

# PLURALISTIC MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY

DESIGNING FOR BUSINESS MODELS:  
FROM VALUE CREATION  
TO VALUE CAPTURE

May 2026



# TODAY'S AGENDA

**1.**

Known  
knowns:  
revenue in  
focus

**2.**

Key concepts  
of relevance

**3.**

Business  
model &  
value: case  
studies

Individual  
task & coffee  
break

**4.**

Revenue  
models &  
how to  
diversify

**5.**

Ready  
Reckoner:  
Simple  
finance  
model for  
business  
innovation

# ADVISORS FOR PM4D



**DR. CLARE COOK**

Head of Journalism and  
Media Viability



**IRYNA VIDANOVA**

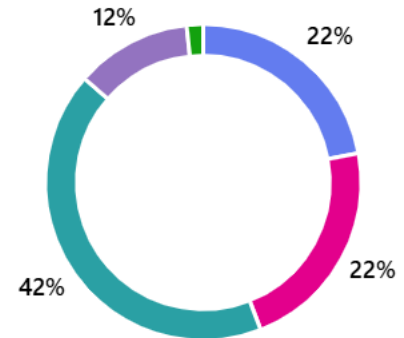
Business Viability  
Advisor

# 1. Known Knowns: Your experiences

- **42 respondents** from the survey from LM4D and PM4D participants available for two weeks October 2025
- **70% of respondents** say income has stayed the same or gone up
- **More than half** (n=23) have grants and donations as less than 20% of their income
- Getting **readers to pay** is tough. Nearly three quarters of respondents make less than 20% of their income from readers (n=29)
- 15 participants say they make nothing from **advertising**
- **Public funding** to media is split between local/national and international
- **Private capital** is highly polarised: 24 of 30 respondents have none, while only four rely on it for 80-100% of their financing

. If you receive any public funding at what level does this come from?

● Local (e.g principality, local government, regional, local cultural offices)	13
● National ( eg. government advertising, grants, tax exemptions, VAT reductions)	13
● International (e.g. EU grants, UN funding, official development assistance)	25
● Do not receive any public funding	7
● Other	1

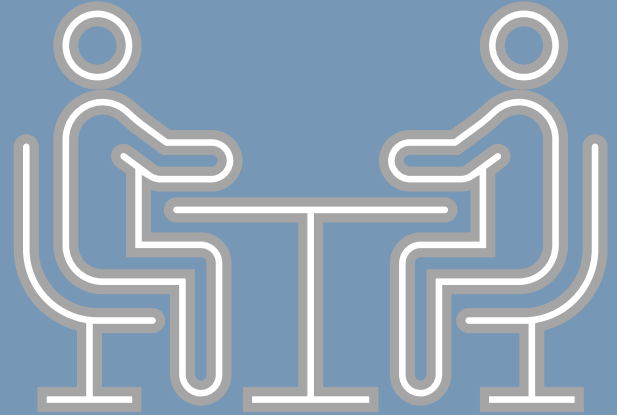


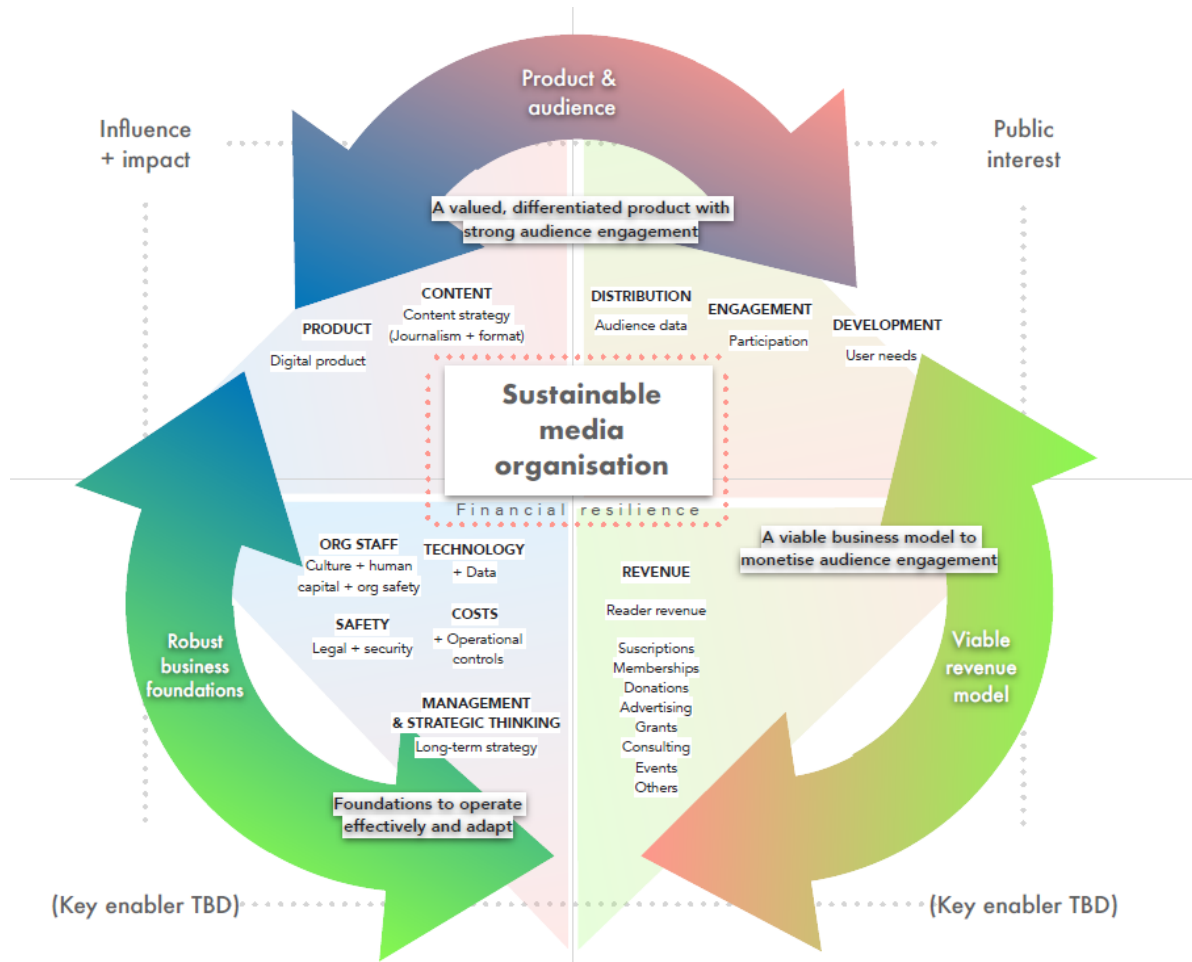
## ...And this is what we are up against

- **Willingness to pay:** “the local market is too small... lowest living standards ..low willingness to pay for news...”
- **Audience size:** “in order to grow our B2C subscriptions we have to expand our audience .... Audience fragmentation and dominance of social make it harder to reach and grow loyal audiences.” Very difficult to reach a bigger audience. **Traffic reductions** from social networks and search engines changing algorithms that penalize news organizations
- **Product development:** “lack of **product market fit**. High tech costs of infrastructure and need to adapt digital formats ...difficult to pivot”
- **Staffing:** “our **credibility** is challenged “**liquidity problems**”. Lack of qualified and skilled staff... low salaries... can’t hire long term. Makes it hard to maintain high quality locally relevant journalism”
- **Politics:** “local and national funding mechanisms have been extremely **influenced by political interests**”
- **Market corruption:** **Interference** by local authorities in companies/institutions that are willing to advertise... advertisers are afraid or retribution” “local advertising is non existent”
- **Structural issues:** “sustainability of tax deduction schemes for donations due to political uncertainties” **lack of government and international corporations’** engagement in protecting local media “**competition** is harsh and advertisers prefer big numbers on social media”

# DISCUSSION

- 1) What is the main challenge to your media organisation's business sustainability today?
- 2) Where do you see the strongest opportunity to strengthen your sustainability?  
(in the next 12-24 months)





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## 2. KEY CONCEPTS

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**Why do you want to develop your project? The why should never be “to make more money”. The why should only ever be to create more value.**

- The fundamentals of business is to be crystal clear on: **for whom, when, where and how do you create value?**
- Value capture can only ever come after value creation.

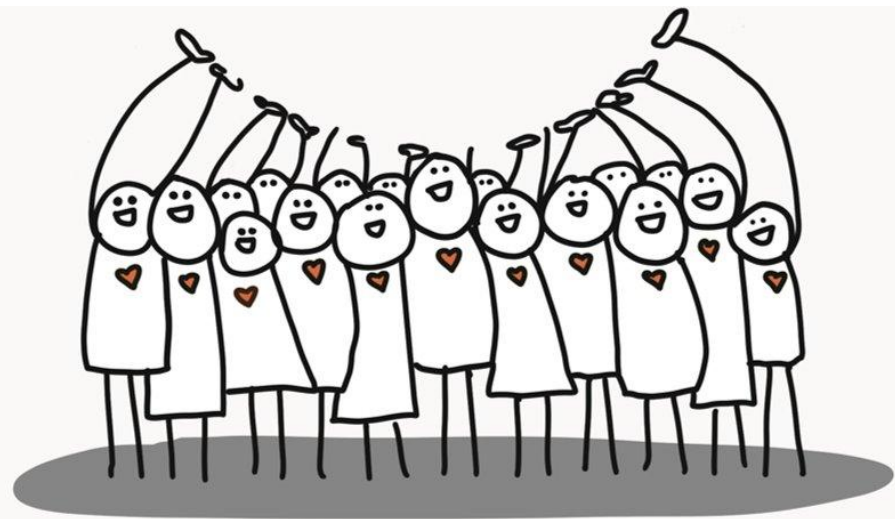
The **business model or business design** is the overall blueprint of how you run your operations and what value you offer to whom, when, where and how. A **business strategy or business plan** is how to achieve goals you set yourself.

The **revenue model** is how you capture the value you create in economic terms. A **revenue stream** is an income. A **commercial strategy** is the monetization action plan.

# MISSION: WHY YOU EXIST



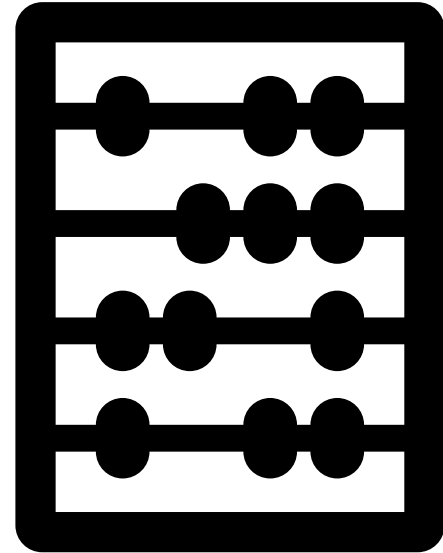
# VALUES: YOUR DNA



# VISION: LONG TERM AMBITION



# HOW YOU CREATE VALUE



# HOW YOU CAPTURE VALUE



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## 3. BUSINESS MODEL

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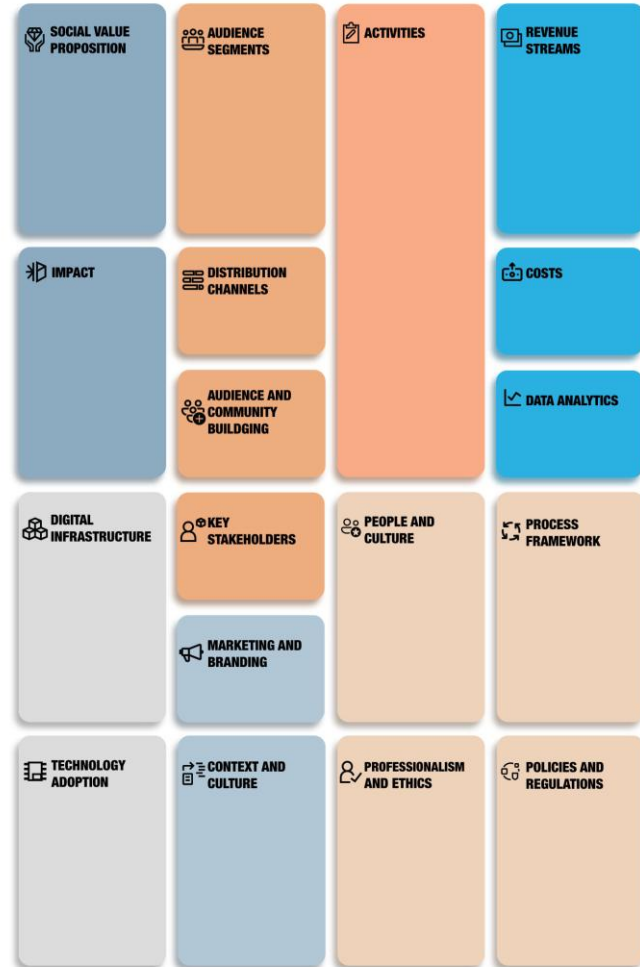
- Your business model describes the rationale of how your organisation **creates, delivers, and captures value**
- The business model can help you develop a new or documenting an existing business model and to **align your activities**
- A visual chart with core inter-related elements describing your company's **value proposition** and key constituent parts
- The **commercial strategy and your content strategy** have to be aligned

# IMS Business Model Canvas & Guide

Practical tool for (re)designing your organisation's business model

For media organisations to understand how key elements of their value creation connect together from the inside out

## BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS





20  
23

 **foodformzansi.co.za**  
THE NEW FACE OF SOUTH AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

NICHE VERTICAL FOCUSED ON AGRICULTURE NEWS



### Top 5 business model learnings:

1. Diversify revenue streams
2. Emphasise engagement
3. Utilise data
4. Invest in SEO
5. Experiment with new revenue models

# Food for Mzansi (South Africa, 2018)

Digital news platform that targets small-scale and newly commercialised black farmers, farmworkers, and agricultural entrepreneurs and seeks to foster inclusivity and empowerment within the agricultural community.

### Multifaceted business model:

**45% - advertising**, consisting of native/partnerships (22%) & direct (23%)

**31% - industry events**

**24% - training and educational programmes** targeting different segments of agricultural community



# The Edinburgh Minute

Choose a subscription plan

Individual

Group

Gift

## Monthly

£5/month

- Exclusive weekend 'what's on' guides on Fridays + The Culture Minute on Wednesdays + the full Edinburgh Minute archive
- Post comments and join the community discussion
- Supporting this daily work ensures it continues landing in your inbox at 7am daily.

## Annual

£45/year (£3.75/month)

- Exclusive weekend 'what's on' guides on Fridays + The Culture Minute on Wednesdays + the full Edinburgh Minute archive
- Post comments and join the community discussion
- Supporting this daily work ensures it continues landing in your inbox at 7am daily.
- 25% cheaper than subscribing monthly

## Sponsor one month

£ 1500 / year

- Exclusive weekend 'what's on' guides on Fridays + The Culture Minute on Wednesdays + the full Edinburgh Minute archive
- Post comments and join the community discussion
- Supporting this daily work ensures it continues landing in your inbox at 7am daily.
- Sponsorship of the newsletter is exclusive to only sponsor at a time.

## None

Free

- Exclusive weekend 'what's on' guides on Fridays + The Culture Minute on Wednesdays + the full Edinburgh Minute archive
- Post comments and join the community discussion
- Supporting this daily work ensures it continues landing in your inbox at 7am daily.
- It's free! You get the daily newsletter plus 7 days to view the full archive.

\*\*\*\* \* 1427

Subscribe

Other subscription options...

By registering you agree to Substack's [Terms of Service](#), our [Privacy Policy](#), and our [Information Collection Notice](#).

## The Edinburgh Minute (Scotland, 2022)

A simple newsletter format to help people learn about their city. *Curation of Edinburgh life, news, culture and communities.*

- 50% of stories are contributed from readers, PR people, business owners, event organisers, charities.
- 50% of stories come from editor skimming through 30+ local reporters' Twitter feeds, ~300 IG/FB/LinkedIn/Threads pages, ~50 news sites & a lot of tabs.

### Newsletter-driven business model:

#### 1. Subscriptions

7,500 people receive a free daily local news roundup.

1,115 people pay £5 a month (or £45/year) to support.

#### 2. Audits and workshops for companies looking to tap into their communities

# Recorder (Romania, 2017)



## Ingredients of success

1. Transparency about revenues → Trust
2. Invest in building community
3. High quality journalism

Video-first investigative NGO,  
**reader-revenue business model:**

**46.5%** - fiscal facility 3.5% from individuals

**29.5%** - donations individuals

**12.2%** - fiscal facility 20% companies

**11.8%** - other (grants, YT advertising, bank deposit interest rates, merch)

*Crowdfunding  
(donations →  
membership)*

*Public events  
(collaborations)*

*Grants*

**VALUE  
EPICENTRE:**  
*in-depth  
socio-cultural  
journalism,  
community*

*E-shop*

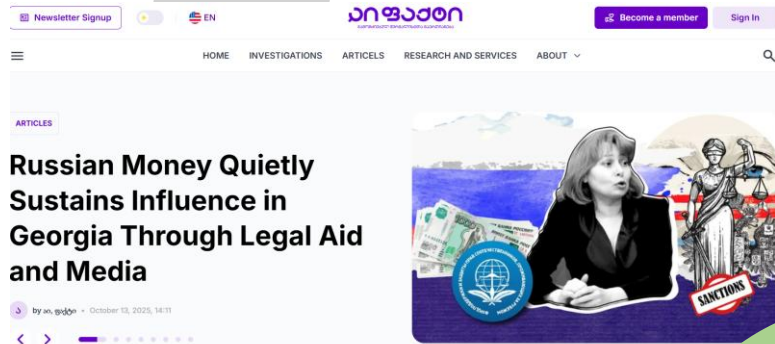
*Adjacent:  
Book publishing  
house*



*Reader  
revenue  
membership  
model*

*Commercial  
income from  
research  
services*

*Sale of  
investigations  
as supply  
chain to  
international  
media*



**VALUE  
EPICENTRE:  
Exclusive, in-  
depth,  
investigative  
journalism in  
Georgia**

**NEW!**  
*Premium  
newsletter to  
embassies on  
sanction  
violations*

*Exclusive fixer  
connections  
for business  
and due  
diligence  
services in  
Georgia*

*Premium  
newsletter for  
foreign  
businesses  
wanting  
information on  
anti corruption*

# Individual reflection

- Reflect on your media organisation's value creation:

**For whom do you create value,  
when and where it is delivered,  
and how do you generate it?**

- Write down your key insights

**10 MIN**



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## 4. REVENUE MODEL

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- Revenue **streams** are forms of income. The revenue **model** is how all that fits together to cover your costs
- Revenue **diversification** is how you balance a portfolio of different revenue streams: it allows to spread risk but also grow different areas of your portfolio
- **Non-profit** media organisations still need income. Therefore they still need a viable revenue model
- **Legal form** of your media organisation can significantly shape your access to funding and revenue opportunities

Shortlinks, surveys  
Dofollow links  
Display, classified,  
programmatic advertising (i.e.  
AdSense),  
Advertising networks  
Content recommends  
Anonymised consumer data  
Sponsored, underwritten  
partnerships, native content  
Multimedia advertising (audio  
and video)

Training or courses  
Consulting  
Convening events online or offline  
Content production or studio  
adjacency  
Skills outsourcing  
Connections and networks  
Books merchandise products  
White label  
Licence or syndication

Sell your  
audience

Sell to  
your  
audience

Sell  
resources  
or  
services

Sell  
influence

Hard metered hybrid vertical  
only geolocation paywalls  
Advertising free versions  
Membership or donor models  
Casual payments /  
micropayments  
Paid newsletters  
Archive monetisation  
Pay per download  
Affiliate links  
Ecommerce  
Sales on third party platforms

Crowdfunding  
Selling content to third party  
Selling data to third party  
Product endorse  
Reports or deeper analysis  
Friend referrals  
Social media influencers

## MICROPAYMENT MODELS

pay-per-article or in tandem with another revenue stream such as advertising or monthly subscriptions  
eg Blendle

## PAYWALL MODELS

Hard, metered, freemium, vertical, geolocation, advertising free

## SUBSCRIPTION MODELS

Product-based subscriptions, print and digital bundles: pay your money and receive a product

## COOPERATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Shared ownership models such as forms of social enterprise or cooperatives

## CROWDFUNDED INVESTMENTS

Crowdfunded shares spread across members by way of support

## ACTION MODELS

Helping by contributing skills and time

## MEMBERSHIP MODELS

a two-way relationship between readers and a publication that often involves monthly monetary exchange

## PROPOSE AND PAY MODELS

allow users to suggest stories and connect this with a donation of financial support

## DONATIONS

allow users to donate to the cause, including through crowdfunding

# READER REVENUE BASED

## CLASSIFIED OR SEARCH

Google AdSense, search-based or classified listings

## DISPLAY & MULTIMEDIA ADVERTISING

Online size or traffic based, pre-roll and audio slot

## ADVERTISING CONSORTIUM

Local media or multiple platform options to cross sell and promote

## PARTNERSHIP & UNDERWRITING

a two-way relationship between funder and a publication that often involves close brand synergy

# ADVERTISING BASED

## CONTENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Such as Outbrain which allow seamless integration through tracking

## CONTENT SPONSORSHIP

Usually for a specific section and set over time

## NATIVE ADVERTISING

Advert is content produced in the same style as editorial and by the editorial team

## WHITE LABELLING

SASS or platform development as product

## TECH PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Such as AI product development, analytics, automated languages, applications.

## ECOMMERCE

Archive prints, merchandise, online stories and affiliate "window" programmes

## CONFERENCES

Large scale convenings linked to the offer

## EVENTS

Meet-ups themed to publication topics, live journalism two-way relationship between funder and a publication includes lead generation or tied to membership

# PRODUCT, SERVICE & ADJACENT BASED

## SERVICE OFFERS

Wedding shows or spin out programmes

## RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Using expertise to produce new products for new audiences

## TRAINING OR CONSULTANCY

Selling the 'learnings' and the value of in-house knowledge


## PAID NEWSLETTERS

Topic and lead generation tied to the publication as part of the content distribution strategy

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# Revenue Models: PM4D Knowledge Exchange Insights

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 [From experiment to revenue | IMS](#)  
(EN, PL, FR, RO, PT, HU)

## **For media organisations:**

- Approach revenue development as an ongoing practice rather than a one-off solution
- Invest early in organisational roles beyond journalism
- Communicate clearly with audiences and funders about mission and impact
- Use grants strategically to test and embed new ways of working

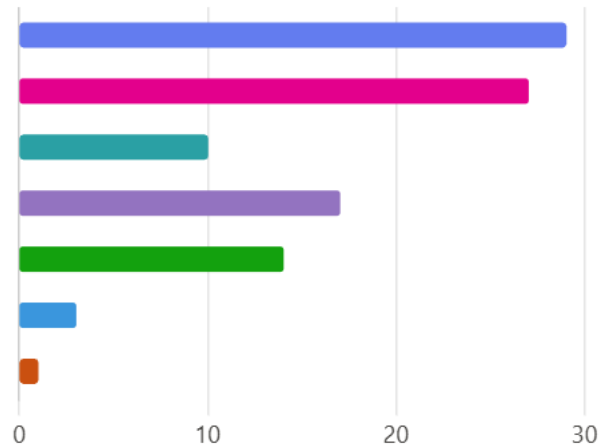
## **For funders and support actors:**

- Prioritise learning-oriented and hybrid sustainability models
- Support organisational development as well as editorial output
- Recognise peer learning as a measurable form of capacity building
- Allow room for experimentation and failure

# Revenue model: Difficult to know which revenues are worth trying, expanding, halting or abandoning

4. What do you consider to be the most important revenue source (s) for your media in the coming five years?

- Grants or donations (philanthropy, high net worth individuals, non-repayable loans,...) 29
- Earned revenue from audiences (eg subscribers, membership schemes and...) 27
- Earned revenue from platform services (YouTube advertising, Meta advertising,...) 10
- Earned revenue from advertising (government advertising, local business...) 17
- Earned revenue from other activities (eg services, consultancy, training, technology...) 14
- Private capital (seed, debt/loans, equity, venture capital, bonds, acquisition or...) 3
- Other 1



# REVENUE MODELS

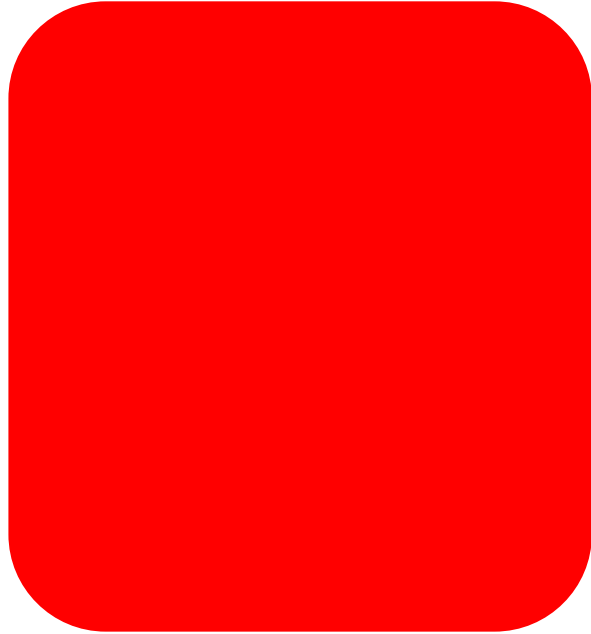


# Strategic thinking on revenue diversification

No way forward

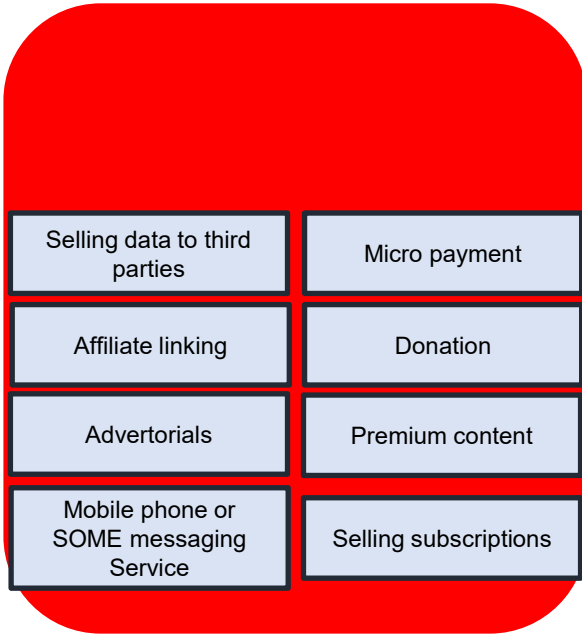
Maybe a way forward

Concrete way forward

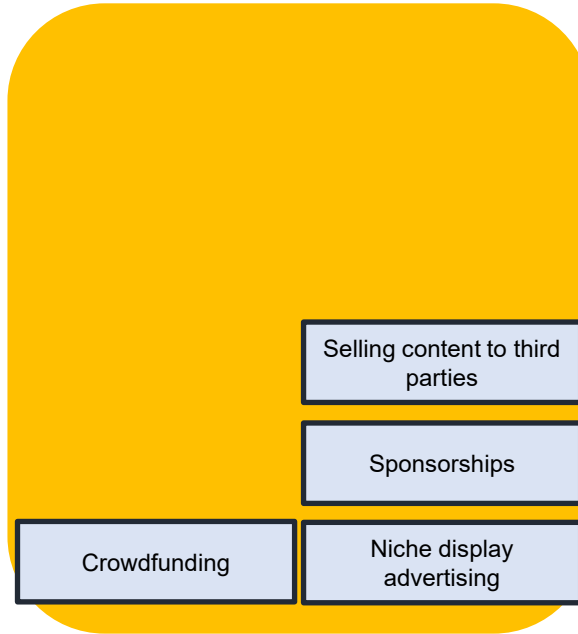


# STEP ONE: Understanding your choices

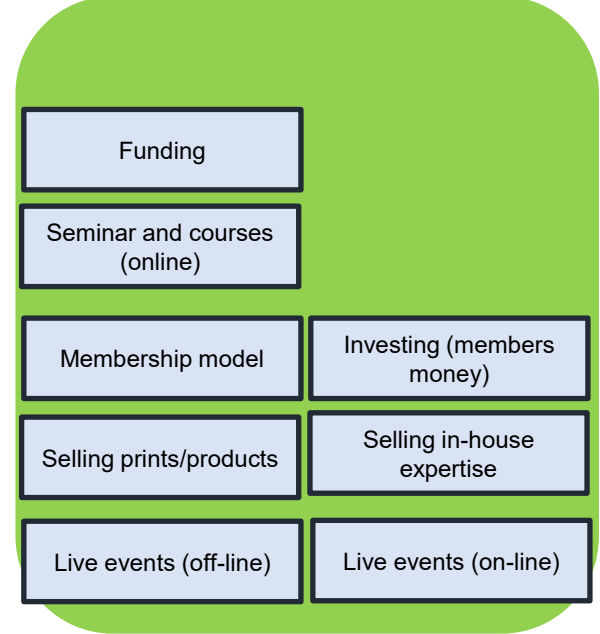
No way forward



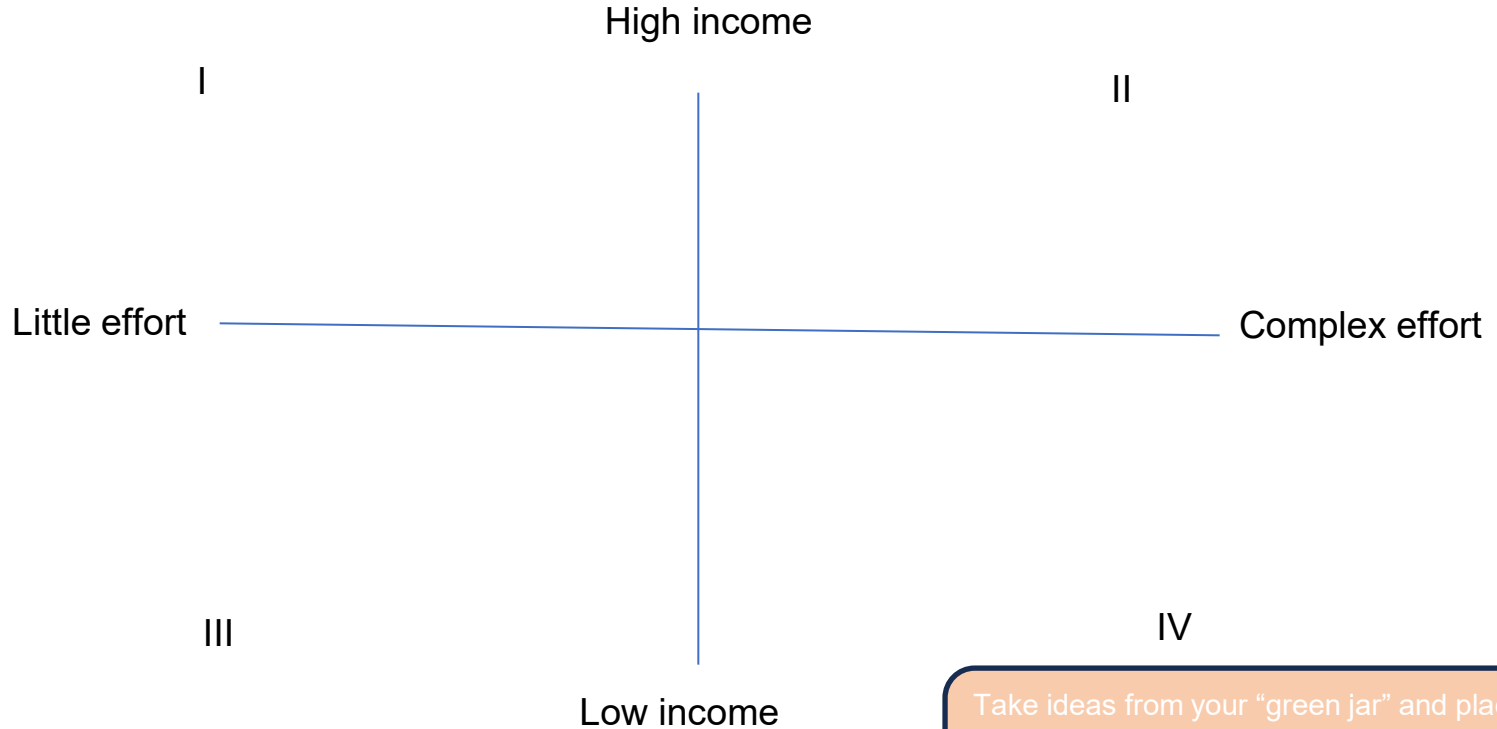
Maybe a way forward



Concrete way forward

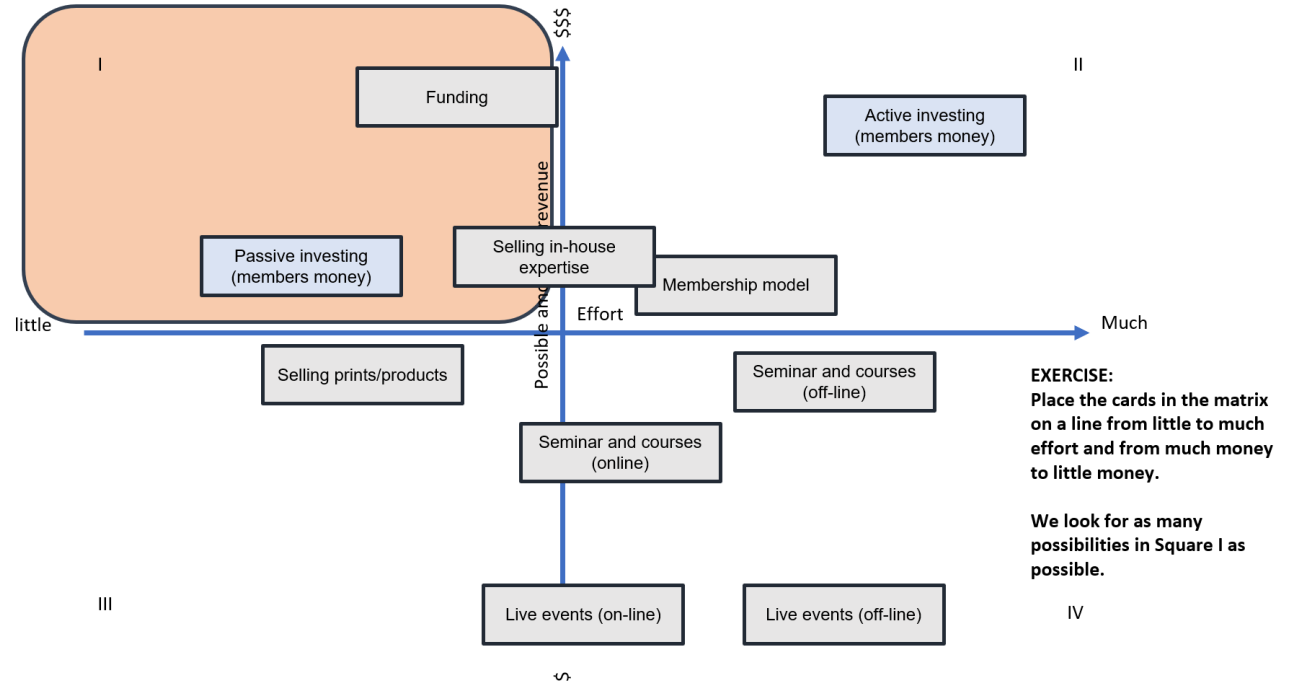


# STEP TWO: Revenue effort to reward matrix

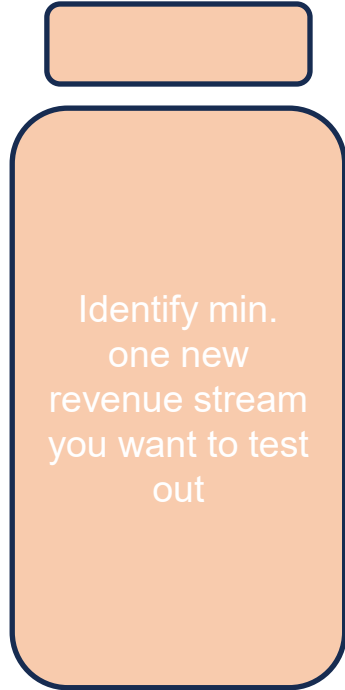


Take ideas from your “green jar” and place them on the matrix: First, position each idea along the horizontal axis (effort required); Then, adjust its position along the vertical axis (expected reward)

# Revenue effort to reward matrix



## STEP THREE: Action planning



What value creation is this based on: for whom, how, when and where?

What makes you think this is worth trying?

What steps do you need to take to get started?

What pricing strategies do you need to consider?

How will you know if it is working?

# Ready Reckoner: Simple finance model for product innovations

- Before committing to doing a full business plan, you can use a 'ready reckoner' to test whether there's potential
- This takes projections for a new product launching and creates a top-level view
- Gives you a financial model to take to funders/banks/teams to explain how things will work
- Answers the following questions:
  - How does this make money? (Revenues)
  - How much does it cost? (Costs)
  - How many people does it involve? (Costs)
  - How long until it breaks even? (Revenues/Costs)

\* *Developed by Ed Walker, founder of [Blog Preston](#)*

# Ready Reckoner: Example of use

Lo wants to launch a new newsletter, she's noticed that people in Dublin are over-indexing for engagement on the titles' main email newsletter offers on culture and thinks there's a strong case for launching a stand-alone culture product that he can charge for. Here is Lo's ready reckoner for what's involved....

First, she needs to size his market, to do this we need to know...

- What is the size of the total market?
- What is the share of the market that Lo's titles has now?
- What's the conversion rate for his current product?
- What's the ARPU (average revenue per user)

# Working with finance on innovations - ready reckoner (revenues)

Dublin population	1,270,000
Current Dublin art readers for brand X	55,000
Current conversion rate for newsletters in the group	2.50%
High estimate for subs (assumes converts 2.5% of population)	31,750
Low estimate for subs (assumes converts 2.5% of current readers)	1,375
ARPU	4.45
High estimate for monthly revenues	141,288
Low estimate for monthly revenues	6,119

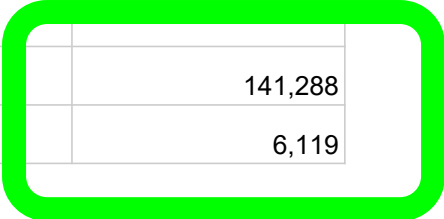
Proof point: Use Google Analytics to find this



Proof point: What's your audience vs total newsletter subscribers



Proof point: This could be an average based on industry research



# A note on proof points

- Chances are most will exist within your organisation/data points, but you may need to spend time digging into data or ask people to obtain them.
- If you don't have a proof point you can either:
  - Run a quick experiment using your existing resources/teams/titles to obtain some data e.g. we did a one-off Dublin arts and culture newsletter and found it had x5 better open rate than the average OR 'we added a button to the What's On page of the site saying 'sign up' and registered 50 people on a wait-list within a week...'
  - Use market data or competitor data to illustrate your proof point and best-guess based on the external data available

# Working with finance on innovations - ready reckoner (costs)

LOW SCENARIO										
	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10
New subs	100	150	255	150	150	220	150	150	150	150
Churn	5	15	20	15	15	20	15	15	15	15
Total subs	95	230	465	600	735	935	1,070	1,205	1,340	1,475
Reader revenues	423	1,024	2,069	2,670	3,271	4,161	4,762	5,362	5,963	6,564
Costs										
Journalists x2 (£25k salary)	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166
Newsletter producer (£21k salary)	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750
On-costs	887	887	887	887	887	887	887	887	887	887
Marketing	100	200	500	200	200	500	200	200	100	100
Additional newsletter tech hosting	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130	140
Total costs	6,953	7,063	7,373	7,083	7,093	7,403	7,113	7,123	7,033	7,043
Profit/loss	-6,531	-6,040	-5,304	-4,413	-3,823	-3,243	-2,352	-1,761	-1,070	-480

# Working with finance on innovations - ready reckoner (costs)

<b>HIGH SCENARIO</b>	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10
New subs	500	500	1,100	750	750	1,100	750	750	750	750
Churn	50	50	80	50	50	80	50	50	50	15
Total subs	450	900	1,920	2,620	3,320	4,340	5,040	5,740	6,440	7,175
Reader revenues	2,003	4,005	8,544	11,659	14,774	19,313	22,428	25,543	28,658	31,929
Costs										
Journalists x2 (£25k salary)	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166	4,166
Newsletter producer (£21k salary)	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750
On-costs	887	887	887	887	887	887	887	887	887	887
Marketing	500	500	1,500	500	500	1,500	500	500	500	500
Additional newsletter tech hosting	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130	140
Total costs	7,353	7,363	8,373	7,383	7,393	8,403	7,413	7,423	7,433	7,443
Profit/loss	-5,351	-3,358	171	4,276	7,381	10,910	15,015	18,120	21,225	24,485

# Ways you could make the 'low' scenario look better

Currently Low scenario v High scenario...

## LOW

Total revenues	36,268
Total costs	71,284
Total	-35,017

## HIGH

Total revenues	168,855
Total costs	76,954
Total	91,901

To improve the low scenario we could:

- Stagger one of the new reporter hires to come in after six months
- Look to utilise a volunteer or student grad for the first few months to test
- Use a freelancer to provide the newsletter producer shifts instead of a full-time hire

# Working with finance on innovations - ready reckoner (costs)

LOW V2	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10
New subs	100	150	255	150	150	220	150	150	150	150
Churn	5	15	20	15	15	20	15	15	15	15
Total subs	95	230	465	600	735	935	1,070	1,205	1,340	1,475
Reader revenues	423	1,024	2,069	2,670	3,271	4,161	4,762	5,362	5,963	6,564
Costs										
Journalists x1 (£25k salary - delay hire)	0	0	0	0	0	2,083	2,083	2,083	2,083	2,083
Journalist x2 (£25k salary - internship)	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500
Newsletter producer (extra shift payments)	600	600	600	600	600	600	600	600	600	600
On-costs	165	165	165	165	165	477	477	477	477	477
Marketing	100	200	500	200	200	500	200	200	100	100
Additional newsletter tech hosting	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130	140
Total costs	1,415	1,525	1,835	1,545	1,555	4,260	3,970	3,980	3,890	3,900
Profit/loss	-992	-502	234	1,125	1,716	-100	791	1,382	2,073	2,663

# And now...

Updated low scenario vs. High scenario...

## LOW

Total revenues	36,268
Total costs	22,127
Profit/Loss	14,140

## HIGH

Total revenues	168,855
Total costs	76,954
Total	91,901

# Measuring innovation

- Lo's ready reckoner means she's able to give clear targets to track against e.g. the low scenario needs 100 new subscribers in month 1 while the high scenario needs 500 new subscribers in month 2.
- *This is useful if you're going for funding and need to demonstrate key milestones, or explain to your team/funders whether you're on track*

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# Useful resources

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## REVENUE AND BUSINESS MODELS

- 👉 [The Native Advertising Playbook](#)
- 👉 [The Social Media Monetisation Playbook](#)
- 👉 [The Entrepreneurial Journalism Playbook](#)
- 👉 [The White Paper on Donations](#)

## CAPITAL AND FINANCING FOR MEDIA

- 👉 [A global perspective on funding, financing and investment for media | IMS](#)
- 👉 [Catalysing private capital: Financing the future of public interest media | IMS](#)
- 👉 [Unlocking local capital | IMS](#) (April 2026)
- 👉 [What's the future of local news funding? | PINF](#) (March 2026)

## DATA BASES AND TOOLS

- 👉 [Project Oasis](#) (global database of independent digital media for inspiration and ideas)
- 👉 [Engaged journalism accelerator](#) (lists 189 news org-s in Europe doing community driven journalism)
- 👉 [The News Sustainability Tool, Recommendations section](#)