



CASE

MYKOLAYIV
NEWS

“**Frontline News:**
Keeping Local Media
Afloat in Ukraine

STUDY

IN SHORT

Mykolayiv News' project was to strengthen its capacity as a source of socially important news on the front line in Ukraine in order to keep operating as a multimedia publication. This helped strengthen its social media presence and preserved the print newspaper.

ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Mykolayivs'ki novyny (Mykolayiv News) is a multimedia publication with a 30-year history. Its website, niknews.mk.ua, has been online since 2000. As a regional publication, it focuses on local topics, but also covers politics, social life, culture, and sports.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Mykolayiv News aimed to strengthen its capacity as a multimedia publication to continue delivering socially important news from the front line. The project focused on maintaining credibility, increasing audience engagement, and exploring sustainable ways to operate under challenging conditions near the conflict zone.



IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

The team applied design-thinking principles, emphasizing empathy and user-centered content, to better understand audience needs. They redesigned social media posts using visual formats, concise takeaways, and clear calls to action, while creating an “idea bank” of proven content formats to streamline production.

WHY THIS PROJECT?

The team saw this as a chance to save the media outlet, and it gave them the opportunity to develop a specific direction and receive financial support. This particular project turned out to be excellent. It includes mentorship from professionals, a stimulus for social media promotion, development of the print edition, and an operational financial component.

Mykolayiv is just 50 kilometers from the front line. Russian strikes have destroyed much local infrastructure and many local businesses are closing down — and with them advertising revenue. Circulation has dropped, and points of sale for newspapers are disappearing. Therefore, the team is fighting to save the printed newspaper, but simultaneously focusing on their website and social media.

HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

Applying design-thinking principles (especially the “empathy” stage) helped the team shift their focus from merely “reposting” content to prioritizing user needs. Now, the editorial team views the Facebook feed not as a news archive, but as a space for emotional and useful interaction. Design thinking allowed us to better identify the audience’s pain points: they don’t read long texts; they need a quick takeaway or a clear call to action.

DID MYKOLAYIV NEWS’ APPROACH CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS AUDIENCE IN ANY WAY?

The approach changed in two key aspects: format and accessibility. The team started using more visual formats — image cards with text instead of long links. This directly increased the visual appeal and visibility of content in the feed. The clear call to action (accessibility) is another change: Mykolayiv News no longer just informs; it prompts: “Find out,” “Share,” “Discuss.” This has made the content more interactive.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID MYKOLAYIV NEWS ENCOUNTER AND HOW DID IT ADDRESS THEM?

The biggest challenge was the lack of resources (it takes much more time than a simple repost). To address this, the team created an “idea bank” — a list of formats that have already proven effective, which helped speed up content generation and avoid having to create new visuals every time. Another challenge was the “blind format” (an unclear understanding of what content the audience truly needs). The team dedicated a week to analyzing just the comments and viewing time to identify which topics get the most response.

HOW WAS MYKOLAYIV NEWS' PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

The team observed that the audience received the changes positively because the content became more readable and easier to see "on the go" in the news feed. It is also more clickable. Thanks to focused headlines, users better understand why they should visit Mykolayiv News' website. The team saw a 15-20% increase in engagement (likes/shares) with posts that were completely redesigned, compared to simple reposts.

WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID MYKOLAYIV NEWS GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

The team realized that a Facebook page is not just a channel, but a separate product that requires its own "design" and editorial policy. Website content is a raw material that must be "reworked" for the social media format. Their main conclusion is that on Facebook, the audience needs a quick value proposition, not complete information. The full text always remains on the website. Overall, these were lessons in establishing cooperation and adapting to unexpected circumstances. A creative, user-focused, design-thinking approach helped address the problems of social media promotion. This became a step towards creating innovative products.

WHAT DOES MYKOLAYIV NEWS PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

Context is currently waiting to hear back on a few other grant applications. They expect answers soon, and if they secure the funding, they will be able to develop a longer-term plan for video production. If not, they will look for other ways to keep the work going without additional financial support. Either way, they are confident that video will remain part of their future. The long-term goal is to bring on a dedicated video editor or establish a consistent partnership with an external collaborator.

The team will focus on Facebook to gain new audiences, monetization, and search for new sources of income. They are now more aware of how to use statistical data and audience engagement tools.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD MYKOLAYIV NEWS GIVE TO OTHER JOURNALISTS OR ORGANISATIONS CONSIDERING A SIMILAR PATH?

If you have a print newspaper, do not give it up under any circumstances. It is the core of your media outlet. Its publication and distribution are very complicated right now. But a print newspaper will make you stronger on social media, add authority and readers, and generally foster a new design-thinking approach. Publishing a newspaper and maintaining a social media presence are the passport of your capability to take on complex projects.



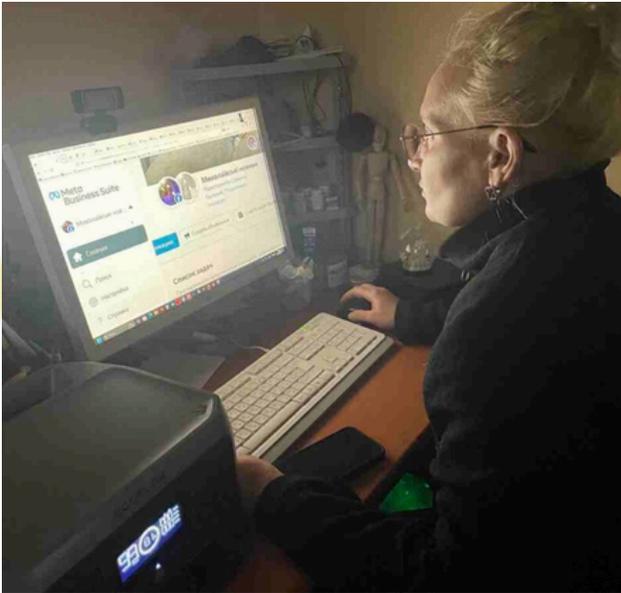
VISUALS FROM THE PROJECT



Photographing the damage to a nine-story administrative building, a short walk from the Mykolayiv News editorial office.



Working on the Mykolayiv News website.



Working during a blackout.



Distributing the print edition of Mykolayiv News.