TownNews: Turning Media Data into Insights

Customer Story:
TownNews is a leading provider of content management systems and platforms for U.S. media organizations. Most of its customers, mid-sized to smaller community-based outlets, lacked deep insight into their content assets. Working with GoodData, it deployed "Data Insights" to provide its customers with robust new tools for gathering, understanding, and acting upon the data that impacts their businesses.

Learn how TownNews:

‣ Enables media companies to draw connections between core business products-videos, articles, and other content-and revenue that's generated from those products.

‣ Turns data insights about content into more informed decisions regarding content, advertising rates, and even staffing.

‣ Drills into specifics, and figures out what content plays best with each audience

‣ Helps media companies better track trends to understand how strategic initiatives impact key performance indicators like advertising and subscription revenue.

Customer Since:
2020

Use Case:
Data analytics to enhance decision making, revenue, efficiency

Favorite Metric:
Can handle high volumes of data and is positioned for future growth

Best Feature:
GoodData's ability to connect to multiple data sources-such as Google Analytics, Google Ad Manager, and other data sources-and bring them into one place. And to do so automatically so media companies, many of whom went without the insights before, now get them and can act upon them.

Results:
Customers immediately find ways to boost revenue

What they're saying:
"Our customers in the publishing, broadcast, and web-native spaces have so much data-often more than they're even aware of-that 'analysis paralysis' can set in. What we're doing with Data Insights is pulling data from a variety of different silos, and presenting it in a way that makes it understandable and actionable", says **Brad Ward, TownNews CEO.**

Media organizations, like most businesses, are awash in data. But being able to gather it and make sense of it are two different things. Media companies need to analyze data to grow revenue, audience and engagement.

Large media organizations, like Dow Jones or Bloomberg, have huge data assets and data crunching capabilities. But more community-based news outlets are less sophisticated in turning data into insights that inform content decisions that best serve readers, watchers, listeners and advertisers.

TownNews, founded in 1989, is a leading provider of content management systems and platforms for media organizations in the U.S. It serves 800 print publications nationwide, digital and TV outlets, too, and 2,000 websites. Its integrated digital publishing and content management solutions power some of the most distinguished media organizations in the local media industry. Most of its customers are mid-sized to smaller community-based outlets in a hyper-competitive industry.

"This product will be iterated over dozens and dozens of times, to better serve the needs of our customers".

Joe Hansen
Sr. Product Manager, TownNews

TownNews' customers have long generated audience and editorial data from content management systems, traffic reports from Google Analytics, and advertising revenue reports.

Still, they lacked deep insight into their content assets, and knowing what content mattered most to their audience and advertisers.

In early 2020, TownNews deployed GoodData technology to launch "Data Insights" to give its media customers robust new tools for gathering, understanding, and acting upon the multitude of data that impacts their businesses.

"Our customers in the publishing, broadcast, and web-native spaces have so much data-often more than they're even aware of-that 'analysis paralysis' can set in," said Brad Ward, CEO of TownNews. "What we're doing with Data Insights is pulling data from a variety of different silos, and presenting it in a way that makes it understandable and actionable."

Data Insights will make it easy to draw connections between the media company's core business products-videos, articles, and other content-and the revenue that's generated from those products, adds Joe Hansen, TownNews senior product manager. By understanding how each piece of content influences revenue, media organizations can make more informed decisions regarding content, advertising rates, and even staffing.

GoodData provides deep analysis
In most media organizations, data is siloed within departments. The advertising team can see how the ad stack is performing but doesn't have access to editorial analytics, and vice-versa. No one can see the big picture.

With Data Insights, media companies will be able to assess such things as whether a viewer is a paying subscriber or a drive-by viewer-and what content plays better with each audience. They'll know how much revenue is generated by each article, or even each reporter.

They'll know where traffic comes from to the site, whether via a social media outlet or via organic search.

Rather than just track page views-which is what many outlets do today-news editors will have access to reader engagement data and how much "share of voice" each article on a site collects. While a crime story might get the most page views, an article about the retirement of a well-loved librarian may end up with the biggest engagement score. That kind of insight will help editors and content managers decide future coverage and content placement.

Media companies will also be better able to track trends over time to understand how strategic initiatives impact key performance indicators like advertising and subscription revenue.

And it is all done automatically. In the past, media organizations either went without the data insights, or they found pieces of it from numerous sources and then manually put it together. Most newspaper groups, crunched by advertising pressure from online business models, don't have data scientists to help do this, and so the insights were frequently lost, Hansen says. Google Analytics is one of the source data. Using a bigger platform like GoodData enables TownNews to integrate multiple data sources, embed it to the application and deliver at scale more easily.

Future advancements
In the future, TownNews expects Data Insights to provide even more specific data, such as which tag words provide more clicks from readers. Also, TownNews expects GoodData's technology to eventually provide data in real-time to inform decision making and resource allocation.

For instance, while a reporter is writing a story, they'll get insights "at the point of work." That means that, while writing a story, reporters or editors could click on older stories on similar subjects and get data about that asset that might inform the new story.

Data Insights might even be predictive. If, in the past, a news event sparked coverage for three days with a spike in readership on day two, editors will know that and so might devote more resources to the story on day two.

Choosing GoodData

TownNews selected GoodData because it needed a solution that could handle high volumes of data, and be positioned for future growth. TownNews produces about a billion page views a month and 24 million rows of data daily.

TownNews considered other options, but none were robust enough to meet its needs. A big selling point for GoodData was its ability to connect to multiple data sources-such as Google Analytics, Google Ad Manager, and other data sources-and bring them into one place.

The Data Insights product is designed to benefit all of TownNews' local media clients - newspapers, TV and radio broadcasters, web pure-plays, and college media. TownNews integrates Data Insights into its BLOX CMS system, and customers access it via that site.

In the first two weeks of offering the product, TownNews won 29 customers. "It has been really well received," Hansen says.

Some customers immediately found economic benefits.

During two product demonstrations, customers discovered that they weren't getting the optimal advertising revenue that was available to them.

By closing that loophole, "they almost immediately paid for the product," Hansen says.

New features have also already been added into the product based on feedback from customers, including data to show metrics like average revenue per page view. Also, TownNews added the ability to show top assets that were produced locally versus those that were syndicated. With this information, news organizations can more easily see the cost of what is produced versus the revenue it produces.

"We are just starting. This product will be iterated over dozens and dozens of times," Hansen says.
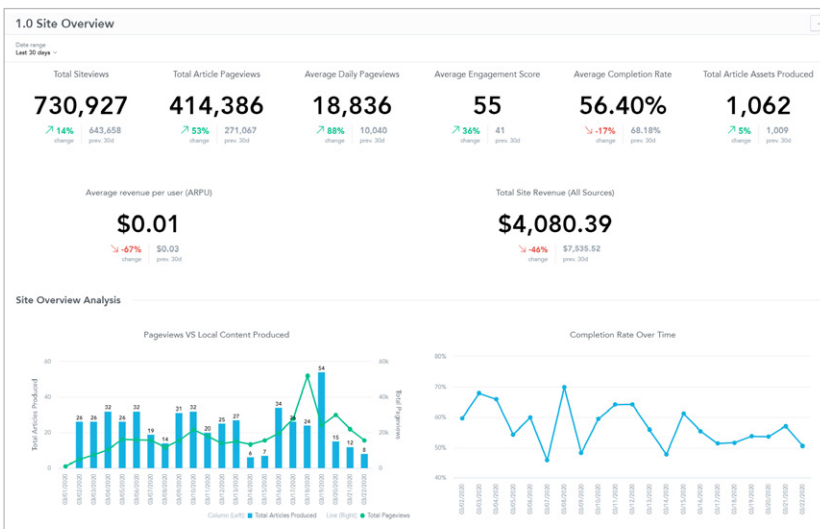
Data Insights Overview

Data Insights pageview