



Whitepaper

Empowering Editorial Excellence:

Strategies for Sustainable Change



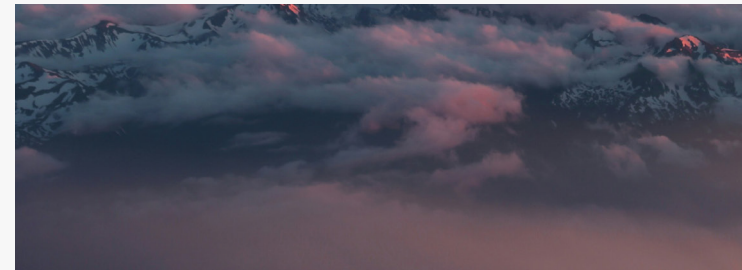
Why change is so necessary

The media landscape is undergoing **significant transformations**, making change imperative for survival and growth. Declining reach and the loss of target groups, especially young people, are major concerns. Additionally, there is a noticeable shift in the consumption behavior of target groups, leading to a decline in revenue. Increasing personnel expenditure further exacerbates the situation, making it crucial for editorial departments to adapt and innovate.

In the past, distribution channels were clearly defined. There was linear television, magazines, and newspapers. The format was set, and the content had to appeal to as many recipients as possible. This has changed significantly. Linear channels are being phased out and, in some cases, are already barely relevant. The **channels** to the recipients are now **diverse** and often very specific and niche. Editorial teams now need to be proficient in far more areas than before.

The new distribution channels **require expertise** in marketing. SEO and SEA skills are necessary, and content must be created in different formats, such as audio, video, shorter, or longer pieces. AI can be helpful in creating content with different intents (based on user needs) and personalizing it to deliver to the right people at the right time.

This requires a new type of leadership in the editorial team, one that brings out individual strengths, supports and drives the necessary change, and incorporates new technical tools.



- No time for change
- Duty to produce content
- Perceived criticism
- Reliance on intuition
- Linear product focus
- Implementing training
- Skill development

Why change is so hard

Despite the necessity, change is often met with resistance. There are several reasons we experience in our projects: Editors often find themselves **overwhelmed with daily tasks** like writing articles and producing audio or video content, leaving little time to focus on implementing change. There is a strong belief that it is the publisher's **duty to produce content**, even if it goes unread, making it difficult to prioritize change over content production. This approach often has been in place for decades – old habits die hard. From their experience, editors often **trust their intuition** about their customers, which may occasionally lead to less reliance on data for adopting new practices. So, results from **data** are sometimes perceived as an **affront**, making it difficult to convince the editorial team of the need for change.

It's encouraging that numerous editorial teams place a strong emphasis on training and development, and these efforts are generally appreciated. Nevertheless, applying newly learned skills within the organisation can be challenging. Too often, **daily routines consume the learned changes**, and employees revert to old, **familiar patterns**. Cultivating new abilities within the editorial team demands considerable time, resources, and an openness to learning and adapting to innovative working methods.

The capabilities of sustainable editorial teams

Building a successful and sustainable editorial teams is one of the core objectives of our **DRIVE** project. The project is a powerful collaboration of 30 regional news publishers, spearheaded by us, **Highberg** (formerly SCHICKLER), a media-specialized consulting company, and the German press agency **dpa**. Our mission is to boost digital reader revenue using data sourced from and shared by multiple publishers. ([↗ highberg.com/products/drive-2](https://highberg.com/products/drive-2))

Over the past year, we have dedicated ourselves intensively to this challenge in the initiative. We assessed the current situations of the publishers, identified their needs, tested ideas and techniques, discarded what didn't work, iterated, and ultimately develop a framework with **eight necessary capabilities**. Acquiring these skills is crucial for the success of editorial teams in the long term. Concentrating on these essential aspects enables editorial teams to navigate the evolving media landscape and excel in a competitive market. Each capability is interconnected with others, such as scheduling, data management, and leadership, making comprehensive mastery necessary.



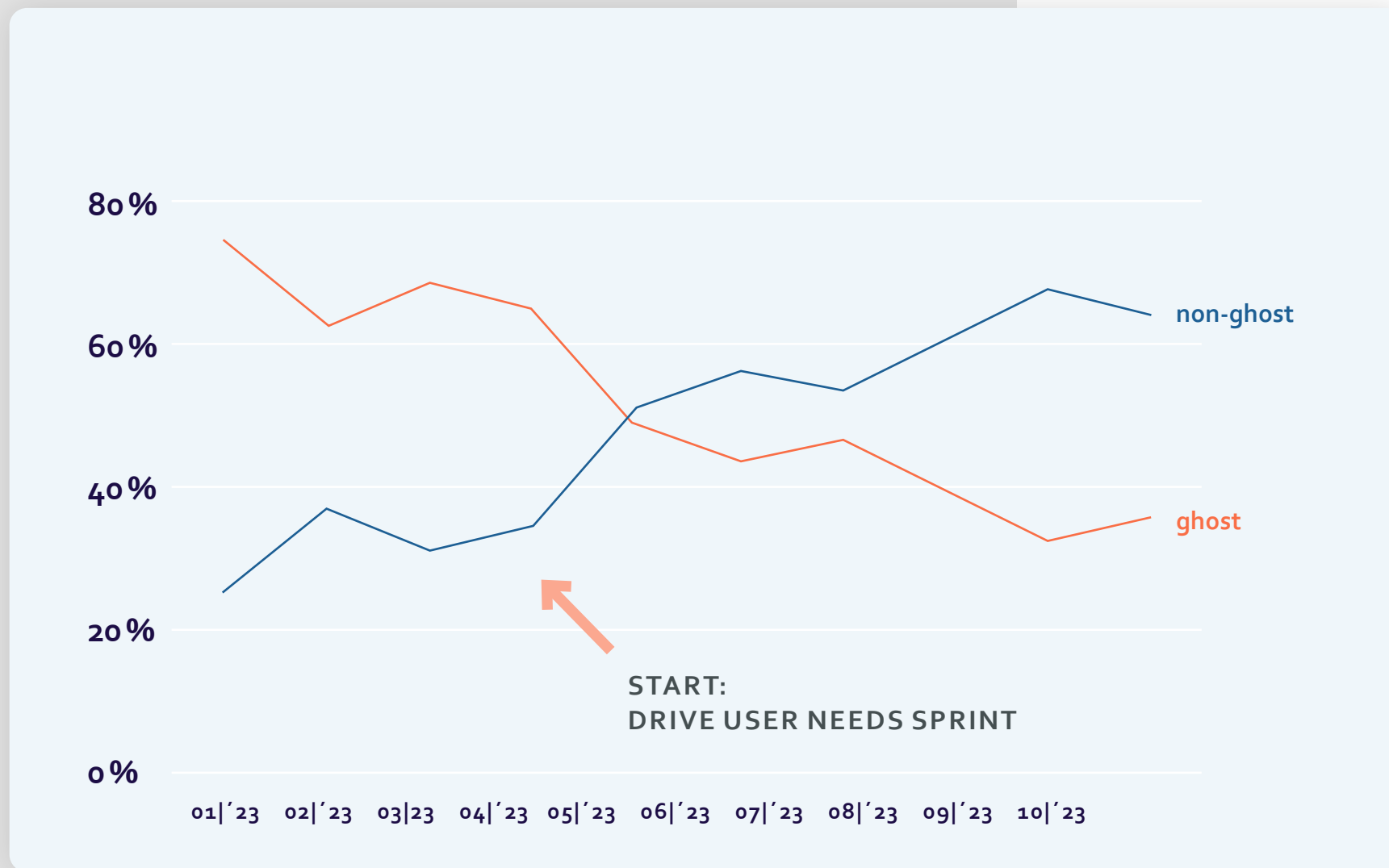
1. Content strategy

Engage, expand, and lead with content

A robust content strategy ensures that the editorial team produces **relevant and engaging content** that resonates with the target audience. This involves understanding **user needs, audience development, breaking news, and top articles**.

By focusing on user needs, editors can create content that addresses the interests and concerns of their readers. Articles get more important. The Audience development is crucial for expanding reach and impact of the content, while breaking news and top articles help maintain the **publication's relevance and authority** in the industry.

Have a look at our whitepaper [with a deepdive on user needs](#) and a newsletter by INMA [discussing Ghost-Articles](#).



→ After the start of the editorial transformation, significant successes have already been celebrated at a DRIVE publisher. The proportion of "ghost articles," which receive less than five hours of media time in total, has been drastically reduced.



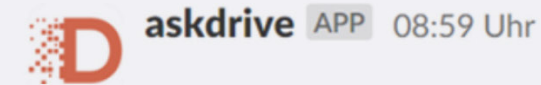
2. Digital craftsmanship

Relearn and enhance editorial craft

To master the new challenges, the editorial craft must also be expanded. Continuous coaching and development are essential for honing the digital skills of the editorial team. Successful digital products, such as **newsletters and check-out funnels**, require **meticulous planning** and execution. Strong **stories about people** from the region always draw attention, as there is no story without a person.

Republishing strong content is always effective, whether timely or years after the initial release. Building a pipeline for republishing content supports **performance during times of weak topics**. Text enrichment, including video content and interactive formats, is also crucial for enhancing the overall quality and engagement of the articles. **Digital craftsmanship** ensures that the editorial team can produce high-quality digital content that meets the **demands of diverse readers**.

- From of our AI chatbot “askdrive” based on the RAG technology. Best practices, hacks and learnings don't need to be delivered by editorial coaches. At DRIVE, we have an AI app that assists editorial team members daily with suggestions based on experiments, analyses, and best practices.



The perfect newsletter strategy would include the following elements:

1. Placement and Marketing: The newsletter should be promoted through social media and general pages, with a fixed widget on the homepage. Incentives such as competitions could be used to encourage newsletter sign-ups.
2. Frequency and Timing: Depending on the volume of content, the newsletter could be sent out three times a week during peak periods, and twice a week during quieter periods.
3. Content Planning: The newsletter could be tailored to the needs of the audience. For example, if the newsletter is sent out on Mondays, it could include entertaining content to start the week.
4. Landing Page: The landing page for the newsletter should highlight the value of subscribing to the newsletter, present the newsletter as a solution, showcase the main features and contents of the newsletter, and clearly define the target audience.
5. Testing: Each edition of the newsletter could be used to test new ideas, with data such as open rates, click rates, and website traffic used to gauge their effectiveness.
6. Onboarding: The onboarding process for new subscribers could include an introduction to the product, a welcome message from the editor-in-chief, a presentation of the benefits of subscribing, and an introduction to the editorial team.



Time / Day of the week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
4 – 6 am	Divert me	Inspire me	Educate me	Educate me	Give me perspective	Help me	Inspire me
6 – 8 am	Divert me	Give me perspective	Educate me	Give me perspective	Give me perspective	Help me	Inspire me
8 – 10 am	Divert me	Give me perspective	Educate me	Give me perspective	Give me perspective	Help me	Inspire me
10 – 12 pm	Divert me	Educate me	Educate me	Give me perspective	Give me perspective	Help me	Help me
12 – 2 pm	Divert me	Update me	Update me	Update me	Help me	Help me	Divert me
2 – 4 pm	Update me	Update me	Update me	Update me	Help me	Help me	Divert me
4 – 6 pm	Update me	Update me	Update me	Update me	Help me	Help me	Divert me
6 – 8 pm	Divert me	Educate me	Update me	Educate me	Help me	Help me	Divert me
8 – 10 pm	Inspire me	Inspire me	Inspire me	Help me	Help me	Inspire me	Divert me
10 – 12 pm	Divert me	Inspire me	Inspire me	Inspire me	Help me	Inspire me	Divert me

3. Production

A timetable – put an old tool to new use

Efficient content production requires planning **content timetables** based on user needs, incorporating varying formats and creative approaches. Articles tailored to user needs are not yet part of the daily routine, but guidelines and scheduled times can help make them **a regular practice**.

Managing the production process remains essential for traditional publishers. AI solutions can be utilized to free up time for this new way of working allowing staff to focus on **planned material, career-specific pieces, and tailored articles**. Timely and appropriately formatted content delivery is key to optimizing its influence and distribution.

→ A user-needs timetable based on our DRIVE-analysis which user needs work best at which day and time



4. Leadership

Lead by example: Move beyond operational duties

A new management style is required, focusing on **minimal operative work** and leading by example. Effective leadership involves **data-driven preparation, feedback loops**, best practices, and **setting business goals** and OKRs. **Transparent communication** and a commitment to **living the new rules** are crucial for fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement within the editorial team. Editorial meetings need to be critically evaluated and replaced with **more productive formats** if they do not contribute to production or the digital craftsmanship.

Key performance indicators are required for leadership. Subscription goals for digital products can be derived from anticipated print losses and target P&L. These conversion goals must be translated into media time targets and **broken down into individual editorial units**. Each unit must generate more media time in a year than they do today, and this must be reflected in **measurable goals** for the editorial teams.

5. Data

Data-driven decisions, better content

Leveraging content analytics to understand **users' needs and preferences** is crucial for creating relevant and compelling material. By knowing what the audience wants, editors can tailor their content to **meet these demands** effectively. Live feedback dashboards provide immediate insights into article performance, enabling real-time adjustments and improvements. Key metrics like **media time** are essential for guiding the editorial strategy.

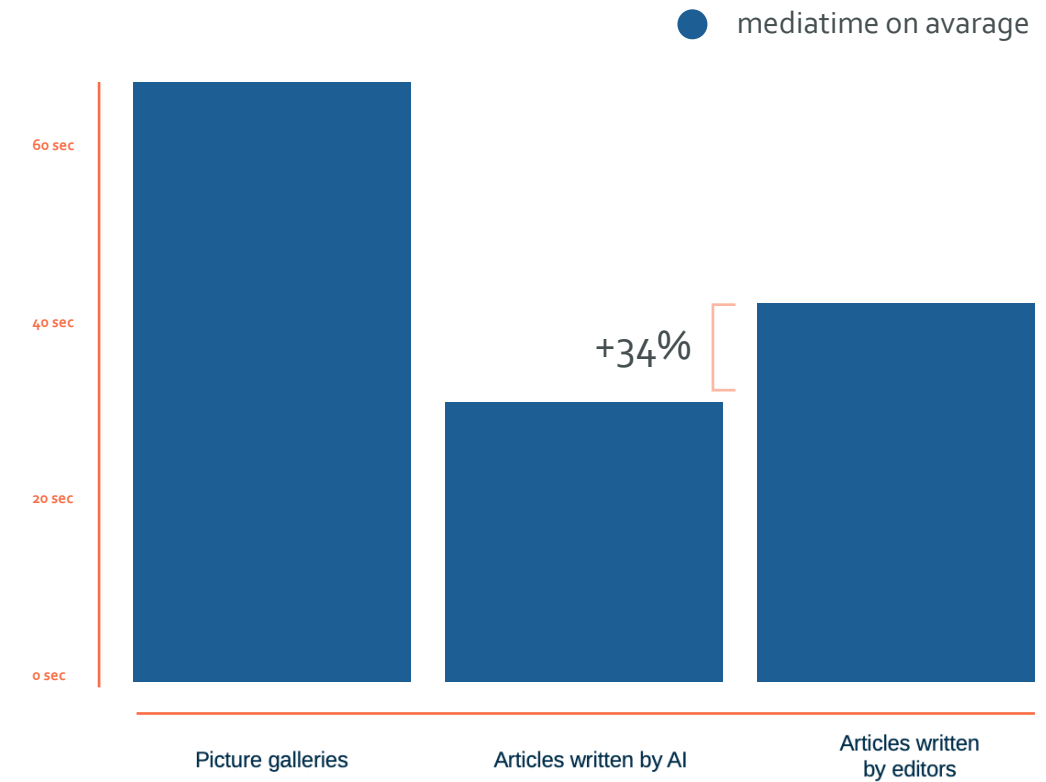
A comprehensive understanding of the data and its everyday use within the editorial team is essential for making informed decisions and improving content efficiency. This continuous analysis helps in identifying trends, understanding audience behavior, and optimizing content accordingly. By **integrating** these insights into the **editorial workflow**, teams can create more impactful and resonant content that not only attracts but also retains readers.

6. AI

Personalization, automation, and support for your editorial team

There are so many possibilities to use AI in the newsroom. **Personalized display** of articles ensures that users receive content that is individually relevant to them. AI-generated content can simplify producing user-created content. Chatbots can assist editors in **improving their articles**, and AI can **automate the production** of print magazines or newspapers. Leveraging AI capabilities allows the editorial team to enhance **efficiency and deliver high-quality** content at scale.

Yet, the power of GenAI also lies on the product side, creating **added value** for paying subscribers. There are **multiple examples**, from a weekly newsletter with a summary of articles over thematic interests summaries showing which articles would have been suggested to this subscriber in a personalized manner to an individual podcast tailored for each subscriber with AI-generated speech. In our DRIVE-project we have established an AI test lab and developed numerous **AI solutions** that are now **in daily use** by various publishers.



→ This analysis clearly demonstrates the relevance of AI-generated articles. While editorial articles are superior, AI articles are highly efficient given their low effort.

7. Channel distribution

Right content, right channel, right time

Ensuring the right content is on the right channel at the right time is crucial for **maximizing reach and engagement**. Improving digital products, newsletters, push notifications, social media, and technical SEO are essential for effective channel distribution. By optimizing content distribution, the editorial team can ensure that their articles reach the intended audience through the most appropriate channels.

8. Transformation

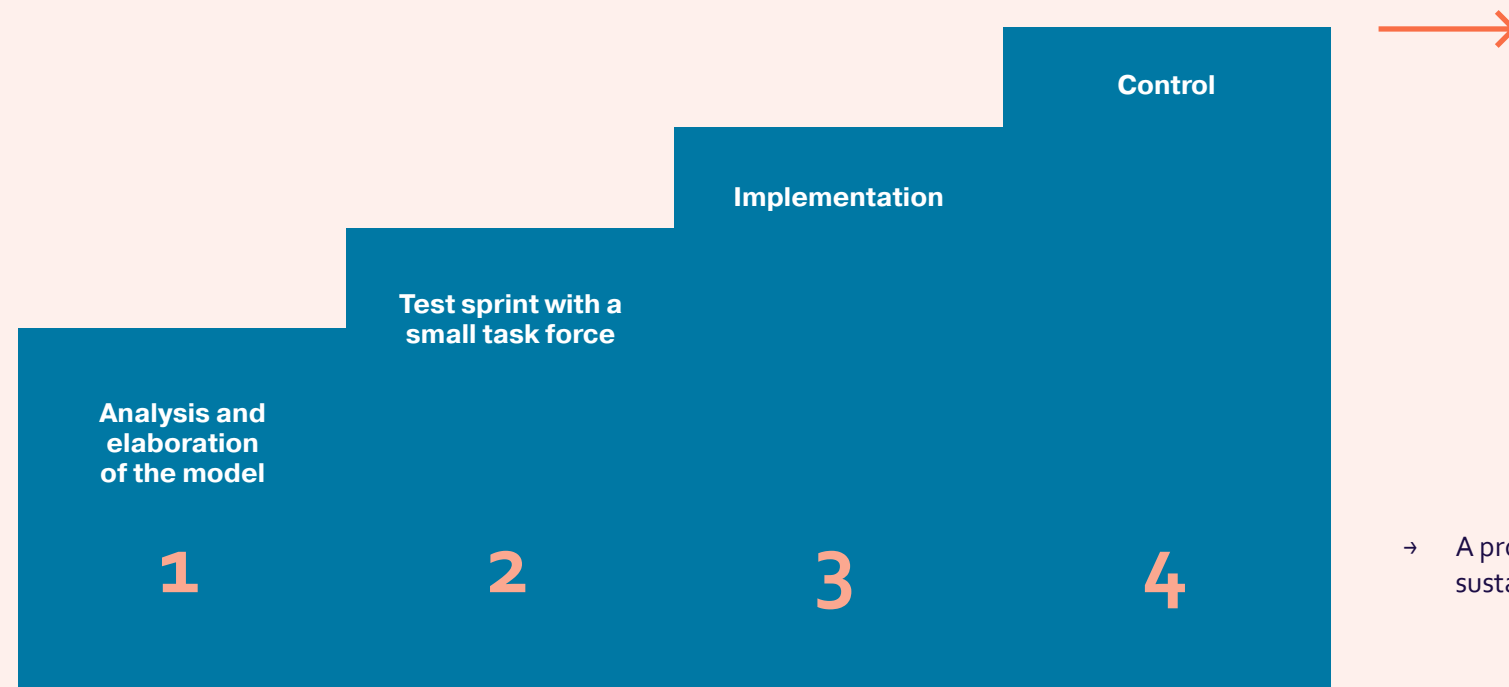
Embrace the change

Selecting the optimal **working methods and team structures** is critical for a successful transformation. The most suitable approach should be chosen based on the specific needs of the organisation, whether that be an agile framework, lean management or a more traditional method. It is essential to provide **moderation and daily support** for the change process to ensure a smooth transition and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

How to approach that transformation

Approaching transformation requires a strategic and methodical approach, much like preparing for a competitive sport. It cannot happen overnight and necessitates a **well-thought-out plan, a skilled coach, focus on individual tasks, and unwavering endurance**.

Leadership plays a crucial role in this process, as leaders must embody and demonstrate the transformation, setting an example for the entire organization. Change will not come from the base organization. Success hinges on two main ingredients: **uncompromising commitment and ownership of the transformation**. Our DRIVE project has developed a proven procedure:



We have developed a proven procedure:

1. **Evaluating** the present state and progression of the target vision, taking into account the publisher's distinct attributes. An important aspect involves fostering awareness among the editorial team regarding necessary changes by data analysis like the ratio of ghost articles. This aids in pinpointing areas requiring enhancement, thereby paving the way for transformation
2. Developing a small operational **task force** for future working methods, including the defined capabilities for a proof of concept
3. **Implementing** the new methods across the entire organization
4. **Tracking and managing** the new working methods using defined KPIs, with coaching for managers to ensure the transformation is consistently implemented in everyday operations

→ A proven approach in projects that leads to sustainable success in transformation.



Why Highberg is the perfect partner

Highberg offers a range of services to support your transformation:

- **Strategic discussions:** Assessing your current state with our DRIVE-framework, identifying development needs, planning the path forward, and addressing issues.
- **Experience from DRIVE and other client projects:** With four years of daily work with the German News Press dpa and up to 30 publishers and numerous client projects, we have insights into their struggles, successes, and investments, helping you avoid common mistakes.
- **Digital expertise:** We built the technical DRIVE framework, collecting up to 10 million data points daily from 30 publishers, analyzing them in real-time, and making them accessible through structured APIs or user-friendly dashboards. We also developed and trained AI models for real-time personalization, chatbots for editors, and automated content creation with direct publishing to CMS systems.
- **Business expertise:** With over 1000 projects, we understand media companies comprehensively, offering multi-year strategies, performance improvements, and in-depth projects in individual divisions.
- **Transformation expertise:** Through the application of agile practices, we enable organizations to set direction, execute, adapt and deliver value with speed and flexibility. We provide a comprehensive approach that promotes adaptive strategy planning, iterative development and operational realisation Our academy offers leadership development and agile frameworks like SAFe and Lean.



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