



CASE

RUBRYKA

“**Active Engagement:**
Involving the Audience to
Build Content, Support

STUDY

IN SHORT

Rubryka concentrated on developing a prototype for a donation-based product aimed at an international English-speaking audience that supports independent journalism from Ukraine. The team conducted research to understand the motivations and interests that drive readers to support the media.

ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Rubryka operates in the format of solution journalism. The newsroom covers news and sociopolitical issues in Ukraine, reporting both problems and solutions. The content is available in three languages: Ukrainian, Russian, and English.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Rubryka aimed to understand what motivates international, English-speaking readers to support solutions-focused journalism from Ukraine and to design a sustainable donation-based product that strengthens long-term audience relationships and builds a global support community around independent reporting.



IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

The team conducted interviews and surveys with international readers, tested donation-based content concepts, and iteratively refined a Patreon model. Audience insights shaped exclusive story selection, community engagement practices, and a supporter-driven product that translated reader interest into recurring financial support.

WHY THIS PROJECT?

Rubryka decided to focus on digging into ways it could connect its independent journalism with an international, English-speaking audience. There were two main goals: the first one was to understand what prompts international readers to support constructive, solutions-focused reporting from Ukraine. The second was to develop a donation-based model that could help sustain Rubryka's work while building a stronger global community around its journalism.

HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

The team applied design thinking to combine user interviews with surveys, prototyping, and iterative feedback. This human-centered approach has been key to sharpening Rubryka's understanding of its audience's needs and preferences. It enabled the team to co-create solutions with readers, discover new story ideas, and refine product concepts based on real insights rather than assumptions. Another important element was mentorship throughout the process, which enhanced the ability to ask proper questions and interpret responses effectively.

DID RUBRYKA'S APPROACH CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS AUDIENCE IN ANY WAY?

The new approach fostered active participation between Rubryka and its audience. The first step was conducting interviews, where people had the opportunity to comment, share, and discuss Rubryka's content. Through interviews and surveys, the team was able to engage directly with their readers, increasing a sense of community that built trust, fostered loyalty, and emphasized the importance of involving readers in shaping the platform.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID RUBRYKA ENCOUNTER AND HOW DID IT ADDRESS THEM?

The main challenge was to find people to interview, as some declined or did not respond. To address this, Rubryka developed individualized approaches, confirmed schedules in advance, and provided context to prepare participants. This taught the team that flexibility during interviews and an emphasis on the value of each person's input are essential for building rapport, revealing insights, and turning challenges into opportunities for stronger engagement.

Other challenges arose while building the donation-based model, as it was completely new territory for the team. One of the most challenging aspects was deciding which stories to place behind a paywall on Patreon, especially considering that one of the team's goals was to reach as many people as possible with their reporting. By focusing on the themes its community genuinely cared about, Rubryka managed to reach an agreement and produce a series of meaningful stories.

HOW WAS RUBRYKA'S PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

The project was well received. The interviewees' engagement with the content grew to the extent that they shared it with their networks and contributed to new story ideas. Also, the audience feedback showed a meaningful interest in exclusive, solutions-focused reporting, which validated the team's approach and strengthened their confidence in expanding their offerings through platforms such as Patreon. Finally, understanding the reasons that encouraged readers to support reporting from Ukraine helped Rubryka to develop a donation-based model that resonated, brought people together, and addressed their needs. As a final achievement, Rubryka grew a community to 63 supporters and began receiving its first stable donations.

WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID RUBRYKA GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

The team understood that one of the key aspects of product development and, most importantly, of building community and discovering new story leads is direct engagement with the audience. Interest in people and their opinions creates a human-centered approach that cultivates loyalty and encourages participation. Additionally, the team gained practical skills in scheduling, preparation, and flexibility in interviews, and discovered the potential of niche content to attract and sustain international support.

WHAT DOES RUBRYKA PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

The team plans to conduct regular interviews and surveys to inform content creation and promote audience engagement. Through the insights they gained during the project, team members aim to expand exclusive content on their Patreon account and focus on uncovered topics that align with the interests of their international supporters. Overall, the team's primary goal is to cultivate a loyal and supportive community around Rubryka's solutions-focused journalism.

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

Engage with the audience regularly and from the outset. Active listening involves participants in shaping their own work. Additionally, it's essential to be open to feedback by treating every participant as a valuable contributor rather than just a source of data. Through iterative, human-centred approaches, it's possible to uncover findings that can improve both the content and the community, and these insights cannot be obtained solely from assumptions.



Different merchandise formats for specific target audience needs.



Patreon page: a space for interaction with the audience.