



# WANT TO GROW YOUR NEWSLETTER?

## TALK TO YOUR READERS



By Priyanka Vora

### AUDIENCE-FIRST JOURNALISM

If you are a writer, reporter, technologist, marketer, customer specialist or in any role which requires you to grow and retain users, this project has many useful insights for you.



I partnered with the Financial Times to make their newsletter offering more user-centric. By talking to the FT's most loyal newsletter readers, I created this playbook which can also help guide your newsletter strategy. The project also has some key takeaways, in case you want to design a similar audience focussed project for your newsroom.

# A FIVE-STEP PROCESS TO BECOME AUDIENCE-FIRST

1

## DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVE



I designed the objectives of this project to fill the knowledge gaps in the news consumption behavior of the FT's American readers with a focus on increasing **shareability** among current and prospective subscribers.

2

## INTERVIEWING STAKEHOLDERS



I conducted interviews with newsletter writers, product leads, customer specialists and editors to find out existing **institutional knowledge on newsletter readers**. I also took the opportunity to learn about their pain points.

3

## REDEFINING OBJECTIVES



After sitting down with various stakeholders and analyzing the existing data, I broadened the project's objectives to learn the **value** that readers derived from the newsletter, their interest in **engaging** with it and how they **discovered the FT** and its newsletters along with their **sharing** behavior.

## 4 ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE



Every question I asked the reader had a **clear actionable goal** attached to it. I also created a prototype of the newsletter, which included a reader callout, charts, and images through which I wanted to gauge their response. I used the NPS score to recruit readers who said they were most likely to recommend the newsletters to their community and interviewed them.

## 5 ANALYZE FINDINGS & TESTING



I kept detailed notes of each interview and collected striking insights using a thematic analysis approach to categorize them into either of four themes —Discovery, Value, Engagement, Sharing. I also **experimented** by including new segments in the newsletter like the '**Reporter's Diary**'.



## ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES



- The youngest reader I interviewed was a 33-year-old female professor and the oldest was an 81-year-old financial professional.
- All of them **reside in the US**. I interviewed readers who were associated with different sectors including finance, tech, education, business.
- After our first outreach to recruit readers for the qualitative interviews, not many **female readers** responded. To ensure that we had a good representation from our female readers, I reached out to all the women who had agreed to be contacted requesting their participation. The second round of outreach helped us get more female voices. Out of the ten readers who I interviewed, three were women.

## KEY FINDINGS



- This project is based on the hypothesis that the current audience (subscribers, trialists) of the Financial Times knew people who are like them and are likely to be interested in the FT's news products.  
The challenge, however, was how to make current subscribers **recommend Financial Times** to others in their network.
- When I was conducting my eight interview, the readers were giving similar responses meaning that the trends on sharing and news consumption were definite — a good indicator that the project is working.
- **Age** played a major role in the way readers **shared FT's journalism** but gender had no influence on how they shared.
- **American readers** saw the FT as their source for international news and subscribed to a US-based publication to get their dose of US focussed news. However, they were interested to read the FT's take on US events.
- **Younger readers** don't care much about columnists, older readers like the opinions.
- Overall, American readers of the FT appreciate the **"other perspective"** they don't get from American publishers.
- I have organized the findings in accordance with the objectives I had created for this project with a focus on FirstFT — a daily newsletter with 100,000 followers.

## DISCOVERY

- Overall, most readers subscribed to the FT via word of mouth. The recommendation on most occasions came from a colleague, family member or friend.
- Then, most subscribed to FirstFT directly from a marketing email that spotlighted FT's newsletter offerings.

"I copy the text from the newsletter and email it to my colleagues. I don't forward the newsletter."

John, 53, works in Finance.



"My sister who works in Finance told me about FT. I always tell my students and friends to subscribe."

Katy, 33, Professor.



## SHARING

- FirstFT highlights a selection of up to 10 top stories from the day. Readers are usually sharing from FirstFT to point friends or colleagues to a specific story within the newsletter.
- They are unlikely to share the whole newsletter because they are conscious of people's time and don't want them to get lost looking for the story of interest.
- Instead of forwarding, they prefer copy + pasting the text of the specific subsection of interest and sharing that, along with a hyperlink to the story.
- Younger readers tended to text this blurb, while older (above 50) preferred email.

## ENGAGEMENT

**The stigma of menopause at work fades** Menopausal women are the [fastest-growing demographic](#) in workplaces across the UK, according to government figures. That is why companies are starting to consider how they can support employees who may be struggling with symptoms, from hot flushes and brain fog to depression and a greater propensity for urinary tract infections. (FT)

*Do you have personal experience with menopause at work? Please share your thoughts with other readers in the [comments](#). Does your company have any specific policies or support for menopausal women? If yes, what are they? If not, what would you like those policies to be?*



- Readers want to respond to callouts and share their opinions/views with FT and other readers.
- They are curious about what other readers think about a particular news event and would like to read carefully curated reader comments in the newsletter.
- FirstFT ran the callout ( highlighted in red) linking readers to the comments section. The piece got 50 + comments.

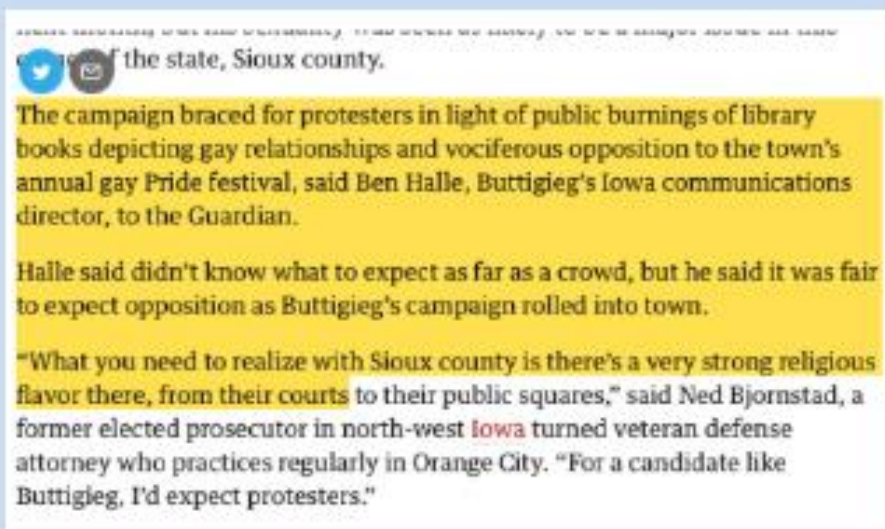
## RECOMMENDATIONS

# 1 Invite, not forward

- Readers want to share the newsletter with other readers but would prefer to do so by inviting their friends/colleagues to subscribe.
- Adding an INVITE button to encourage existing readers to recommend the newsletter to others. It will also help us reach FT's audience network by allowing readers to invite their friends to 'try before you buy' subscription.

# 2 Sharing via email

- Making sharing easier via email for readers to share individual story synopsis with other readers. FT's readers are likely to copy + paste synopsis to share via email or text messages. The sharing experience could be made more reader friendly. Guardian ( see the image below) has a easy email share mechanism.





# 3

## Reporter's Diary

- Organic cross-promotion of audio products in the newsletter like the 'Reporter's Diary' segment increased listenership. This works best as content promotion ("here's a taste, hear more on this podcast") versus just recommending the podcast.
- Readers are interested in more human, behind the scenes insights from reporters.
- When we ran the 'Reporter's diary' segment in the newsletter and linked to the podcast from which it was re-purposed. We saw an addition 3K listens.

*Reporter's diary: George Parker, FT's political editor "So far, at least the economy appears to be one of the less preoccupying factors for voters. Talking about the issues that voters care most about at this moment, Brexit comes easily at the top of the list, followed by the National Health Service and then followed in equal third place by the economy and the environment." Hear more on the [latest episode](#) of the FT News Briefing.*

# 4

## Use visuals only if they add value

- Readers do not enjoy the repetition of photos of people who are regularly in news like Boris Johnson and Donald Trump.
- They like charts that give valuable information that the synopsis cannot.
- As many read the newsletter while traveling, they prefer a newsletter without visuals as they find the, distracting to the reading experience.

# 5

## Illustration of the day

- Introduce a new segment like the 'Illustration of the Day' to replace the 'Video of the Day' segment.
- A survey commissioned earlier found that readers don't find value in the 'Video of the Day' segment.
- I tested swapping this with Ingram Pinn's illustration known to do well on social.

Readers unanimously preferred the Illustration over the current video segments.



# Want to know more about audience-first journalism? Say, hello.

If you would like to correspond with me directly, please feel free to send me an email at [vorakpriyanka@gmail.com](mailto:vorakpriyanka@gmail.com).

You may also follow my work on LinkedIn and follow me on twitter @PriyankaKVora

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