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CASE

MAKE SENSE

“Your Media, Your Voice:
A Community-Based
Fundraising Solution

STUDY

IN SHORT

The “Your Media, Your Voice” initiative built a community-supported platform for Make Sense’s Slovyansk hub, enabling readers to contribute financially and strengthen independent journalism in wartime Ukraine. By engaging its audience directly, the team aimed to create stable, diversified revenue streams and reinforce trust between the newsroom and its readers.

ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Founded in 2014, Make Sense operates across Slovyansk and Chernivtsi, Ukraine. The organization works at the intersection of independent journalism, media literacy, and development, running projects that counter disinformation and support displaced people. Its Slovyansk platform, 6262.com.ua, focuses on community resilience — covering local safety, disability rights, and family and veteran issues — while upholding truthful reporting amid war and propaganda.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

To strengthen Make Sense’s relationship with its Slovyansk audience by developing a user-friendly donation platform, diversifying income sources, and empowering the community to actively support independent journalism.



IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

The team conducted audience surveys to identify content needs, then launched a new fundraising platform allowing one-time and recurring contributions. They also added a Q&A section to boost interaction, refined site navigation, and recruited a communications manager to lead audience engagement and donor outreach.

WHY THIS PROJECT?

With close connections to its Chernivtsi audience, the “Your Media, Your Voice” project focused on growing the Slovyansk hub and its audience relationships after relocating at the start of the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion in 2022. “Now we have a situation with war in our region and our city,” Oleksandra Pylypenko, director of media, said. “And people, I think that they feel the value of our work in Slovyansk now.”

HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

The first step: understand the audience. Collaborating with mentors on the best ways to reach its audience, Make Sense conducted surveys asking what they value about the media, what information they want, and what types of content they prefer. The project focuses on creating a platform that is human-centered and collaborative.

Make Sense emphasized the importance of maintaining a connection to Slovyansk, especially as many internally displaced people have relocated. “It’s important to save this connection with our city, with our hometown,” Pylypenko said. This effort is part of the group’s diversification strategy to become more independent, reduce reliance on grants and donor support, and develop alternative income sources. Even small amounts help demonstrate value to readers and build connections.

DID MAKE SENSE’S APPROACH CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS AUDIENCE IN ANY WAY?

Make Sense developed the platform based on responses from its audience survey. The team began producing more of the content requested by its audience, including coverage of safety in Slovyansk, as well as financial, government, and employment topics. It also added a Q&A section to improve communication and is working to make the platform easier to subscribe to.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID MAKE SENSE ENCOUNTER AND HOW DID IT ADDRESS THEM?

Building and designing the platform was fairly straightforward. The biggest challenge has been communicating with the audience and helping them understand why the platform exists and why it is worth supporting, even during a crisis.

Some people wondered why they should contribute to a media outlet when they have so many other urgent needs. The team realized it is important to raise awareness that independent journalism still matters, all the more during wartime. Independent journalism is crucial for maintaining a democratic society, especially in a country defending its freedom.

“Journalism is not separate, it’s a part of the struggle,” said grant manager Natalie Hanzha. After launching the platform, the team shared updates on their NGO’s website and social media, but the response was limited. To improve communication, a communications manager recently joined to create a clearer strategy for engaging the audience and highlighting the platform’s importance.

HOW WAS MAKE SENSE'S PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

The platform has received several donations and five subscribers. Some posts have received likes and occasional comments, but overall engagement has not reached the level the team is aiming for. They noted that subscription models are still relatively unfamiliar to their audience, and many people are not used to supporting media through regular contributions.

WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID MAKE SENSE GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

The team learned that thorough preparation before launching the platform is important. They emphasized that the platform must be comfortable and safe for users, especially given the sensitive context, to build trust and encourage participation. They hope the recent addition of a communications manager will help them explain the value of ongoing contributions and build stronger connections with the audience.

WHAT DOES MAKE SENSE PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

The team plans to implement a new communication strategy with the communications manager over the next month. They will focus on writing articles and posts on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Following a mentor's advice, they are considering offering some free content to allow the audience to experience what they have to offer.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD MAKE SENSE GIVE TO OTHER JOURNALISTS OR ORGANISATIONS CONSIDERING A SIMILAR PATH?

Make Sense points to the importance of investing in audience research for projects like this. The group's mentors kept emphasizing this advice throughout the process, and the team agrees that it's essential. They said their mentors' support made all the difference, helping them understand early on just how important it is to study and connect with their audience. That way, they can build a platform that meets their needs and has a better chance of success.
