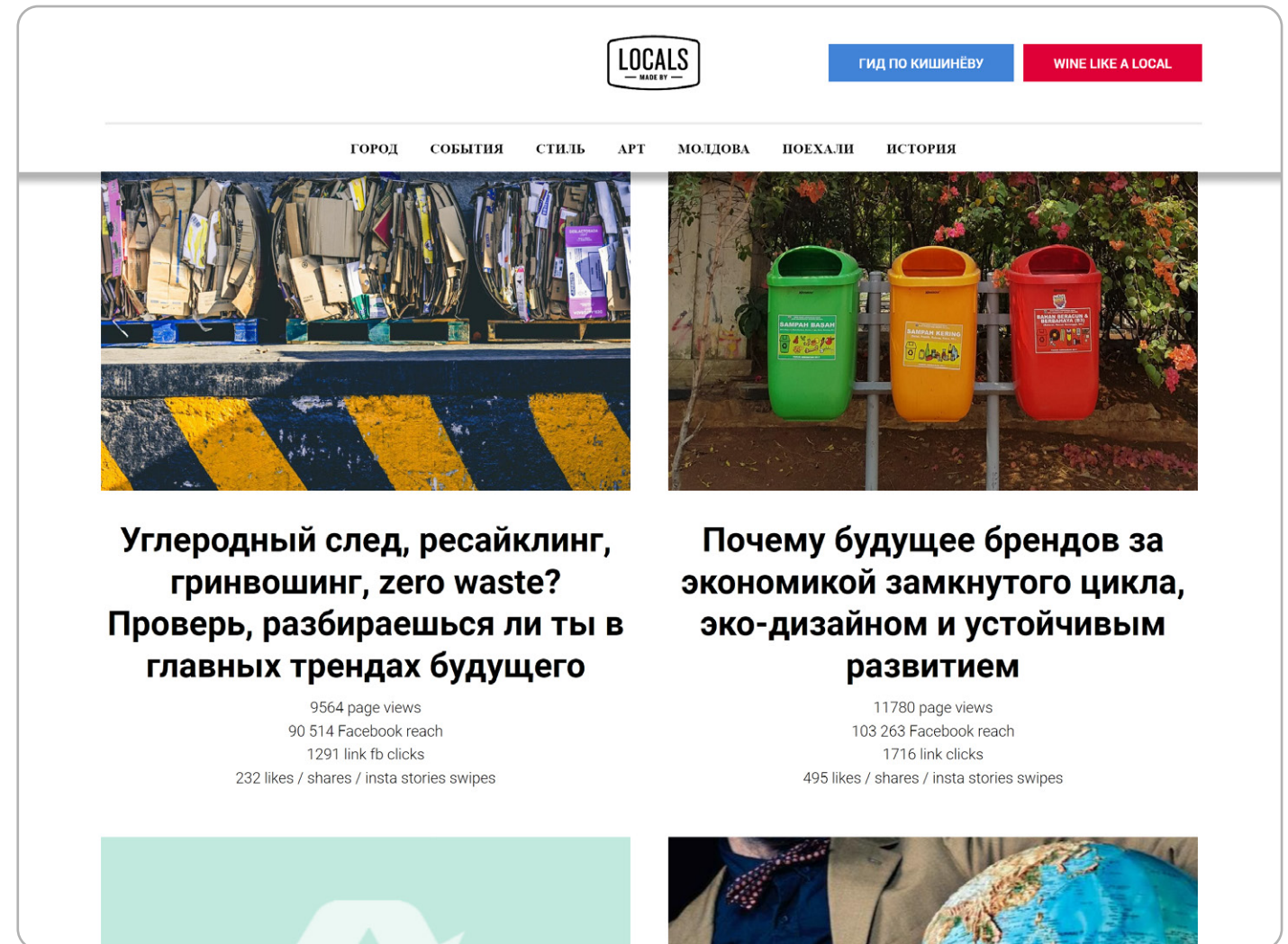
LOCALS publishes its native articles on its website and distributes them via social media. It often uses “Stories” on Instagram with links to the post on its website.

For example, the team was tasked by one client to promote a special hashtag. The magazine promoted the [hashtag in posts on its website](#) as well as on [Instagram](#). As a result, more than 600 people joined the client’s campaign of walking around the city and drawing their routes with the help of a special mobile phone app.

LOCALS uses the following KPIs for its commercial materials:

- Views on its website
- Likes and shares on social media
- Number of banner impressions

The majority of clients have only a basic knowledge of and little interest in online analytics. If they request performance reports, it is mainly to document what their advertising budget was spent on.



The screenshot shows the LOCALS website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the LOCALS logo and links for "ГИД ПО КИШИНЬУ" and "WINE LIKE A LOCAL". Below the navigation bar, there's a row of category links: ГОРОД, СОБЫТИЯ, СТИЛЬ, АРТ, МОЛДОВА, ПОЕХАЛИ, ИСТОРИЯ. The main content area displays two article cards. The first card features a photo of cardboard boxes and has the title "Углеродный след, ресайклинг, гринвошинг, zero waste? Проверь, разбираешься ли ты в главных трендах будущего". Below the title, it lists performance metrics: 9564 page views, 90 514 Facebook reach, 1291 link fb clicks, and 232 likes / shares / insta stories swipes. The second card features a photo of three recycling bins (green, yellow, red) and has the title "Почему будущее брендов за экономикой замкнутого цикла, эко-дизайном и устойчивым развитием". Below the title, it lists performance metrics: 11780 page views, 103 263 Facebook reach, 1716 link clicks, and 495 likes / shares / insta stories swipes. At the bottom of the cards, there are partial images of a recycling symbol and a globe.

[An example of a special project performance report](#)

5.1 SPECIAL THEMATIC PROJECTS BY LOCALS (MOLDOVA)

Native Advertising Example

Title: [“Smart Environment”](#)

Period of implementation:
September – October 2020.

Objective: Raise public awareness about the global trend of conscious consumption and educate readers about what they can do in practice to reduce their negative impact on the environment.

Format: A branded section on the website with four multimedia thematic posts, including:

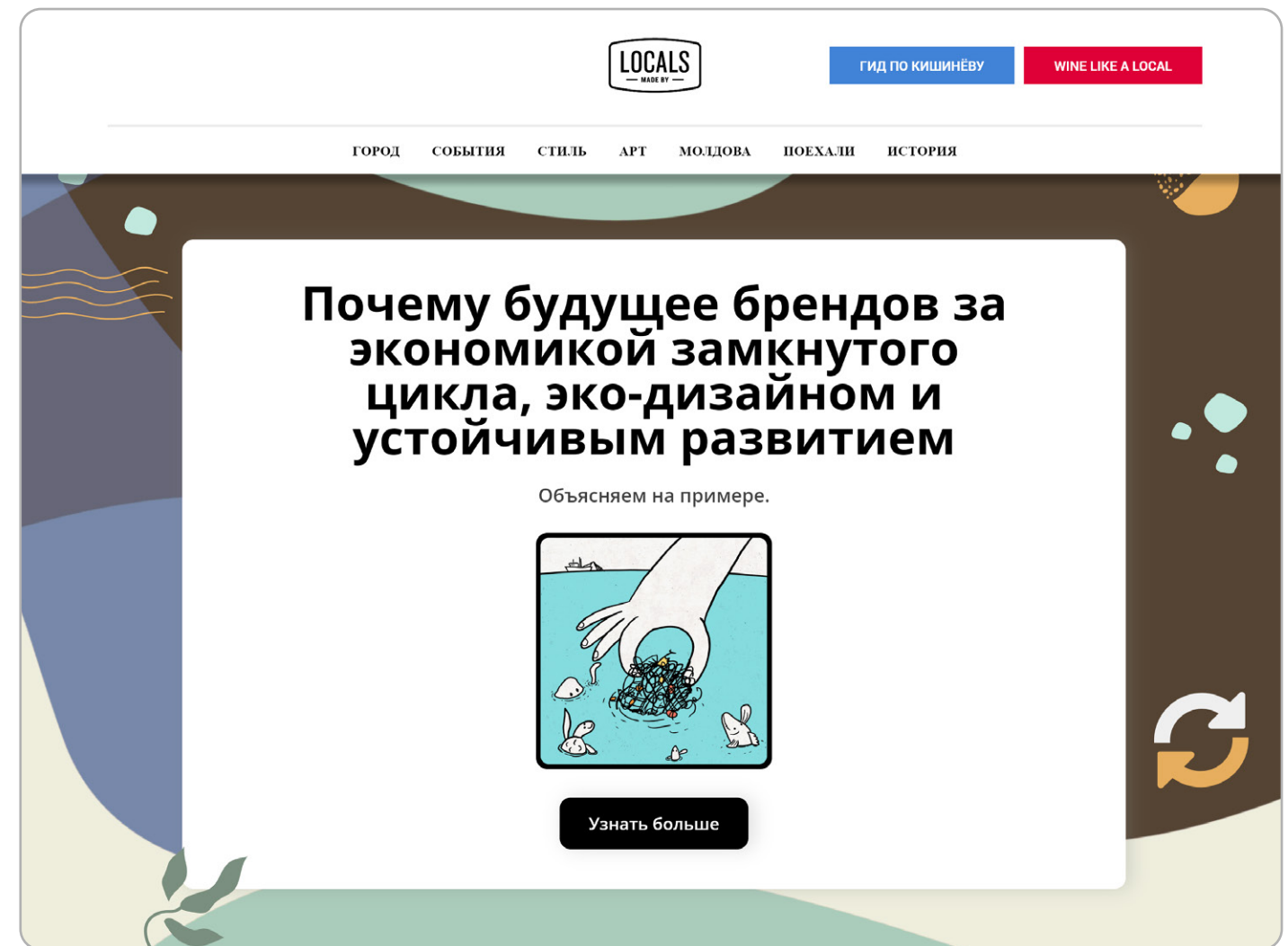
- [A quiz](#) on eco-friendly consumption trends.
- [An article](#) featuring five Moldovan eco-responsible companies and organisations.
- [An explainer](#) on why the future of brands lies in a circular economy, eco-design and sustainable development.
- [A guide](#) to e-waste recycling in Moldova.

Distribution:

Publication on the LOCALS website and distribution via social media.

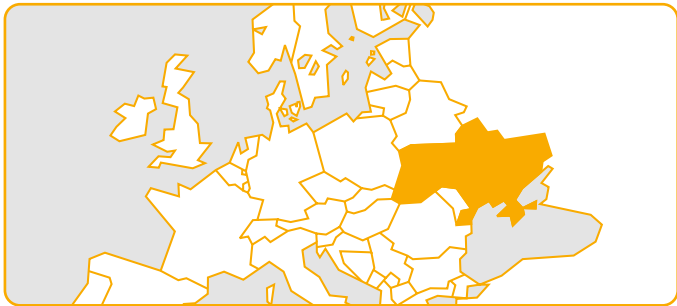
KPIs:

- The four materials on the publication’s website generated over 45,000 views.
- The social media posts reached over 360,000 people and received more than 1,500 likes and shares.
- 1.7 million banner displays.



[The “Smart Environment” special project](#)

5.2 ANNUAL CONTRACTS AND DEFINED MEDIA PLANS – VAROSH, UKRAINE



Ukraine is a former Soviet republic in Eastern Europe with a population of 44 million. Freedom House’s [2021 Freedom in the World](#) report rated the country as “Partly Free” in terms of political rights and civil liberties. Reporters Without Borders’ [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#) ranked Ukraine 97 of 180 countries, noting its “diversified media landscape.” Regarding internet freedom, Freedom House’s [2021 Freedom on the Net](#) report assessed the country as “Partly Free,” but with a “vibrant online media.” While media and internet advertising grew in 2020, “many online outlets struggle to remain financially viable in a market deeply distorted by media conglomerates.” IREX’s final [Media Sustainability Index](#) in 2019 found Ukraine’s indicator for business management by independent media to rank in the “Unsustainable Mixed System” category. According to [Statista](#), Ukraine’s digital advertising market was projected to reach \$301 million in 2021, a growth of 10%. The average ad spending per user for banner advertising, the leading segment of the market, was projected to amount to \$6.16 in 2021

Varosh

City: Uzhhorod (capital of the Zakarpattia region in western Ukraine, with 120,000 inhabitants)

Language: Ukrainian

Launch: 2014

Team: 7 people, including freelancers

Type of media: Digital city magazine

Audience:

- Website: 50,000-80,000 users/month
- Facebook: About 26,000 followers
- Instagram: 4,600+ followers

Native Advertising Focus: Annual Contracts and Defined Media Plans

Varosh was founded by a married couple of young professionals who returned to their native city after living for some time in Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital. They envision the digital magazine as an independent urban outlet for active and thoughtful residents who seek to improve their city and region and are ready to foster changes. In the Zakarpattia (Transcarpathian) dialect,

“varosh” means “city centre” and commonly refers to a central meeting point.

From its start, Varosh strove to monetize through sporadic advertorials written by the magazine’s editors and authors, but it lacked a systematic approach. In 2020, the team developed a business plan, created [a media kit](#), increased prices, and started working more consistently with potential advertisers.

The magazine launched the business plan by compiling a list of all companies with whom it had already worked in the past and identified 10 potential partners with whom it would like to cooperate on a more regular basis. Varosh targeted local and regional SMEs with well-known and reliable brands that had stable advertising budgets but lacked coherent marketing strategies. The editor held a series of face-to-face meetings with representatives of the targeted businesses and explained to them why communicating with their customers via an influential local media outlet could be mutually beneficial and effective. She offered the prospective partners annual

contracts centered around a series of 10-12 articles, with one published each month. The series would focus on one theme (i.e. health, travel, culture). However, at the beginning of every month, the topic of the scheduled article would be discussed and agreed upon with the client so that each part of the series would be relevant and interesting.

A number of companies agreed to the proposal. With a capacity to produce 10 advertising materials per month, Varosh administered five annual contracts in the first year, 2020-2021. The clients pay for each article before or immediately after its publication. According to the publisher, this annual model has several important advantages. The magazine can plan its budget and more effectively allocate resources for content creation, both editorial and advertorial. It is efficient because it saves time and energy by reducing the time spent on constantly recruiting and retaining clients, allowing the publication’s small editorial team to focus on content production.

5.2 ANNUAL CONTRACTS AND DEFINED MEDIA PLANS – VAROSH, UKRAINE

Advertising Market and Clients

varosh

In Ukraine, marketing and advertising agencies are concentrated in the capital and work mainly with national media. At the local or regional levels, there are no agencies that place advertising in media; local SMM agencies focus exclusively on social networks. Therefore, Varosh works with local businesses directly.

Unlike the majority of internet media, Varosh does not place banners on its website. Instead, the magazine focuses on creating quality commercial content and seeks to foster a new culture of promoting content advertising in its region.

“

If the client doesn't know what native advertising is, we explain. If the company still doesn't see a point in partnering with us, we don't waste time in trying to convince. I believe that it makes more sense to spend time targeting like-minded people who share our values. With them, we are ready to discuss cooperation at length and find the best solutions for their businesses.

”

Rosana Tuzhanska, cofounder
and editor-in-chief

The magazine is on a mission to explain to business owners and their marketing managers why it is important to invest in creating content that does not advertise their products or services directly but rather helps to strengthen their brands and build relations with customers. One such [example](#) is a long-form story about a unique Roma pop-jazz quartet and festival, which was sponsored by a local medical lab.

Among Varosh's regular advertisers are medical centres and labs, a reproductive health clinic, a beauty and wellness centre, car dealerships, and restaurants. Until recently, the magazine cooperated exclusively with local businesses and the

regional branches of national companies. In October 2021, Varosh partnered for the first time with a large national dairy brand, originating from Zakarpattia. It published an advertorial – [“25 must-haves for an autumn mountain hike”](#) – that was a breakthrough for a small local magazine.

Positive side effect: In the last few years, Varosh has partnered with several medical centres and started covering health topics on a regular basis. The editorial team noticed that its articles about health and wellness issues have proved to be very popular among readers. As a result, the magazine is now developing a dedicated “Health” section for its website.

5.2 ANNUAL CONTRACTS AND DEFINED MEDIA PLANS – VAROSH, UKRAINE

Content production

There is no division between editorial and commercial work; the magazine’s editorial team produces all commercial content. Editors, journalists and photographers work on both editorial and advertising articles. Team members enjoy developing both editorial and advertising materials, as both consist of quality content that is of interest and value to the magazine’s audience. The careful selection of business partners helps to ensure that there are no toxic clients or irrelevant topics for the magazine.

“

Native content does not conflict with editorial content. Our commercial articles are on topics that we want and like to cover as a media outlet. Therefore, our audience appreciates native projects as well.

”

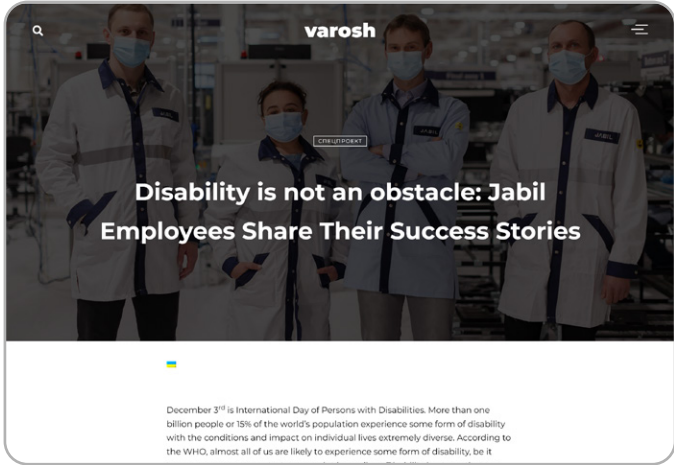
Rosana Tuzhanska, cofounder and editor-in-chief

The editor-in-chief also acts as the commercial director responsible for finding and working with business partners, managing contracts, and communicating with clients. Instead of a sales manager, the team hired another journalist last year in order to fulfill the growing demand for native advertising content production.

All native content is clearly marked as “advertising.” Since October 2021, each native piece has two markers – one at the beginning and one at the end of the post.

Formats:
The magazine mainly offers text and photo native advertising, with a focus on interviews, reports, human interest stories and long-form articles. The favorite genre of both the editorial team and advertisers tends to be interviews.

Technology:
Varosh runs on WordPress and uses its plugins to create various formats.



The “Disability is not an obstacle” special project



5.2 ANNUAL CONTRACTS AND DEFINED MEDIA PLANS – VAROSH, UKRAINE

Content Distribution and KPIs

varosh

All commercial articles appear on the magazine's website and its Facebook and Instagram pages. Journalists also share the articles on their individual social media pages and do it gladly as they are proud of the content they produce. Additionally, they distribute posts with links through thematic public pages and groups in social media.

Paid promotion via social networks is done at the client's request or when the target audience is located outside of the Zakarpattia region. For example, a reproductive health clinic sought to boost its clients from neighboring regions of Ukraine and nearby countries; Varosh therefore expanded its geographical reach through paid ads on Facebook and Instagram.

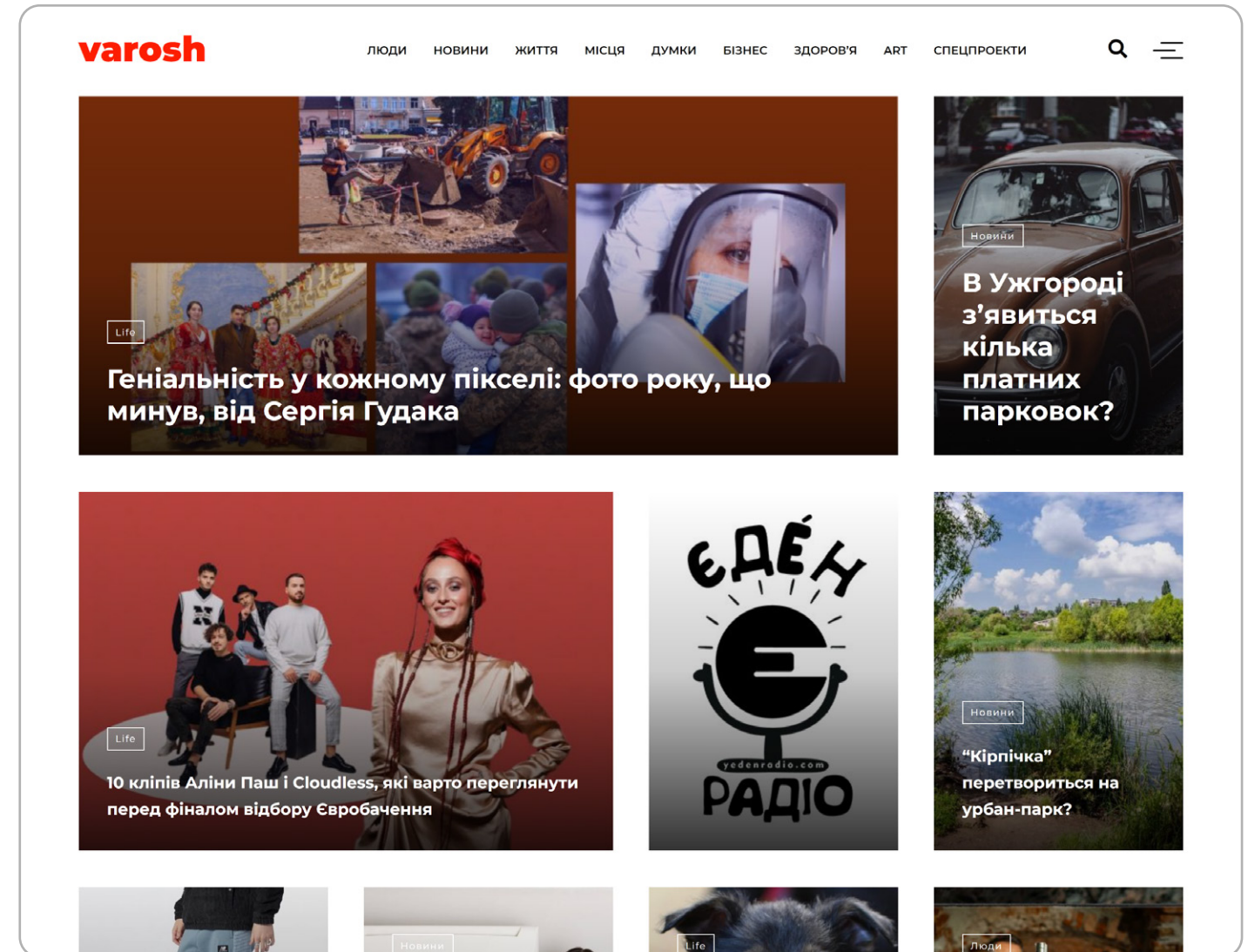
The average budget for the paid promotion of a publication is \$5-\$10 (with a maximum budget of \$50).

Varosh offers the following KPIs for its commercial materials:

- A minimum of 1,500 views on the website
- A 10,000-15,000 reach on Facebook

On average, its special projects generate 6,000 views, a very good indicator in Ukraine, even for national media websites. Some of Varosh's native advertising articles have reached 120,000 users on Facebook and generated more than 1,000 likes.

The level of media literacy among the magazine's clients varies greatly. The majority is satisfied with very basic performance reports, including links to the published materials and number of views. For sophisticated partners, the editorial team prepares more detailed reports or supplies specific indicators on a monthly basis.



Varosh's main page, featuring both editorial and native advertising content

5.2 ANNUAL CONTRACTS AND DEFINED MEDIA PLANS – VAROSH, UKRAINE

Native Advertising Example

varosh

Title: Partnership with a local medical centre

Period of implementation:
March – October 2021.

Objective: Using explanatory journalism that draws on simple words to discuss complex medical topics and dispel myths that negatively affect readers' health.

Format: Series of interviews with doctors from the partner medical clinic, illustrated with photos.

Distribution:

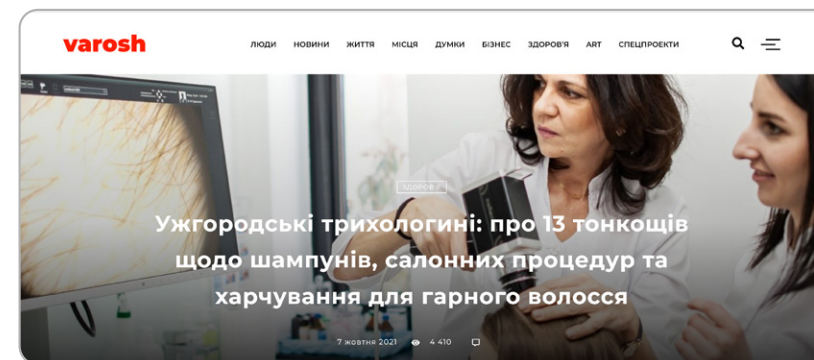
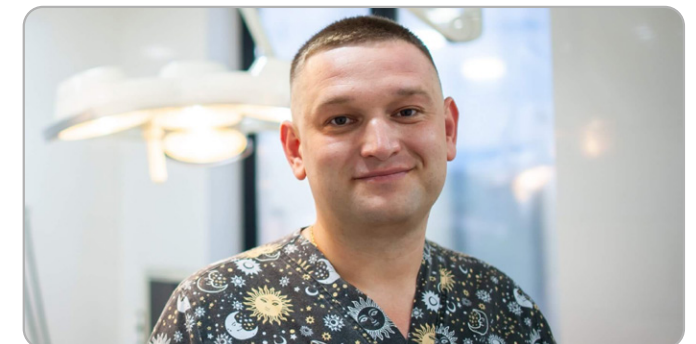
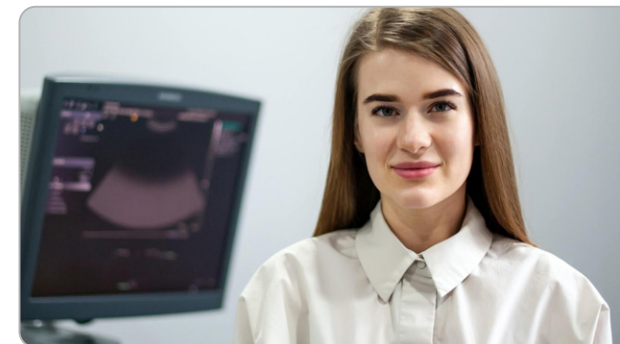
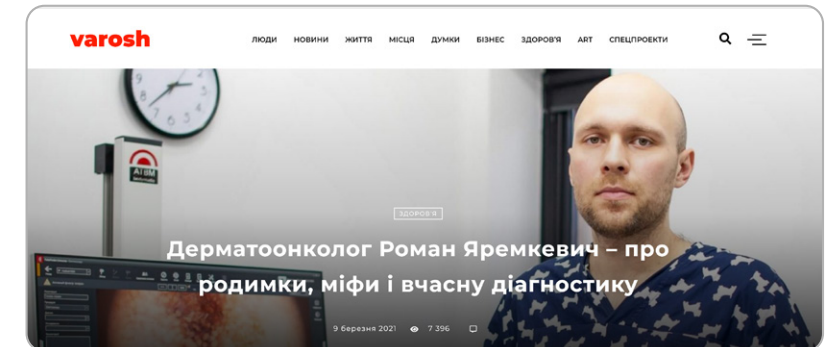
- Publication on Varosh's website and Facebook and Instagram pages.
- Paid promotion in social networks. Posts in thematic public groups in social media.

KPIs:

- The five articles on the website generated over 20,000 views.
- The Facebook posts reached over 100,000 people.

Results:

- An increase in the brand recognition of the partner.
- The development of the personal brands of the clinic's doctors featured in the project.
- A growth in lead generation, as readers contacted specialists after reading the interviews.



Click on the images to see the interviews from the partnership with a local medical centre series

5.3 A CREATIVE AGENCY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – PLATFOR.MA, UKRAINE

Platfor.ma

City: Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine
Language: Ukrainian
Launch: 2010 as an educational event calendar; 2013 as an internet magazine
Team: 5 people
Type of media: Digital magazine for the creative class
Audience:
• Website: 80,000 users/month
• Facebook: 63,000 followers
• Instagram: almost 4,500 followers

Native Advertising Focus:
A Creative Agency for Social Change

Platfor.ma (“platform” in Ukrainian and Russian) is an acknowledged leader in native advertising in Ukraine. It was founded in 2010 as an internet event calendar that collected, listed and promoted different educational

opportunities. In 2013, the website relaunched as a digital magazine, becoming an influential niche outlet focusing on career development and opportunities that reached more than 200,000 users a month. In 2017, the team decided to rethink its approach and focus solely on producing long-form, high-quality native materials, while moving away from what they defined as “lesser” formats. The magazine evolved into a creative agency that promotes social change and uses its website as a platform for distributing the agency’s native content.

Rather than offering the usual mix of articles and news posts, Platfor.ma publishes three news pieces per day as a “mini-format” and one long-form article per week or even biweekly. Its daily curated news posts help to promote important civic and social initiatives while, at the same time, allowing the website to

remain visible and relevant in the media landscape. These publishing changes naturally resulted in a decrease in traffic to the site, which now draws about 80,000 users per month.

The team does not, however, consider traffic to be the defining criterion for success. Instead, Platfor.ma now focuses on a new content distribution model: it designs a specific publishing and distribution approach for each native project, depending on its objectives and target audiences. The team works as a creative agency but with the advantage of possessing its own media; the outlet has built a quality audience and the team ensures a broad reach by also distributing its native content across other platforms. Moreover, Platfor.ma can charge more for its native projects than other, larger media, as its prices are not linked solely to traffic.

Initially, Platfor.ma was funded by foreign grants but the magazine soon adopted native advertising as its first monetization tool; today native advertising generates its main revenue stream. These projects also provided a springboard for the team to move beyond being just a media outlet and evolve into a creative agency. Currently, native advertising on the website and associated social media pages generates 60 percent of Platfor.ma’s revenue while the outsourcing of the agency’s creative services brings in the remaining 40 percent. Notably, all the agency’s native projects have a component of social importance and utilize storytelling.

“
What we offer is more than native advertising. We create value content produced with the support of a brand.
”
Julia Salizhenko, creative director

5.3 A CREATIVE AGENCY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – PLATFOR.MA, UKRAINE

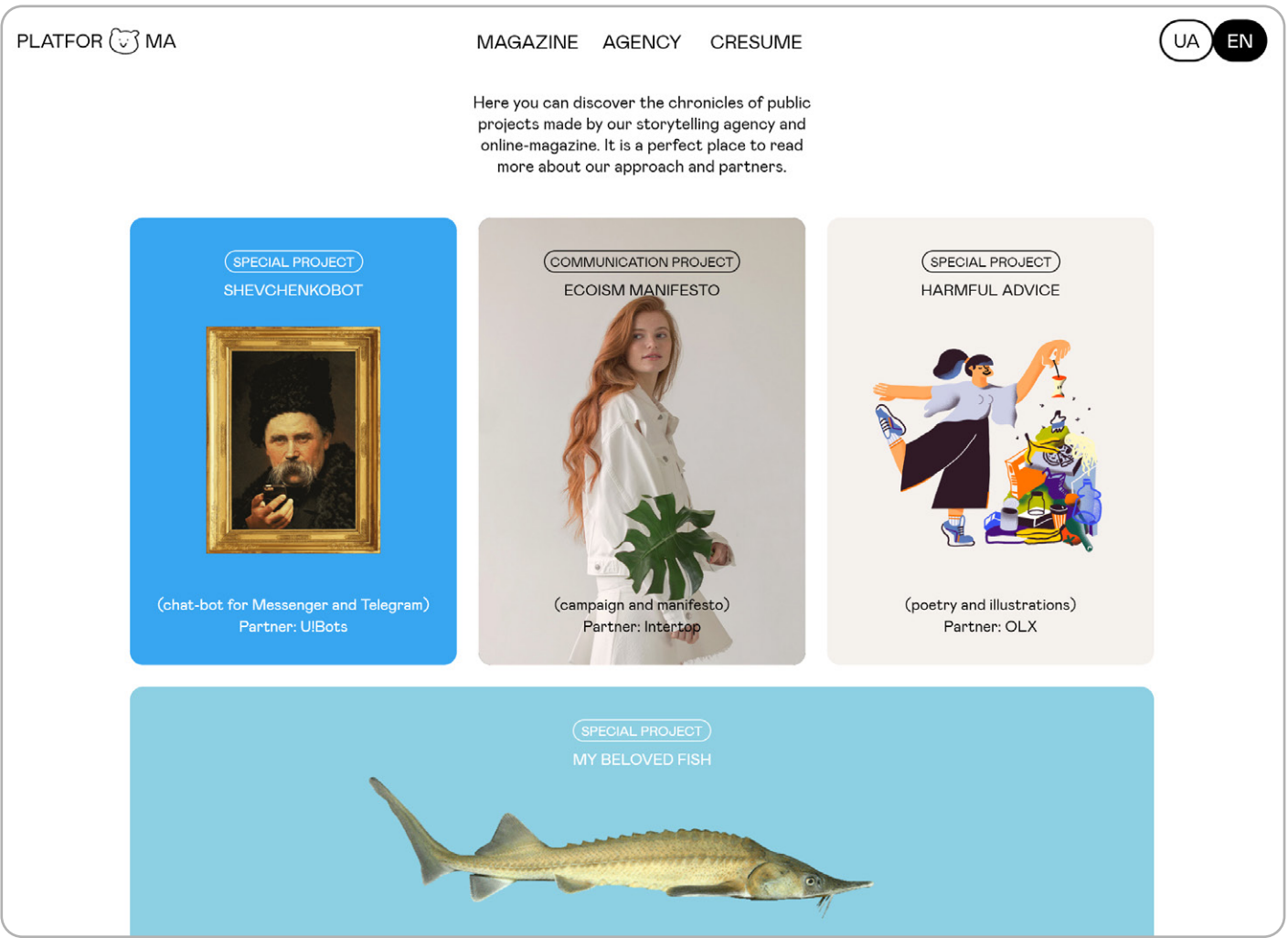
Advertising Market and Clients

Based in the capital, having a strong brand in the media and creative sectors, and driven by a professional and innovative team, Platfor.ma has secured a strong position in Ukraine’s advertising market and has no shortage of clients. Among its regular partners are leading Ukrainian businesses, particularly those from the booming IT sector, including well-known global electronics and computer brands. The team also works with international organisations such as UNICEF, the UN, the WHO and others, cultural institutions, and national NGOs.

True to its fundamental values, the agency has a strict policy of not partnering with alcohol and tobacco brands, pharmaceutical companies, casinos and other gambling institutions, and not representing any political interests.

The team also screens the ownership of its potential clients and chooses not to work with those founded or funded by Russian oligarchs.

While some of Platfor.ma’s native projects are light and entertaining, all have social significance. Sometimes, companies that have contracted with the agency to produce creative ideas or organize PR campaigns end up becoming Platfor.ma’s partners and sponsoring special projects on important social issues not directly related to the companys’ fields of work. This was the case with a well-known global IT startup of Ukrainian origin that first came to the agency as a commercial client and now sponsors the “[Medical Leaders](#)” special project that promotes family doctors as part of the reform of Ukraine’s healthcare system.



Platfor.ma’s landing page, including links to the creative agency’s special projects

5.3 A CREATIVE AGENCY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – PLATFOR.MA, UKRAINE

Content Production

The agency’s core team consists of five people: a creative director, who also acts as a project and financial manager, an editor-in-chief, an art director responsible for visual style and design, an author, and an account manager who is in charge of communicating with partners. The agency plans to hire two more “universal content creators,” as its number of projects is increasing.

The agency works as one creative unit, with the same team working on Platfor.ma-based special projects and on outsourcing contracts. Work on any project starts with a client filing a [brief](#) that is available on the website. In practice, most clients contact the agency by telephone or email and request the brief.

Based on information provided in the obligatory brief, the team offers the client either a special project on Platfor.ma itself or an outsourcing campaign in other media.

Once the format is agreed on, the agency generates three ideas for the planned project or campaign. This stage normally requires a week. The team also might include a research stage, which requires an additional 3-7 days, in order to identify any major “pain points” before developing a complex project idea selected by the client. This was the case when Platfor.ma was tasked to come up with a [“Taxi driver code of conduct”](#) for a delivery company. The team first conducted in-depth interviews with 10 drivers before starting to craft a project idea.

Once the client approves the project idea, the team draws up a contract, has it signed, and only then moves on to the production stage. It prepares and presents to the client a detailed content plan. The team also provides visual references for the future project and discusses the tone and voice of the writing. Normally, the agency designs a unique visual style for each project.

The team clearly marks all native advertising content. The partner’s logo appears on the first screen of the publication. The lead to the article states that it has been created “in partnership with...” At the end of the article, there is a promo frame with the name of and a short introduction to the partner. In the agency’s long-form projects, this frame also appears in the middle of the text. The partner’s brand is tagged in all social media posts.

Formats:
Platfor.ma offers only two native advertising formats: a [news post](#) for a fixed price of \$380 and a [special thematic project](#) that starts at \$3,800.

Technology:
Platfor.ma runs on WordPress. It creates the majority of its special projects on Tilda. For very complex projects, which require developing unique front- and back-ends, the team hires external programmers.

“
We treat our clients as partners with whom we are in the same boat. It is in our common interest to produce a great project, which the audience will love. The clients have a right to voice their opinion. When our partners suggest some changes, we try to react calmly and be open-minded. If the change is justified and doesn’t harm the project, we can agree. In some cases, we need to insist on our vision, explain and even educate our partners, but we do so politely. This applies to both content and design. If the situation hits a dead end, I prefer to have a call with the client and talk it through. Conversation is usually more productive than an endless chain of emails and messages, where emotions might be misconstrued. Such an approach helps to avoid conflicts.
”

Julia Salizhenko, creative director

5.3 A CREATIVE AGENCY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – PLATFOR.MA, UKRAINE

Content Distribution and KPIs

The Platfor.ma team is attuned to trends and rapid changes in media consumption and diversification. Therefore, it does not consider the magazine's website to be its anchor platform, but focuses on broader content distribution. The team delivers its content on platforms that are native to the target audience of a specific project. With this approach, users are more likely to see content that is designed for them, get and understand the messages of the campaign, and recognize the partner's brand.

For each special project or campaign, Platfor.ma produces internally a content distribution map. In most cases, the team creates a branded landing page with text and illustrations on the website. If it is normal for the project's target audience to consume information on Instagram, the project's content is also packaged as "[Stories](#)" and then distributed there. If Facebook is the natural habitat of the

target audience, the content is packaged for its [photo gallery](#). Each week, the team publishes two-three posts about the project on various platforms and writes about it in its e-newsletter, which has over 5,000 subscribers.

Platfor.ma's main content distribution channels are Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, and its e-newsletter. If a project requires a broader reach, including in the country's regions, Platfor.ma may recruit local opinion leaders, place press releases in key media outlets, and partner with regional TV stations. In this case, Platfor.ma assumes the role of a PR agency. One such example was a [communication campaign on "The Day of Cancer Survivors"](#), for which Platfor.ma's team created a separate landing page and also spread it across different media outlets and platforms reaching over 6 million people.

Paid promotion in social media is usually included in a project budget, but the team always starts with distributing the content organically to see if it resonates with the audience and then decides if a paid boost is needed.

It is important that, according to Platfor.ma's model, the team distributes and promotes large special projects over a long period of time, at least one month, with regular posts in social media that share interesting facts and engage with users. The objective is to multiply and maximize the created content.

The main KPI is the total number of contacts with the target audience, which includes the number of views on the website and the project's reach on social media. For Platfor.ma, the number of views on social networks and messengers carry the same weight as views on the site.

Qualitative indicators include comments and reposts. The team tracks and saves screenshots with reposts and comments in social media. The team also has a dedicated Slack channel, where team members can share links and other feedback they receive regarding the project. This is very important for the team and the client.

At the end of the project's implementation, the partner receives a detailed performance report with KPIs and 2-3 screenshots with reposts and feedback.

5.3 A CREATIVE AGENCY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – PLATFOR.MA, UKRAINE

Native Advertising Example

Title: Education in Overdrive

Period of implementation: April-July 2019

Objective: To motivate Ukrainians to capitalize on opportunities to study abroad, in particular through the Erasmus+ program.

Creative idea and formats: Erasmus+ is the EU’s largest educational program; it aims to improve education and to create new life possibilities for participants. Unlike students in many European countries, Ukrainians do not have a tradition of studying abroad. Ukrainians generally see going to university in Europe as something too difficult, very expensive, and available only for a chosen few.

After conducting audience analysis, the team concluded that the biggest challenge was not a lack of motivation,

as previously thought; on the contrary, many Ukrainians would like to study abroad. The real problem was accessibility. When presenting the opportunity to study abroad, the program’s organizers tended to employ complicated language and terminology, while important and practical information was often located in hard-to-find places online.

Respondents also noted that there were no stories about real-life Ukrainians who had been accepted and studied in Europe. In existing materials, participants were presented as some kind of superstars, while counterparts wanted to read stories about how someone normal, even ordinary, could come by the chance to study abroad. Because of this approach, those interested tended to think that few Ukrainians were actually studying in the EU and saw no point in even trying to apply to study abroad programs.



The “Education in Overdrive” special project

5.3 A CREATIVE AGENCY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – PLATFOR.MA, UKRAINE

Native Advertising Example



The “Education in Overdrive” special project

To make the idea of studying abroad more accessible and user-friendly, the team updated the visual style of the Erasmus+ program’s materials to make them simpler and more attractive. Together with Erasmus+ experts, Platfor.ma transformed the lengthy and complex materials about education abroad into a handy, simple-to-use and easily navigated content map. In addition, the team produced [stories of real people, real Ukrainians](#) – students, young professionals, and teachers – and their educational experiences in the EU. Each of the stories represented a segment of the project’s target audience. Finally, Platfor.ma created [a quiz](#) to help readers assess their chances of qualifying for education abroad. Spoiler alert: no matter how badly you do on the test, there is always a chance.

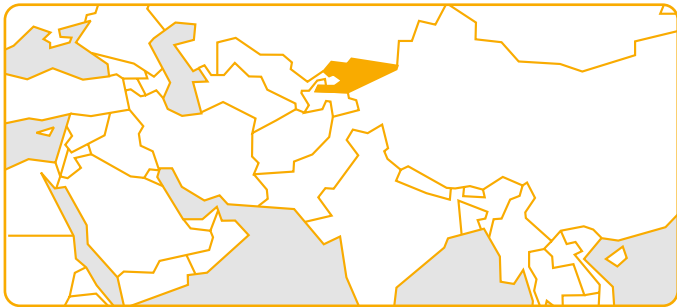
Distribution:

- Publication on the website and targeted distribution in social media.

- KPIs:**
- 449,300 total contacts
 - 30% share coefficient
 - > 04:00 minute average time on page
- Results:**
- Target audience reached across all regions.
 - Positive feedback from students and teachers.
 - The EU Delegation to Ukraine uses the content map and materials created by Platfor.ma for this project to explain and promote the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ program.

See more examples of Platfor.ma’s special projects [here](#) (in English).

5.4 NATIVE-ONLY CONTENT MONETIZATION – KLOOP, KYRGYZSTAN



Kyrgyzstan is a former Soviet republic in Central Asia with a population of 6.6 million. Freedom House’s 2021 [Freedom in the World](#) report rated the country as “Not Free” in terms of political rights and civil liberties. Reporters Without Borders’ 2021 [World Press Freedom Index](#) ranked Kyrgyzstan 79 of 180 countries, noting that “the pluralism of the Kyrgyz media is exceptional in Central Asia.” Regarding internet freedom, Freedom House’s 2021 [Freedom on the Net](#) report assessed the country as “Partly Free” and in decline; it cited reports that the “government skews the advertising market” and that “media outlets are seldom able to generate the appropriate cash flow to assure their independence.” IREX’s final [Media Sustainability Index](#) in 2019 found Kyrgyzstan’s indicator for business management by independent media to rank in the “Unsustainable Mixed System” category. According to [Statista](#), ad spending in the digital advertising market was projected to reach \$17 million in 2021, a growth of 12%. The average ad spending per user for social media advertising was projected to amount to \$2.51 in 2021.

Kloop

Cities: Bishkek, the capital (Russian-language editorial team and commercial department), and Osh (Kyrgyz-language office), in southern Kyrgyzstan

Languages: Russian, Kyrgyz, Uzbek

Launch: 2007

Team: 35-40 people, including two in the commercial department

Type of media: News website specializing in citizen and investigative journalism

Audience:

- Facebook: 134,000 followers
- Instagram: 82,000+ followers
- YouTube: almost 82,000 subscribers

Native Advertising Focus: Native-only Content Monetization

Kloop is one of the leading independent media outlets in Kyrgyzstan. It was founded by young civic activists and is known for its innovative use of technology and citizen journalism school. Even though

Kloop is a household name among media in Central Asia, the origins and meaning of its title are shrouded in legend. The founders do not disclose the secret even to the publication’s staff.

Kloop is produced in Russian and Kyrgyz. Some of the content appearing in Russian is translated into two other languages, but the Kyrgyz editorial team also produces its own original content, as the interests of the website’s Russian-, Kyrgyz- and Uzbek-speaking audiences differ. Kloop targets readers aged 25 and older across the country, but its core audience is located in the capital of Bishkek. More women than men read the website due to its focus on gender issues.

Funded mainly by grants in 2018, Kloop began utilizing native advertising that same year as a means to diversify its revenue streams. With talented and creative personnel, the team decided that native advertising better fit Kloop’s

mission and vision than any other model of content monetization. In 2020, the website completely abandoned banner ads.



The “Heroes among us” special video project

Following a growing demand among clients for promo videos, especially for social media, and engaging with customers, Kloop decided to capitalize on this trend by specializing in producing native videos, quizzes and games. While Kloop publishes these on its website, clients can also post them on their own social media pages or use them in paid promo campaigns.

5.4 NATIVE-ONLY CONTENT MONETIZATION – KLOOP, KYRGYZSTAN

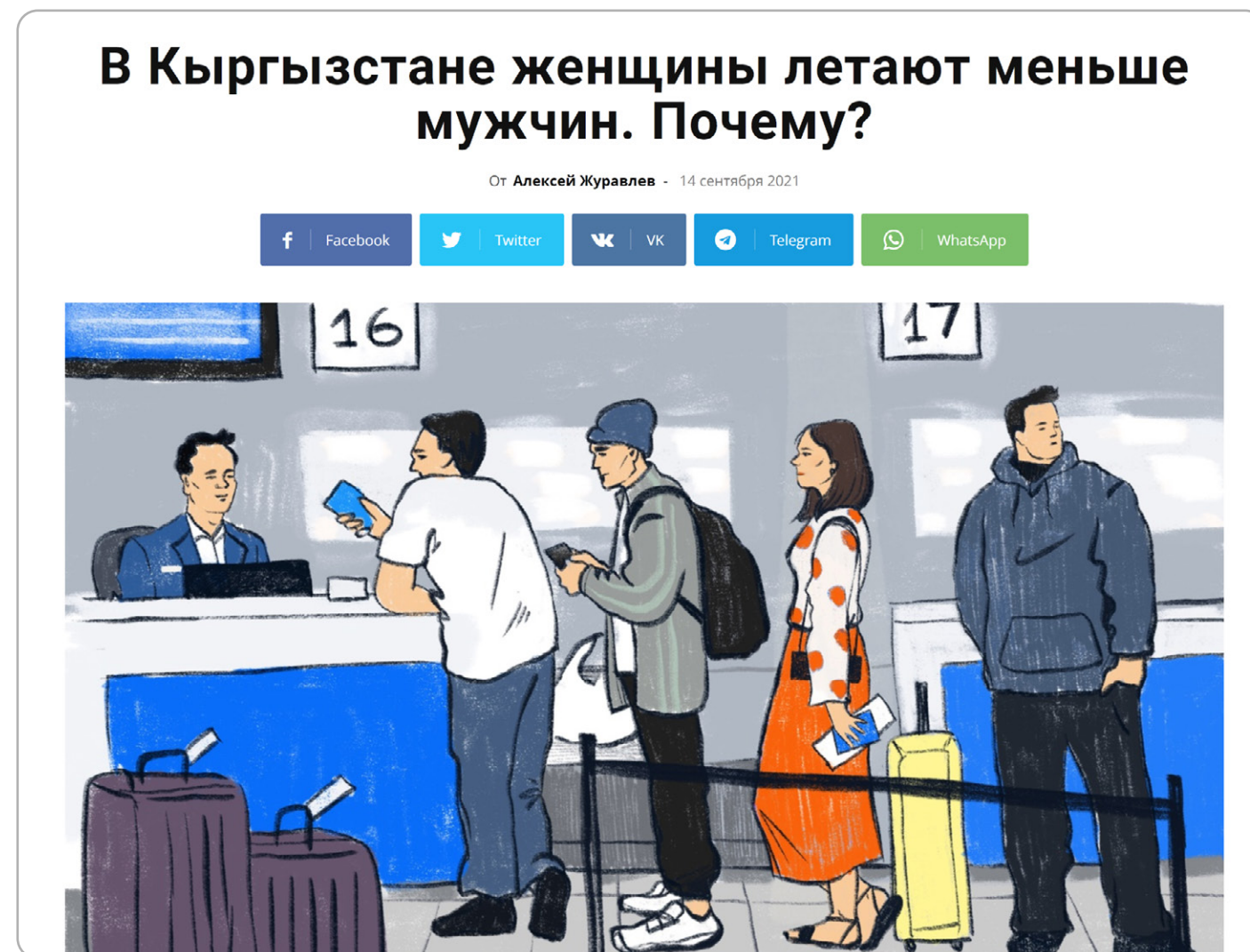
Advertising Market and Clients



As in many other emerging markets, native advertising is still a new and somewhat alien concept in Kyrgyzstan. Large companies with solid advertising budgets can afford the format, but their owners and managers often lack the skills needed for digital marketing, which often leads to misunderstandings with media outlets about the product and expected results. Productive communication between the outlets and advertisers is a frequent challenge. SMEs prefer the cheaper option of paid promotion via social networks and are more interested in generating clicks than in building relations with customers.

Relatively new to the native advertising field, Kloop is still building its client base. However, the publication managed to secure [a long-term partnership with a popular airline ticket website](#); it publishes regular advertorials based on a content plan and receives a commission from tickets sold via the partner's widget that is embedded in Kloop's website. The publication also cooperates with a number of international organisations, a leading mobile telephone operator, restaurants and others.

Despite many businesses still preferring banners to content ads, Kloop sees a strong potential for native advertising and plans to put more effort into creating and promoting native content in the Kyrgyz language. The team is proud to have dedicated partners with whom it shares common values and interests.



The “Why women in Kyrgyzstan fly less than men” advertorial

5.4 NATIVE-ONLY CONTENT MONETIZATION – KLOOP, KYRGYZSTAN

Content Production

The publication’s editorial and commercial departments are strictly divided. The commercial team consists of two staff – a director and a native editor – and hires freelance authors to produce native content. The editorial team is not involved in the creation of content for or management of commercial projects so that it remains fully independent.

The commercial director is responsible for finding and negotiating with the clients as well as managing the native projects. At the initial meeting with a potential client, the commercial director and native editor discuss general plans and needs. To follow up, the client fills out a brief with questions about the objectives, target audience, tone of voice and style of the future publication. Based on this information, Kloop’s commercial director and editor generate 2-3 project ideas. Once the client approves one of the proposed project ideas, the team

starts preparing the material. It hires freelance authors, photographers and videographers when necessary.

When the draft is ready, the team shares the text and other materials with the client for review via a Google document. With commercial clients, one series of edits usually suffices. With large international organisations, such as the UN, several rounds of editing and approving are often required due to these clients’ complex structures and protocols. To optimize the time spent on each project, the team is considering limiting the number of editing cycles to three and mandating this in its contracts. The clients pay Kloop after the publication of the final materials.

Despite the glass wall between the editorial and commercial teams, the two are united by Kloop’s mission and professional standards. Its current

commercial editor joined the website as a freelance journalist in 2017, became a staff reporter in 2019, and was offered her current position in 2020.

“

I like my job because it stimulates my professional development, as I constantly generate creative ideas and work with different formats. I don’t feel burned out because I’m not focused on the news cycle, which is pretty grim in Kyrgyzstan.

”

Aizirek Imanalieva, commercial editor

Kloop’s commercial publications often raise awareness about important social issues. For example, a recent advertorial for the airplane ticket website revealed that women fly less frequently than men in Kyrgyzstan and explained the underlying gender inequality reasons

for it. One of the native quizzes was dedicated to the flaws and corruption plaguing Kyrgyzstan’s judicial system.

Kloop clearly marks all native content as “created in partnership with...” at the beginning and at the end of its text publications and at the end of its video materials.

Formats:

- Video
- Interactive formats, mainly quizzes and games
- Advertorials

Technology:

Kloop does not have an in-house IT specialist. For interactive formats and long-read pieces, it depends on subscriptions to external services and tools, such as Genial.ly, Riddle.com, Calconic and Tilda, which are used by both the editorial and commercial teams.

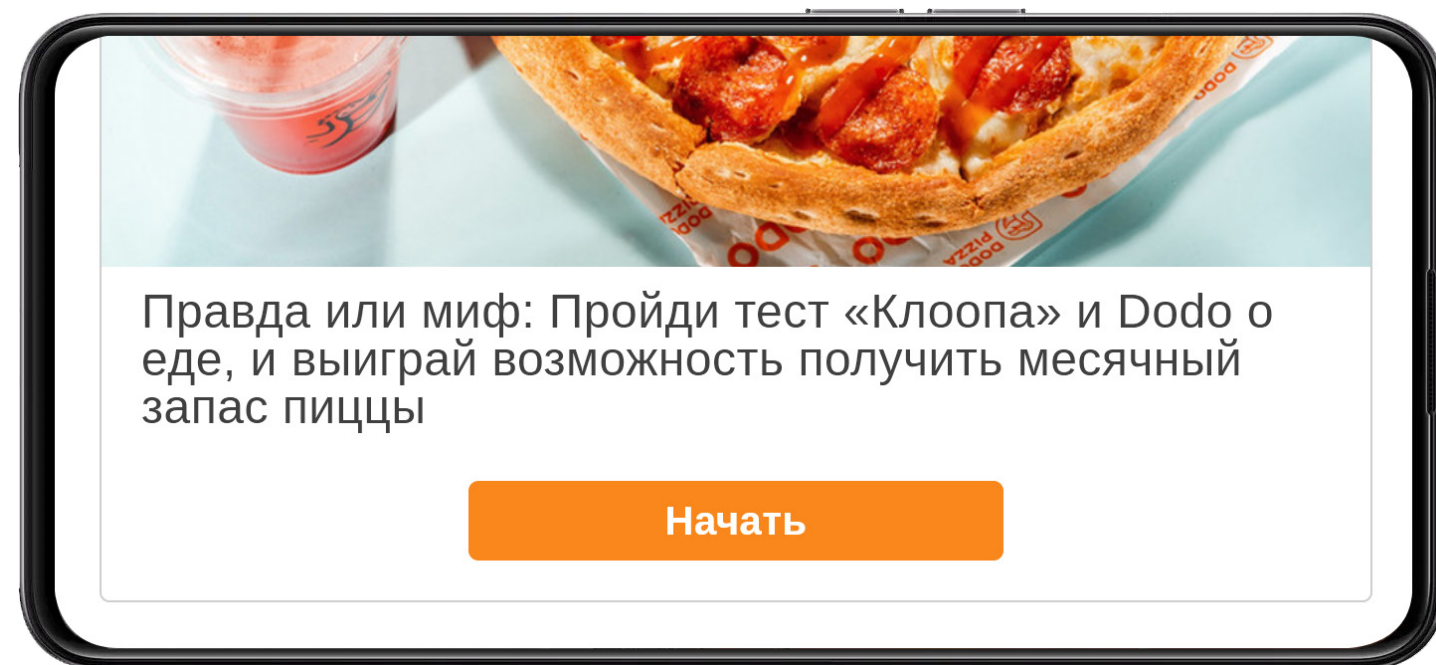
5.4 NATIVE-ONLY CONTENT MONETIZATION – KLOOP, KYRGYZSTAN

Content Distribution and KPIs

In addition to publishing native materials on its website and social pages, Kloop also runs paid promotions on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and, more often recently, on TikTok, at clients' requests. Advertorials that involve complex issues or policies (i.e. materials created in partnership with the UN and other international organisations), as well as native advertising pieces in Kyrgyz, usually require boosting in order to reach broader audiences. The extent of a promo campaign depends on the client's budget, but normally starts at \$30.

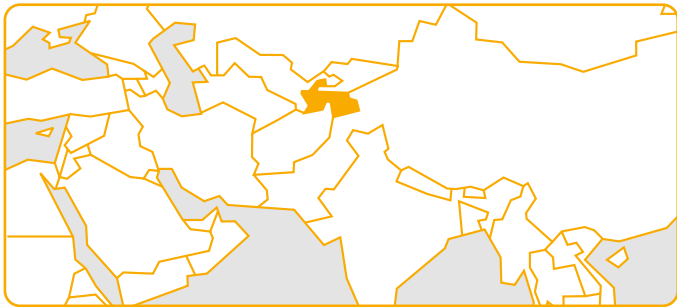
Occasionally, Kloop organizes online contests with prizes. [For example](#), those who successfully passed a test about food, prepared in partnership with a pizzeria, could win a monthly supply of pizza.

Kloop uses views and engagement rates as KPIs, but does not disclose the baseline numbers publicly; it also compiles and submits performance reports to its clients.



[A special project test produced in partnership with a pizzeria](#)

5.5 NATIVE PODCASTS AND VIDEO STORIES – YOUR.TJ, TAJIKISTAN



Tajikistan is a former Soviet republic in Central Asia with a population of 9.5 million. Freedom House’s [2021 Freedom in the World](#) report assessed the country as “Not Free,” noting that the government targets independent outlets, routinely blocks critical websites, and harasses independent journalists. Its [2021 Nations in Transit](#) report indicated that the authorities increased restrictions on independent media in 2020. Reporters without Borders’ [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#) ranked Tajikistan 162 of 180 countries, stressing that “government pressure compounded by an economic crisis has resulted in the closure of most independent media outlets.” IREX’s final [Media Sustainability Index](#) in 2019 found Tajikistan’s indicator for business management by independent media to be in the “Unsustainable Mixed System” category due to a poor economic situation and “lack of a full-fledged market policy.” According to [Statista](#), ad spending in the digital advertising market was projected to reach \$16 million in 2021, a growth of 5%. The average ad spending per user in the social media advertising segment of the market was projected to amount to \$3.41 in 2021.

YOUR.TJ

City: Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan

Languages: Tajik and Russian

Launch: January 2020

Team: 10 people, including four in the commercial department

Type of media: National socio-political online magazine

Audience:

- Website: 70,000 users/month
- Facebook: 17,000+ followers (reach of 2.8 million and engagement rate of 1 million)
- YouTube: 4,500 subscribers
- Instagram: 3,500 follower

Native Advertising Focus: Native Podcasts and Video Stories with Multiplatform Distribution

A group of experienced journalists founded YOUR magazine. Registered in October 2019 as a news agency (the only possible way to register online

media in Tajikistan), the launch of the magazine coincided with the onset of the pandemic. YOUR targets citizens 25-45 years old who care about their country and its opinion leaders. Its name is a play on an English and Tajik word: “your” in Tajik means “a friend.” The name conveys the magazine’s philosophy of being close with its audience and a friend for its readers. YOUR specializes in creating educational content with a focus on people with disabilities and their families, their socialization, overcoming stereotypes, etc.

The website is published in Tajik and Russian. However, the content is not duplicated because the publication’s Tajik- and Russian-speaking audiences do not overlap. The Tajik website version is read mainly in the country’s rural areas; the Russian version is popular in urban areas and among Tajiks living abroad. But both audience segments consume

the magazine’s videos. Interestingly, YOUR’s video content is also popular in Ukraine, where there is an active movement of parents of children with disabilities and, therefore, a high demand for quality content of this type in the Russian language.

From the magazine’s start, its founders planned that native advertising would be the main source of income. The team hoped to do away with the pseudo native formats of paid press releases and PR articles, which dominate the market, but hasn’t been able to completely eliminate them. Nevertheless, the emphasis is still on developing native content, which currently generates about 70 percent of revenue.

5.5 NATIVE PODCASTS AND VIDEO STORIES – YOUR.TJ, TAJIKISTAN

Native advertising is new and not very well understood in Tajikistan. The majority of businesses prefer direct and positive ads, which are usually paid PR articles or press releases. Normally, businesses do not want to raise difficult topics. To accustom the market to native advertising, YOUR's editor-in-chief meets with business associations and explains its advantages. At the same time, the magazine works on expanding its portfolio of interesting native projects.

Since YOUR has its own audio and video (AV) studio and expertise in multimedia production, the team decided to specialize in native podcasts and video stories. YOUR's inaugural clients were international organisations and Tajik NGOs looking for new ways to raise public awareness about important social issues. The magazine's [initial series of native podcasts – on the history of the world economy](#) – was created in

partnership with a local NGO. It was noticed by the publication's audience and became a good example for attracting commercial clients. The first project involving commercial podcasts was [“I've got a question”](#), a series of expert talks produced in partnership with one of the country's leading mobile telephone operators.

Special podcast projects are currently YOUR's top selling native format. A thematic project usually consists of 10 podcasts with two published per month.



[The “I've got a question” special podcast project](#)

5.5 NATIVE PODCASTS AND VIDEO STORIES – YOUR.TJ, TAJIKISTAN

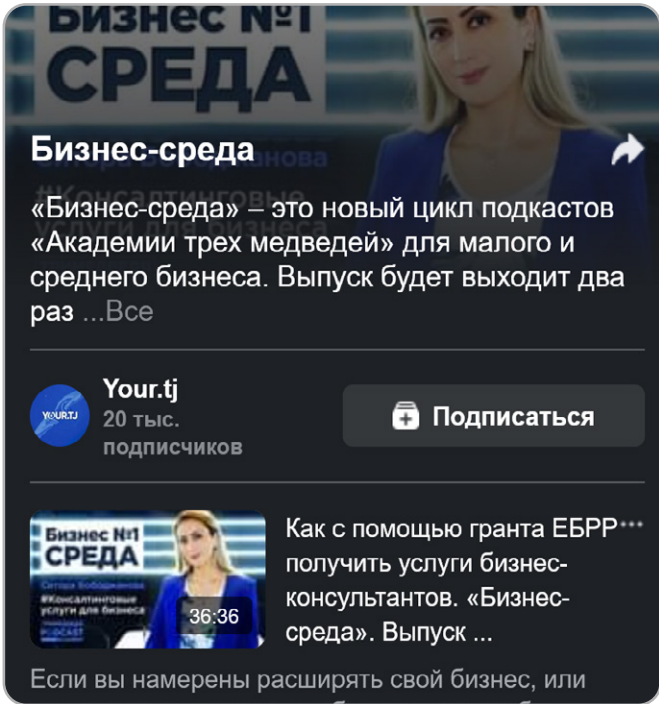
Advertising Market and Clients

Mobile telephone operators, banks and microcredit organisations are the most active advertisers in Tajikistan. Mobile operators still prefer to place paid press releases across different media without adapting them or even changing their headlines, which results in reductions in search traffic and annoys audiences. Financial institutions favor using events and contests to promote their services.

YOUR has succeeded in attracting and retaining clients from both of these segments. Another important group of partners is international organisations

and NGOs. With them, the magazine realizes native advertising contracts, not grants, and considers this to be its unique selling point on the Tajik market. In 2021, for example, YOUR implemented a special video stories project – “[The business environment](#)” – in partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

The magazine is expanding into other sectors as well. In November 2021, the publication launched its first ever special podcast project in partnership with [a medical centre](#).



“The business environment” special video stories project

“
Convincing companies to invest in native advertising is still very hard. Many do not realize that it is possible to promote their business through their own expertise and in partnership with professional media. It helps when a company has managers who are already familiar with native formats and appreciate them, but this is rarely the case.”

Zebo Tadjibaeva,
founder and editor-in-chief

5.5 NATIVE PODCASTS AND VIDEO STORIES – YOUR.TJ, TAJIKISTAN

Content Production

As a new media outlet, YOUR employs a pro-active approach to cultivating clients. The team conducts market research, identifies potential partners and comes up with project ideas that might be interesting for specific companies. Project ideas are usually generated by the magazine’s commercial department, which includes an editor-in-chief, a commercial director, a creative editor, and a podcast/video producer. The commercial director is responsible for sales, signing contracts, project management and communication with clients.

There is no glass wall between the editorial and commercial departments. YOUR editors and journalists produce both editorial and advertorial content. However, the editor-in-chief does not participate in the management of commercial projects or meetings with commercial clients, but is in charge of the special native projects

done in partnership with international organisations and NGOs. In the future, YOUR plans to create a separate native advertising department and to divide commercial and editorial production, but this process requires additional resources that the magazine currently lacks.

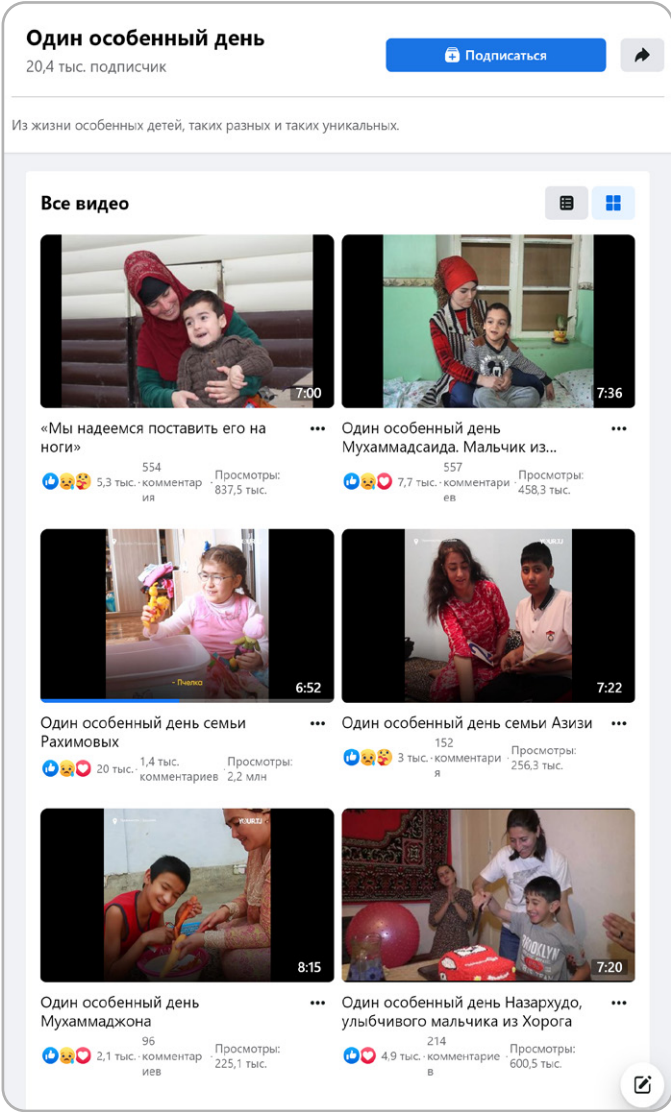
YOUR aims to partner only with reliable companies with good reputations. It tries to make every commercial publication useful and visually attractive. As a result, the magazine’s team has not received negative feedback from its readers regarding its native projects. On the contrary, they often generate substantive public discussions.

There is no law regulating native advertising in Tajikistan. Nevertheless, YOUR marks all its native materials as “Created in partnership with...” Descriptions for its YouTube posts also indicate if the video contains advertising.

Native podcasts include disclaimers stating that they were created in partnership with a client but include no other direct advertising of the client’s brand or services.

Formats:
YOUR specializes in native podcasts in the form of expert discussions and video stories on important social topics. An example of the latter is the “One special day” video series, which is about the life of families with autistic children, created in partnership with a parents’ association. YOUR text explainers with questions and answers are also popular among its clients.

Technology:
YOUR runs on WordPress and uses its plugins, i.e. AddTwenty20 – a “before and after” photo slider. The magazine has its own AV studio. The team used Ex.co for creating quizzes before the service changed its pricing policy.



The “One special day” special video stories project

5.5 NATIVE PODCASTS AND VIDEO STORIES – YOUR.TJ, TAJIKISTAN

Content Distribution and KPIs

Since podcasts alone do not generate many plays, YOUR produces two versions – audio and video – of its native materials. The magazine disseminates the audio version across 12 podcast platforms. YOUR publishes the video version on its website and YouTube, Facebook and Instagram pages. This multiplatform approach to content distribution provides for a significant increase in the reach, which, in turn, allows the magazine to develop more native projects.

For the magazine, Facebook tends to generate more views than YouTube. For example, the most popular video of the “One special day” series generated almost 2 million views, 18,000 likes and over 1,300 comments on Facebook alone.

Unlike in most other regions, audiences in Central Asia widely view Instagram as an information rather than an entertainment platform, therefore, news content there is more popular than lifestyle images.

YOUR occasionally utilizes paid promotion on Facebook and Instagram. A budget of \$4 is usually enough for the promotion of one post. For some clients, such as financial institutions or a medical centre, the magazine organizes online contests at the end of its native materials that result in some viewers winning prizes or gift certificates.

The majority of customers set very general objectives, such as an increase of brand awareness or loyalty, without any requirements that measure results and they do not ask for any KPIs or performance reports.

YOUR employs the following KPIs for its commercial materials:

- The number of views on the website
- 15,000 views and plays of a podcast/video
- At least 150,000-200,000 views and plays of a series
- The engagement rate on social media

6. The Native Advertising Toolkit

TILDA PUBLISHING



Summary: Website builder. Good for creating landing pages for long-read articles, editorials and advertorials as well as selling and service pages, such as media kits, online shops, event pages, etc.

Advantages:

- Large library of ready-to-use content blocks, including for creating quizzes and tests that will look like dedicated pages on your website.
- Doesn't require any coding.

Disadvantages: Well-known and broadly used. Most websites and pages created with Tilda have a similar look in terms of design, layout and animation styles. Therefore, your page might have a typical Tilda look and not appear as your original project.

Language versions:

English, French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Russian, Ukrainian, and Japanese.

Price:

- Free basic version includes design and support for one website with a limited choice of content blocks.
- Professional version prices start at \$20/month and offer the possibility of exporting the code and integrating it into your website, which will work autonomously from the website builder.

Examples: [1](#) / [2](#)

Alternatives:

- [Squarespace](#) website builder. Language: English. No free version (prices start at \$12/month).
- [Readymag](#) website builder. Language: English. Free version available.

INFOGRAM



Summary: Data visualization and infographics platform. Allows the creation of charts, diagrams and dashboards. Can be used for creating interactive maps, graphic designs for posts in social media, and thumbnails for videos on YouTube.

Advantages:

- Free version for creating and sharing infographics.
- Easy to use.
- Good tool for publishers who rarely use data visualization.

Language: English

Price:

- Free basic version.
- Professional version subscription packages start at \$19/month.

Alternatives:

- [Tableau](#) data visualization and infographics platform. Good for editorial teams working extensively with data visualization.
 - Advantages: Large choice of tools and built-in analytics.
 - Disadvantages: Expensive at \$70/month (the Tableau Creator plan, which allows not only browsing but also creating content).
- [Flourish](#), another data visualization platform, which allows the creation of interactive charts.

JUXTAPOSE JS

Juxtapose JS

Summary: “Before and after” slider tool. Good for publications that require the comparison of illustrations for pieces focusing on architecture, interior designs, urban space, fashion, beauty, retouching, etc. Widget developed by the Knight Lab studio at Northwestern University.

Advantages: Easy to use.

Disadvantages: Logo will appear and be embedded on your website sliders. However, the logo is not large.

Language: English.
Price: Free.
Examples: [Here](#)

Alternatives:

- [Elfsight - Before and After Slider](#).
Language: English. Price: Free, but only for up to 200 views of posts using the widget. Paid subscription is \$5/month for up to 5,000 views and \$10/month for up to 50,000 views.
- [Twenty20 Image Before-After](#). A plug-in for WordPress pages.

TIMELINE JS

Timeline JS

Summary: Tool for creating timelines and visualizing sequences of events. Good for long-form articles, history publications, explainers, investigations, news, etc. Also developed by the Knight Lab studio.

Language: English
Examples: [Here](#)

THINGLINK

thinglink..

Summary: Tool for creating interactive visual content. Allows the marking of selected objects in photos or illustrations and adding short descriptions, thus making the visual content clickable and more informative.

Advantages: Increases interaction with your content.

Disadvantages: Free version is no longer available. Content created earlier using the free version is now available by clicking on the ThingLink website (see example below).

Language: English.
Price: From \$25/month
Examples: [Here](#)

Alternatives:

[Interactive Images by Genially](#) was originally developed for educational purposes. Has free basic package.

CALCONIC

CALCONIC_

Summary: Calculator widget. Good for materials in which users must do their own calculations (i.e. prices, salaries, squares, calories, etc.).

Advantages: Offers many ready-made templates for different types of information. Also allows the creation of your own customized calculator.

Disadvantages: Free package includes a very limited number of views per month (see below).

Price: Free basic package (up to 5 widgets with up to 500 views per month). Paid packages start at \$5/month.

[UNSPLASH.COM](https://unsplash.com)
[PIXABAY.COM](https://pixabay.com)
[FREEPIK.COM](https://freepik.com)



Summary: Free stock photos, images, vectors and videos. Read the license terms very carefully before using graphics from any of these services.

[UPSCALE.MEDIA](https://upscale.media)



Summary: Using AI technology and advanced computer vision algorithms, this service allows the upscaling and enhancing of low-quality images with only a few clicks. Increases resolution up to 400 percent and works great for upscaling compressed images from social networks. Registration is not required.

Price: Free.

[TINYPNG](https://tinypng.com)



Summary: For the “smart” compression of JPEG, PNG and WEBP files, permitting a reduction of file size without any visible loss in the quality of the images. Supports image batch processing (up to 20 images can be uploaded at the same time).

Price: Free.

[ANCHOR](https://anchor.fm)



Summary: A free platform for creating, distributing and monetizing podcasts. It also offers a royalty-free audio and music library.

Alternatives:

[Simplecast](https://simplecast.com) is a platform for podcast management and analytics.

Prices start at \$15/month

[YOUTUBE AUDIO LIBRARY](https://youtube.com/audiolibrary)



Summary: Free music tracks and sound effects which can be used for creating video and other content. New tracks are added twice a month. Read the licensing terms very carefully before using. To access and use the YouTube Audio Library, you must login using your Google account.

Alternatives:

- [Pixabay.com/music](https://pixabay.com/music) offers music and audio tracks for commercial and non-commercial use.
- [Freemusicarchive.org](https://freemusicarchive.org) provides free music for downloading.

7. Takeaways

TAKEAWAYS



The model

- Native advertising can be adapted for use by any type of online media, although it is more common among niche outlets with specifically targeted audiences.
- In order to succeed with native advertising, an outlet must make sure that the sponsored content corresponds to its editorial values, content policies, tone of voice and visual style. Most importantly, it must be interesting to and have value for the audience.
- The native advertising model can take different forms, as laid out in this Playbook. The right format depends on the specialization of the media outlet, size of the editorial team and commercial department, available talent and skills, and specifics of the market.

Getting started

- A media outlet does not need to make additional investments or have a big budget in order to start experimenting with native advertising – utilize the formats you already have, build on your current editorial strengths, and take advantage of available external tools/platforms for more cost-effective content creation.
- Editorial and sponsored content can be created either just by an editorial team or by separate editorial and commercial departments. There are pros and cons to each approach. In both cases, however, it is crucial that the outlet ensures its independence by establishing clear rules and boundaries governing relations with clients/sponsors.
- To reduce the risks of misunderstandings with and interference from sponsors, it is highly recommended that any and all cooperation start with a request that a client fills out the advertising brief.

TAKEAWAYS

Making it work

- Native advertising projects usually involve a team effort and require ongoing communication with partners/sponsors. It is therefore crucial to assign clear roles to team members and establish smooth workflow processes. Having a dedicated native advertising manager, developing a media kit, advertising brief and communication guidelines, and utilizing team cooperation tools, such as Slack or Trello, will make a native advertising model more efficient.
- Native advertising content can and should be disseminated across different platforms, not only just via an outlet's website. Utilize and capitalize on multi-channel content distribution, which will increase the reach and effectiveness of any native project. Use paid promotion on social media when needed, but

remember that quality native advertising content often generates its own organic reach and engagement.

- Native advertising is all about building relations – not only between an outlet and its audience but also an outlet and its partners. As with any relationship, communication is very important. Make sure that the manager stays in touch with, regularly updates and communicates with the client throughout the project. In the event of a problem or misunderstanding, talking to the client on the phone or convening an in-person meeting will likely be more productive than a written exchange.

Building on success

- Sending a thoughtful report that includes the project's quantitative and qualitative results and conducting a debrief after the project is concluded will increase chances for continued cooperation. Media outlets that are able to develop long-term partnerships with repeat clients have better chances to succeed with native advertising.
- In developing markets, businesses often lack an understanding of and appreciation for native advertising. This can be countered by investing in market research, identifying international organisations and companies with social corporate responsibilities corresponding to your outlet's mission and editorial policies, and meeting with business owners, managers and associations and educating them about native advertising. These processes might take time and effort, but they are likely to result in you developing more native advertising partners.



