

VREME

CASE

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“**Adding Value: Developing and Monetizing a Premium Newsletter**”

STUDY

IN SHORT

Vreme set out to transform its free newsletter Medjuvreme into a paid, premium version that supports independent journalism. With over 11,000 subscribers, the outlet created a new model offering exclusive investigations, behind-the-scenes insights, and in-depth analysis. The project positioned Medjuvreme as a sustainable, reader-supported pillar of Vreme's mission.

ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Founded in 1990, Vreme is one of Serbia's most respected independent media organizations. It began as a weekly magazine established by journalists who left mainstream outlets protesting editorial censorship under the Milosevic regime. Over the decades, Vreme expanded into a multimedia platform — running a website, podcast, newsletter, and documentaries — continuing to champion free expression and factual, critical reporting across the region.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Vreme aimed to convert its free newsletter into a sustainable, reader-funded product. The goal was to provide subscribers with exclusive content and deeper analysis while strengthening financial independence and reinforcing trust in quality, in-depth journalism.



IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

By applying design-thinking methods, Vreme conducted user research, tested pricing models, and refined newsletter prototypes. Mentorship sessions helped align editorial and business goals, resulting in a clear structure for premium content and a long-term monetization plan.

WHY THIS PROJECT?

Vreme recognized a growing demand for journalism that offers depth and context — something missing from mainstream media. Many loyal readers sought content that not only informs but explains. Creating a premium newsletter allowed Vreme to meet this need while generating revenue to sustain independence. By offering exclusive interviews, investigations, and commentary, the newsroom could reward its most engaged readers with meaningful value. This approach bridged audience loyalty with long-term sustainability, transforming Medjuvreme from a free publication into a vital, paid product that supports its journalistic mission.

HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

Design thinking helped Vreme move from intuition to user-driven strategy. Through mentoring sessions and feedback loops, the team learned to question assumptions and prototype effectively. Early audience surveys clarified pricing expectations, preferred content formats, and tone. Testing multiple newsletter layouts helped the newsroom identify what made readers feel engaged and willing to pay. The process also strengthened teamwork between editorial and business sides, encouraging a shared understanding of readers' motivations. This iterative, empathetic approach resulted in a data-informed, user-centered model for sustainable newsletter monetization.

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

Vreme developed and tested a premium newsletter format, which required the team to think more strategically about their relationship with readers. Instead of only focusing on general readership, they began to consider how to serve the most engaged part of the audience with added value.

This changed their editorial approach: they started engaging in two-way communication, inviting feedback, and creating content that is more tailored and personal. It also gave them new insights into reader loyalty and what motivates people to support quality journalism directly.

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

The main challenge was the technical implementation of the subscription model. Without an in-house IT team, the team depended on an external partner whose solution to the problem was delayed and didn't fully meet their needs. Vreme's existing online store couldn't support recurring payments, which forced them to find a workaround and delayed the launch of the paid newsletter.

Another challenge was managing the production schedule, since the team working on the newsletter was small and already engaged in daily tasks. The team learned that projects involving both technical and editorial changes require more buffer time and clearer division of roles, and that early testing of tools and infrastructure is essential for success. Despite the obstacles, the team adapted quickly and launched the premium newsletter, and are now better equipped to scale it up further.

HOW WAS VREME'S PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

Through a targeted survey sent to a portion of its free subscribers, Vreme validated that there was both interest and willingness among readers to pay for high-quality, independent content. Based on these insights, the team created a sustainable pricing structure and promoted the new premium offer through Vreme's website and social media channels. Within the first weeks, Vreme reached 65 paying subscribers, and the growth has continued.

WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID VREME GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

This experience taught the team to be data-driven and align their goals with the needs of their core audience. The insights gained from this project will inform future monetization strategies, not only for Medjuvreme, but potentially for other segments within Vreme as well.

One of the main lessons was that premium products like newsletters must go beyond simply repackaging existing content. Readers respond best when they feel that they are receiving unique, carefully curated, and context-rich reporting. Another insight was the importance of testing different formats and tones.

WHAT DOES VREME PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

Moving forward, Vreme will further develop Medjuvreme as a core reader-supported product. The focus will shift to growing the number of subscribers, refining content based on reader feedback, and optimizing the user experience. The team will continue to monitor analytics related to open rates, subscription upgrades, and cancellations to better understand what drives engagement and retention. Based on this data, they plan to adjust the structure and frequency of content to meet evolving audience needs.

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

Vreme's main advice would be to treat a premium newsletter as a standalone product, not just an extension of your existing work. Start by clearly defining who your target readers are and what unique value you can deliver to them. Don't be afraid to experiment with style, structure, and timing until you find what works best for your audience. And most importantly, integrate feedback loops. Ask readers what they like, what they need more of, and how they use the newsletter. Building a sense of community and trust around the product is as important as the content itself.

Međuvreme

„Međuvreme“, **njuzleter** nedeljnika „Vreme“,
stiže **svake srede tačno u podne** u Vaš inboks.

Prvi ćete moći da zavirite u broj „Vremena“ pre nego što stigne na kioske,
tu su najbolji sadržaji sa našeg portala, i preporuke kako provesti vreme.
Poklanjamo knjige, ulaznice za pozorišta, bioskope, koncerte.

Prijava je prosta i **besplatna**, samo ispod unesite svoj mejl i kliknite:

Upišite Vašu e-mail adresu

Prijavi se

Medjuvreme, Vreme's weekly premium newsletter, delivered every Wednesday at noon.