

News worth seeking

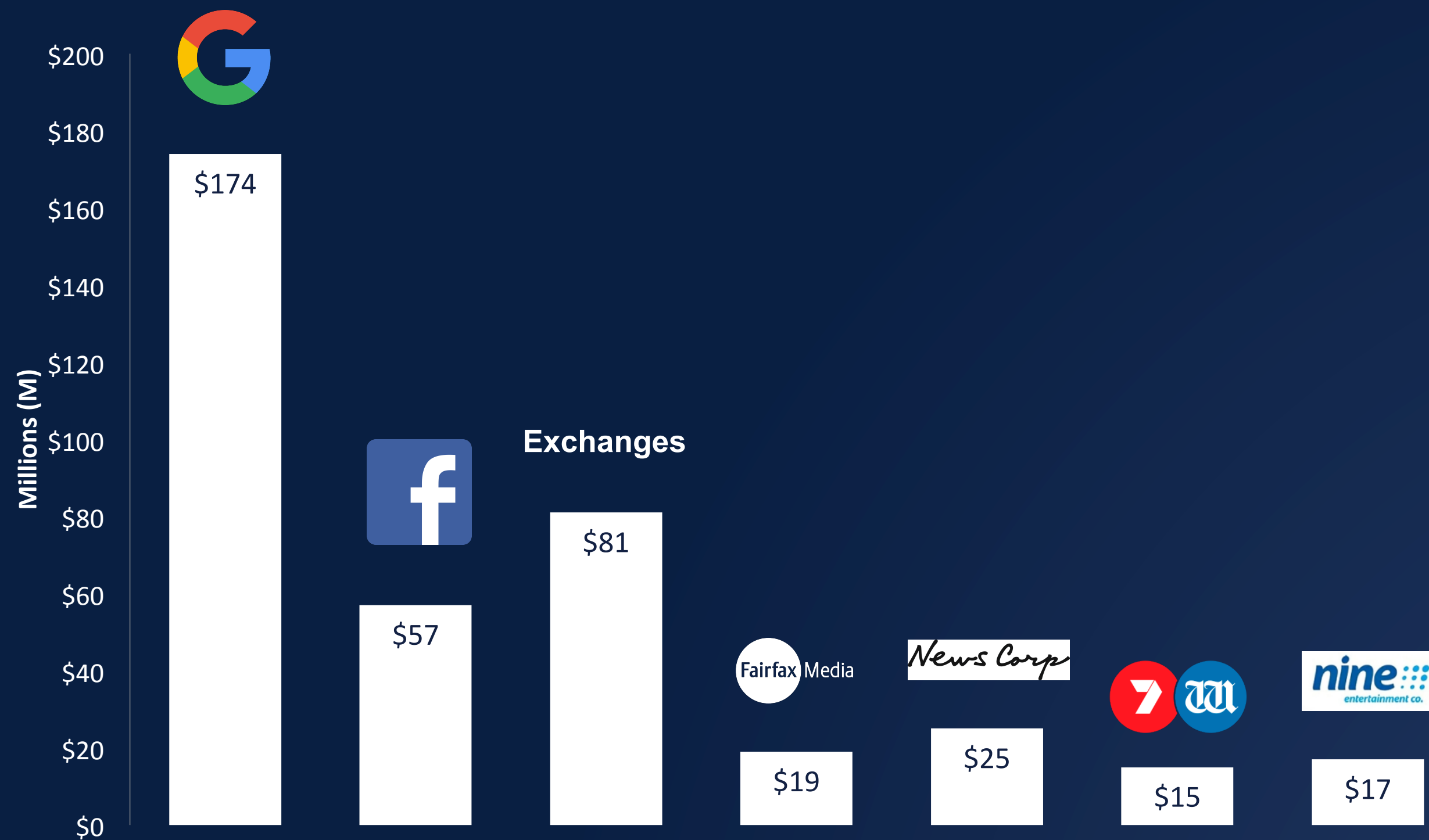
A tale of change through product development from the newsroom of
The Sydney Morning Herald.

Jess Ross

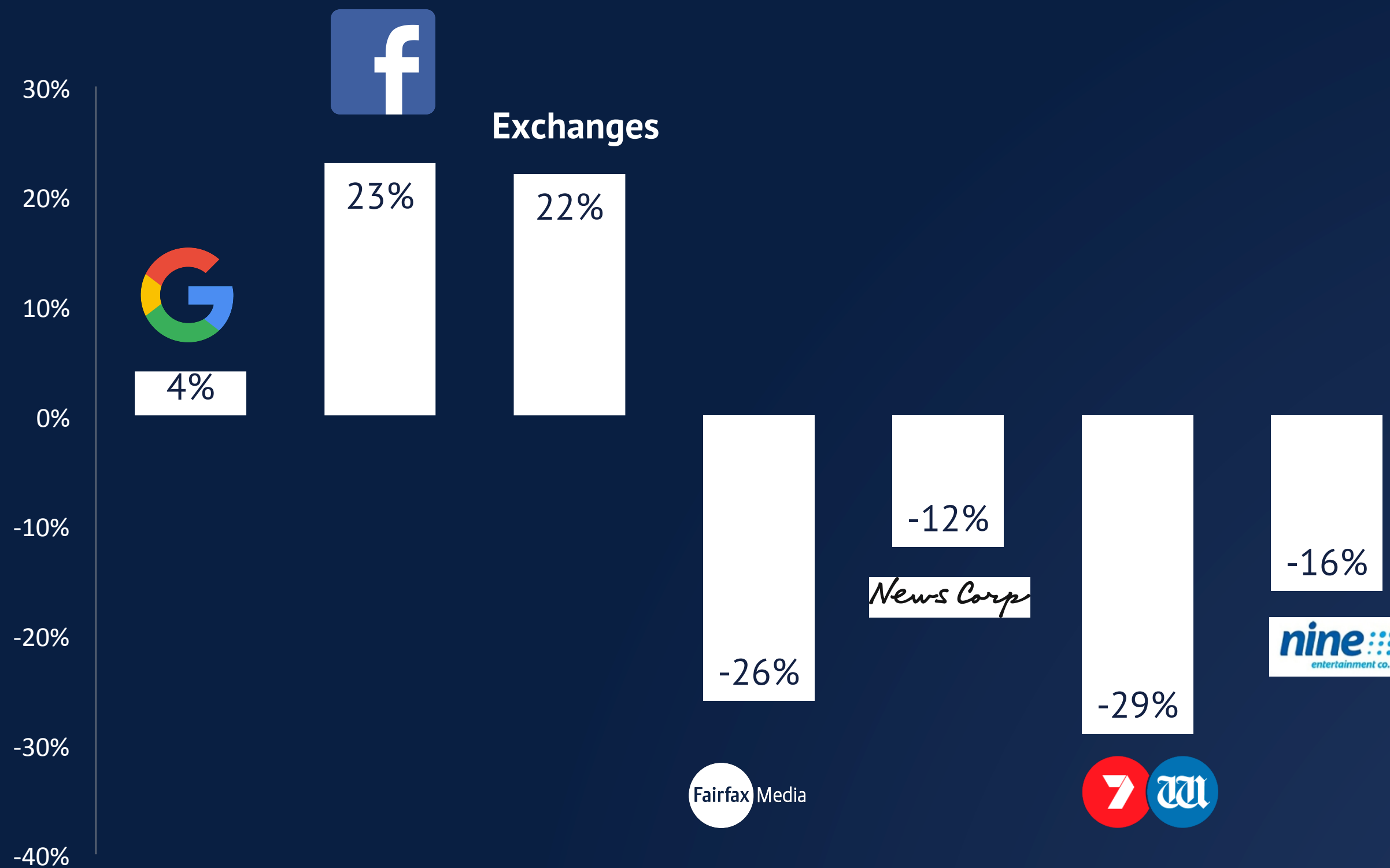
Former Chief Product Officer
Australian Metro Publishing, Fairfax Media

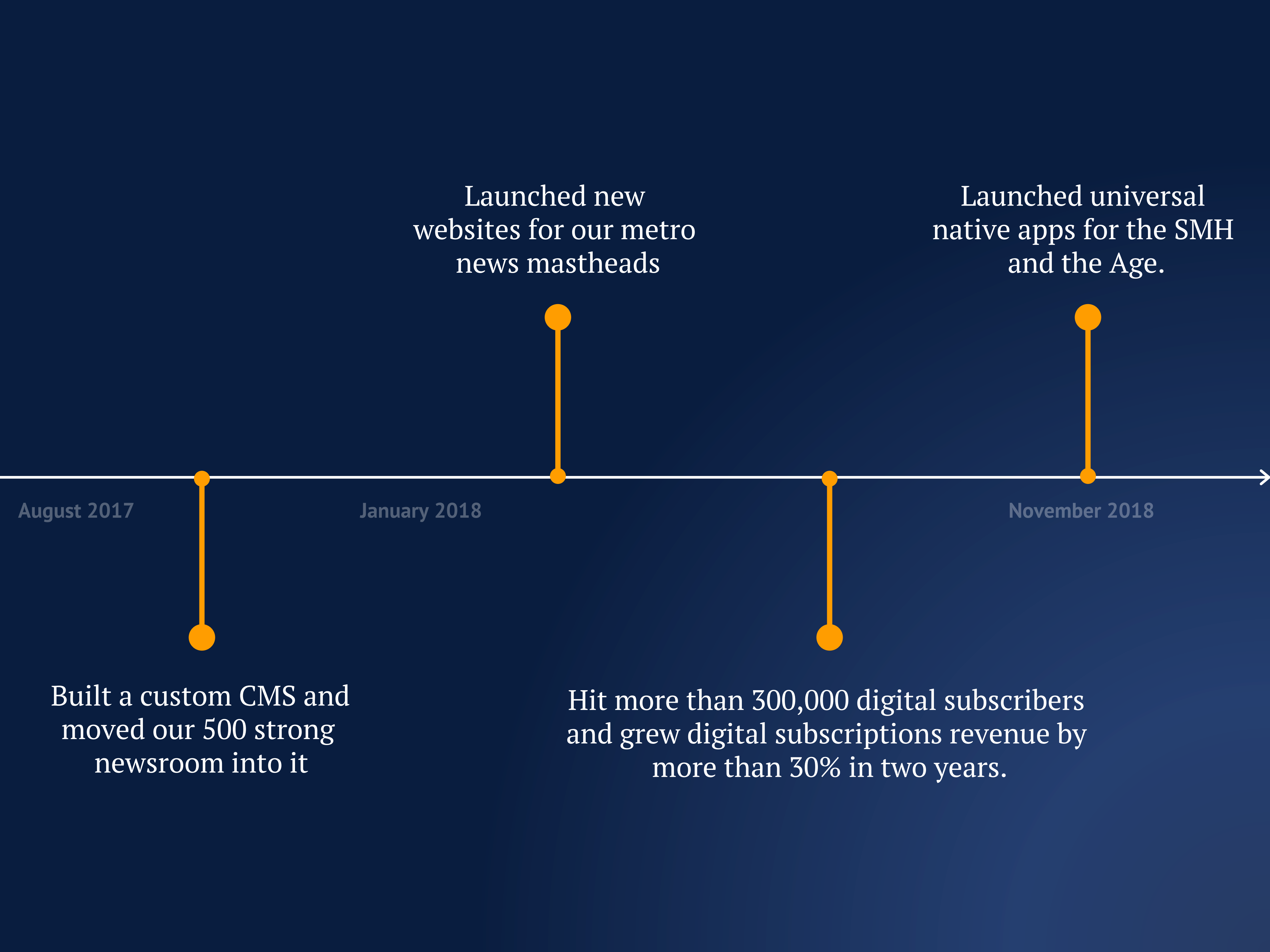
Digital Advertising Revenue

Jan-April 2017 (indicative)



Digital revenue growth (y-o-y) Jan-Apr 2017





Launched new websites for our metro news mastheads

Launched universal native apps for the SMH and the Age.

August 2017

January 2018

November 2018

Built a custom CMS and moved our 500 strong newsroom into it

Hit more than 300,000 digital subscribers and grew digital subscriptions revenue by more than 30% in two years.

What do you seek?

What do you seek?

- New websites or native apps for your mastheads
- A new CMS or better editorial tools for our newsrooms
- Email newsletters, podcasts or video strategies

KEEP OUT

What do you seek?

*“ News is what somebody
somewhere does not want
you to print. Everything
else is advertising.”*

– Lord Northcliffe

KEEP OUT

“*News is what somebody somewhere does not want you to print. Everything else is advertising.*”

– Lord Northcliffe

We set out to

Rebuild our digital publishing platform and our portfolio of products to strengthen our brands and drive commercial growth.



Love and loyalty with
our readers



More engaging
storytelling



New ways to fund our
newsrooms

Business challenges

Our aim was to create a sustainable future for our business by combining our heritage assets with a leaner operating model.



Poor quality
digital inventory



Disjointed digital and
print products



A focus on reaching
audiences, not driving
value from them

Key insight

5% of readers drive more than 50% of digital revenue.

Focusing on loyal readers would mean significant change for our business.



Retention over reach



Direct over distributed



Viewability over variety

In a distributed content landscape

The act of seeking is a good proxy
for customer value

And our product vision for our digital mastheads was born.

*News experiences
worth seeking.*

What motivates people to seek out news?

Clarity & Cut-through

“Some brands just show more intelligence. They may as well be I make you smarter.com”

Mastery

“I want to know about it enough so I can make good decisions and I don't look stupid.”

Inspiration & Escape

“Reading the paper is like being on holiday. I enjoy taking the time to read it.”

Belonging

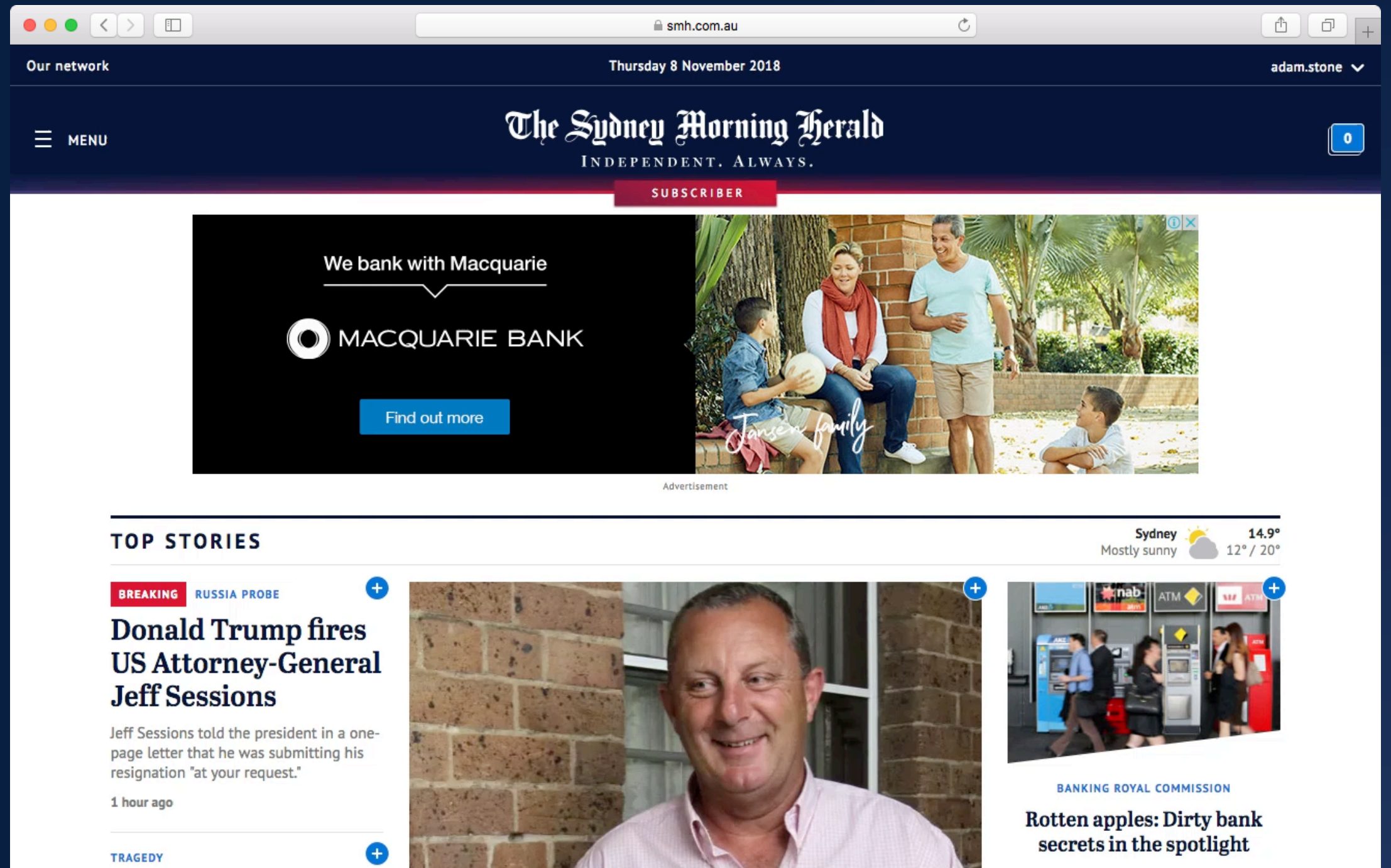
“I want to see how people react to a certain topic. It makes me feel like I'm on the right side.”

An aerial photograph showing a two-lane asphalt road that curves along the edge of a large, calm lake. The lake's water is a clear, light blue-green color. To the left of the road is a dense, lush green forest of evergreen trees. The road has a white dashed center line and solid white edge lines. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

What we changed

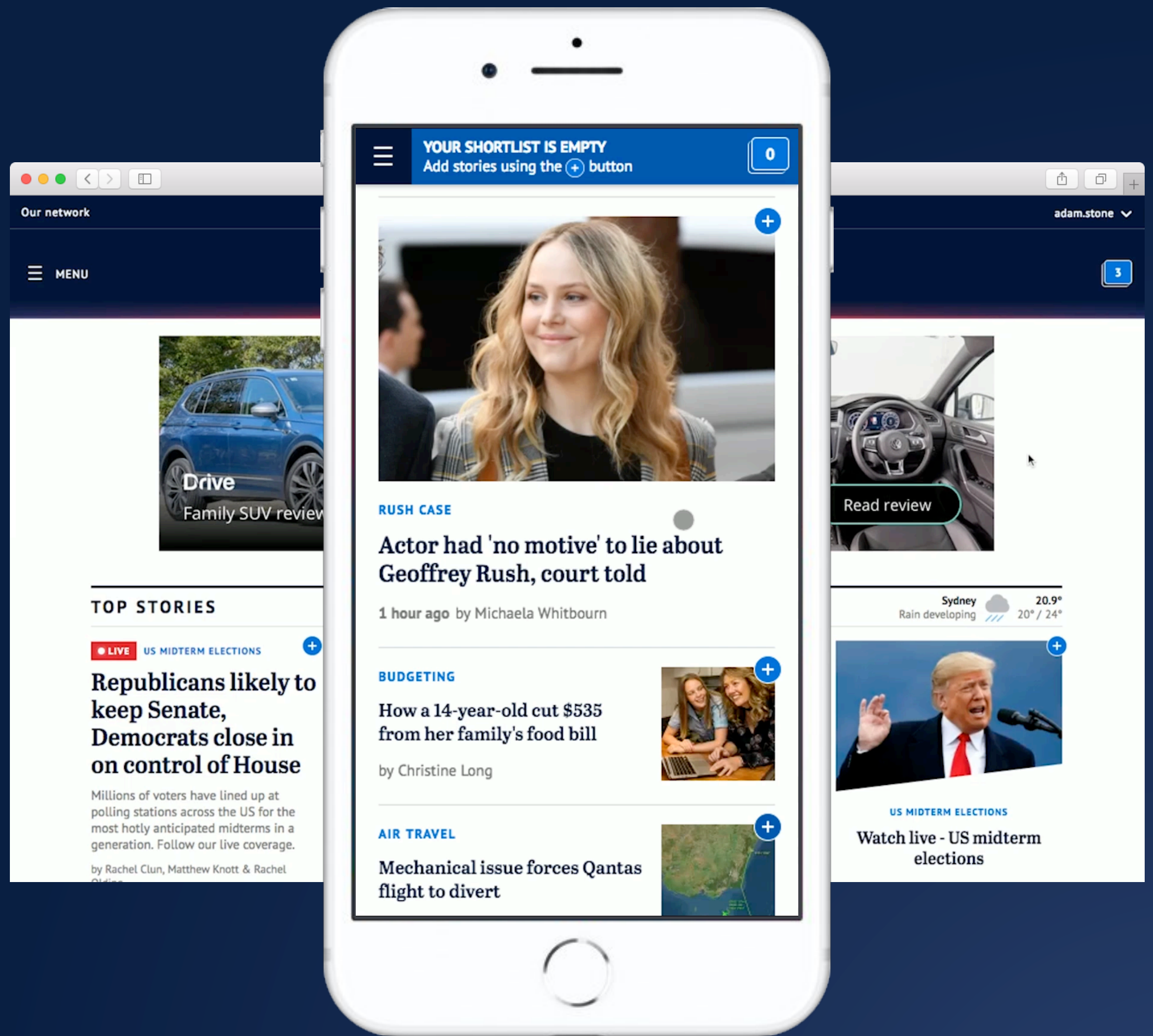
Clarity & Cut-through

We used white space and a distinctive visual language, grid and story tiles to better communicate content hierarchy, and make stories easier to discover.



Mastery

We developed Shortlist to give readers a greater sense of control, productivity and mastery by enabling them to get more out of every news session and to pick up where they left off even when they switch devices.



Inspiration & Escape

We introduced a serendipity zone for lighter content combined with our signature opinion and perspectives.

The screenshot displays the smh.com.au news website. At the top right, the weather for Sydney is shown as 'Mostly sunny' with a temperature of 26.7° and a range of 20° / 31°. The main content area is titled 'TOP STORIES' and features several news items:

- BREAKING RUSH CASE:** 'Judge rejects bid to call 'Witness X' in Geoffrey Rush trial'. A Federal Court judge has rejected a bid by The Daily Telegraph to call a new witness, dubbed Ms X, in a defamation case brought against it by Geoffrey Rush. 33 minutes ago by Michaela Whitbourn.
- CRIME:** 'Police officer made sickening threat to Senator Sarah Hanson-Young'. In a 16-second phone call to the Senator's office, Senior Constable Sean Daniel Murphy made a sickening threat to sexually assault one of her family members. 2 hours ago by Georgina Mitchell.
- OPINION PROPERTY MARKET:** 'Sydney's housing market downturn could end up being the longest on record'. Sydney's property slump could rival the downturn in...
- CRIME:** 'Son stabbed father to death after being told to stop playing computer games'. 1 hour ago by Georgina Mitchell.
- LIVE MELBOURNE CUP:** 'Track downgraded as deluge hits Melbourne Cup day'.
- EXCLUSIVE THAILAND:** 'Aussie divers land \$6m deal over Thai cave rescue'.

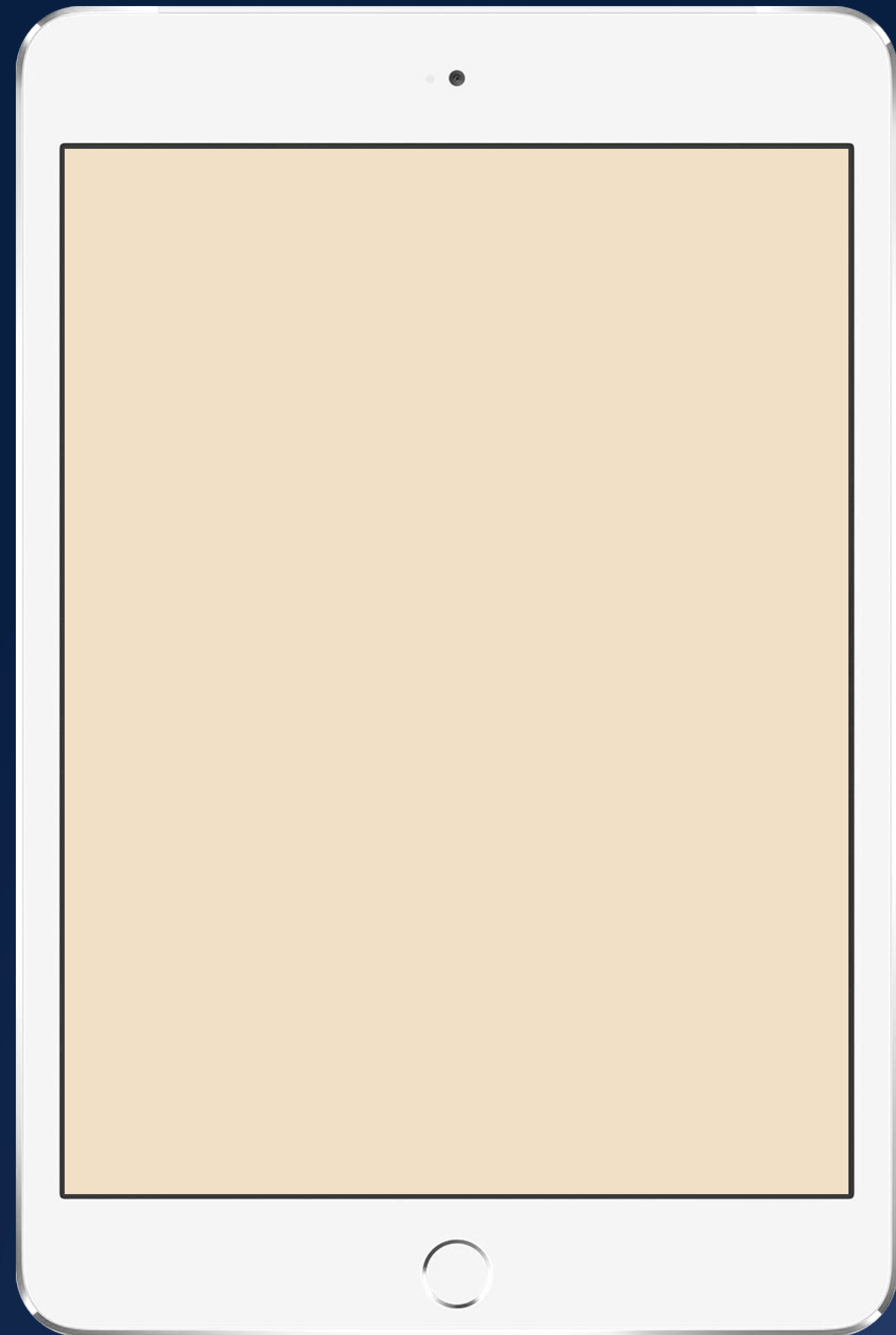
On the right side, there is a 'JUST IN >' section with several updates:

- Just now:** 'After a year-long search, insiders say Amazon has made a call on its HQ2'.
- 12 minutes ago:** 'Sacked Real Madrid mentor 'the best coach I've had': Carvajal'.
- 13 minutes ago:** 'LIVE / Markets Live: ASX up on energy, groceries'.
- 16 minutes ago:** 'Fifty Stars will head to Perth after Cup day win'.

There are also several images and graphics, including a large image of a trophy (Melbourne Cup) and a smaller image of a man in a blue shirt.

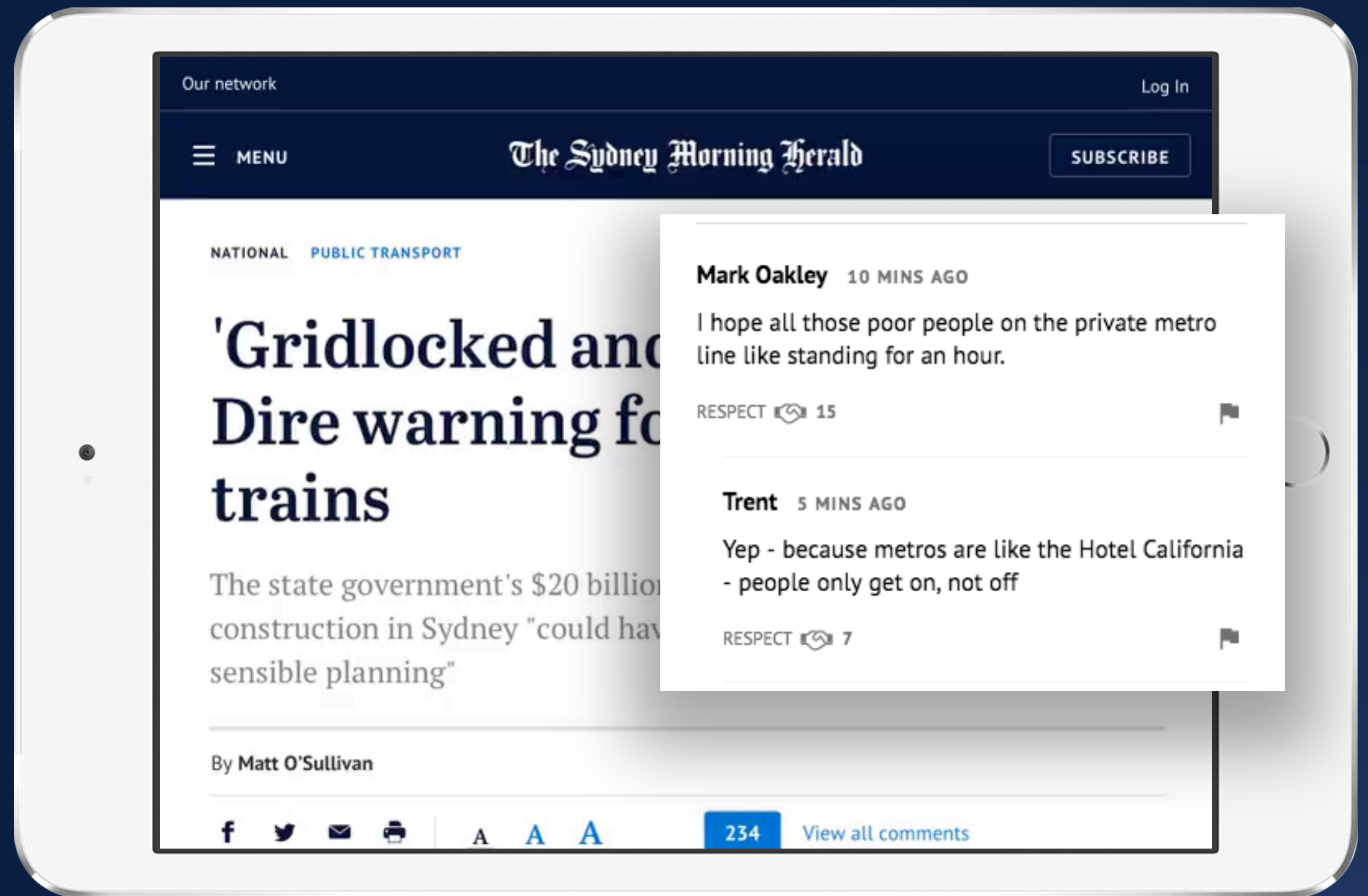
Inspiration & Escape

Collections – a new experience-led format designed to counter readers propensity to skim or be distracted and to deliver maximum relaxation and enjoyment.



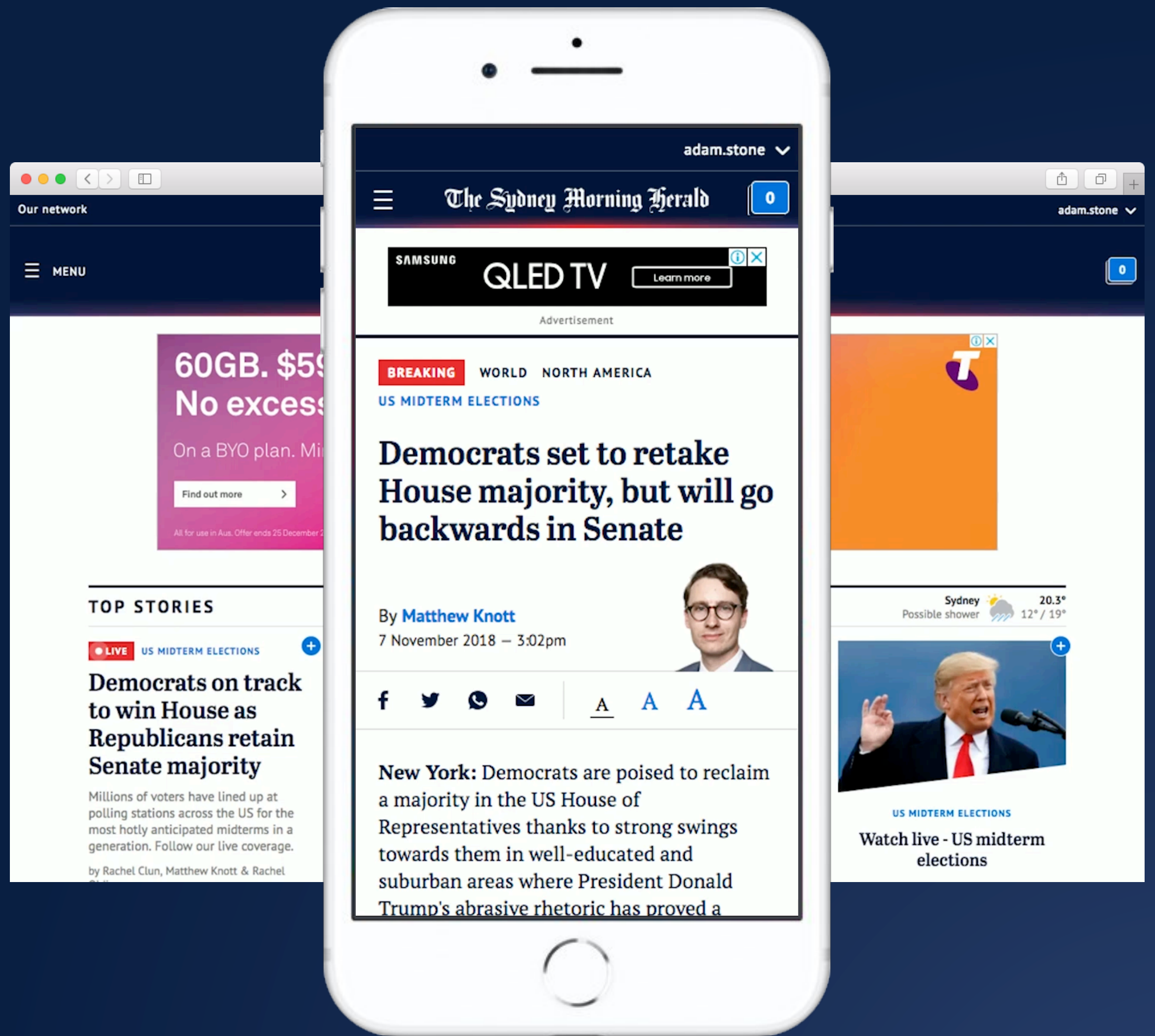
Belonging

We increasing the prominence of commenting on articles, allowing readers to 'up vote' other commenters posts by clicking or tapping 'Respect' and optimised the moderation environment to increase the volume of comments published and lowering the elapsed time from submission to publication.



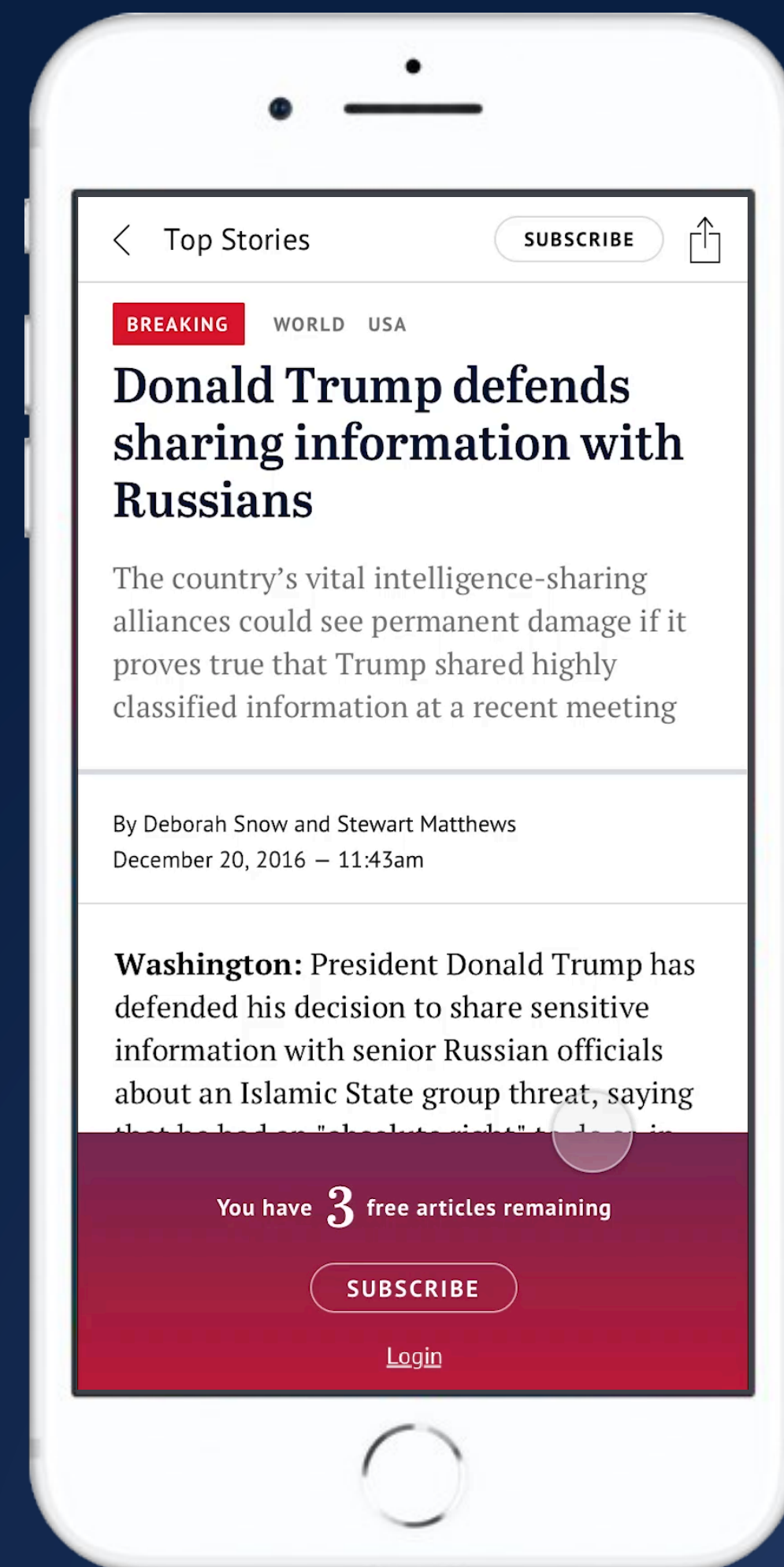
Ad overhaul

We reduced the number of ad shapes from 38 to 4, swapped intrusive skins and OTPs for large-scale scrollers providing a flexible rich media canvas, and enabled all ad formats including high-impact scrollers across all device classes and page types on every page reducing our reliance on homepage takeovers.



Subscriptions

We lowered article limits, optimised our subscription conversion paths and introduced a new 'toaster' meter prompting our loyal readers to subscribe as they near their monthly article limit.



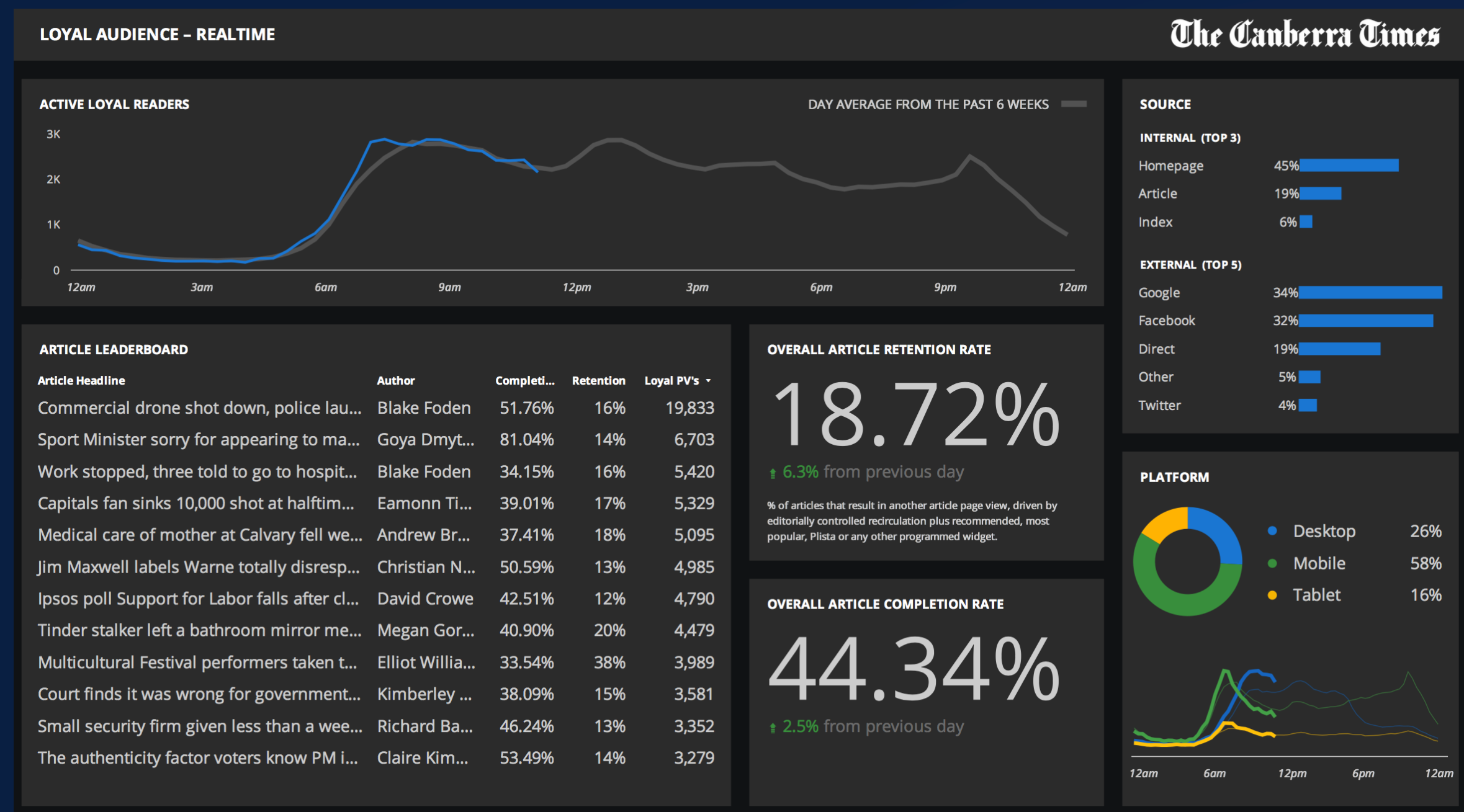
Sponsored content drivers

We integrated native sponsored content and drivers on homepage and article pages retaining the site look and feel while clearly labelling sponsors.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a news article on the Sydney Morning Herald website. The browser's address bar shows 'smh.com.au'. The page header includes 'Our network' and 'adam.stone'. The main navigation bar features 'MENU' and 'The Sydney Morning Herald' logo. A prominent blue banner at the top of the article area reads 'Surround your brand with articles your customers trust.' and lists sponsors: 'TheTruthBuildsTrust.com.au', 'Fairfax Media', 'News Corp Australia', and 'SEVEN WEST MEDIA'. Below the banner, the article is categorized under 'POLITICS FEDERAL HEALTHCARE'. The headline is 'My Health Record opt-out system back online after crash'. The author is 'Dana McCauley', and the article was published on '6 November 2018 - 10:53am'. A small profile picture of the author is visible. Below the author information are social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email, along with text formatting options. A blue comment bubble indicates '130' comments, with a link to 'View all comments'. The main text of the article begins with 'The My Health Record opt-out helpline is up and running again after a system failure this morning, when centre workers said they had been "inundated" by those rushing to opt out before the deadline.' A quote follows: '"The issue has now been resolved," a spokeswoman for the Australian Digital Health Agency told Fairfax Media.' The final sentence of the visible text is 'Callers to the telephone opt-out service were told the system used by call centre operators had crashed on Tuesday morning, as Australians rushed to opt out of the controversial e-health'.

Realtime newsroom dashboards

We integrated native sponsored content and drivers on homepage and article pages retaining the site look and feel while clearly labelling sponsors.



An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road along a rocky coastline. The road curves from the top left towards the bottom right. To the right of the road, the ocean is a vibrant turquoise color, with white waves crashing against dark, jagged rocks. The left side of the road is covered in lush green vegetation. A small red car is visible on the road, moving away from the viewer. The overall scene is serene and scenic.

How audiences responded

Reach is stable

 **0.61%**

Average monthly reach

 **3.91%**

Average monthly page views

 **0.07%**

Average daily UBs

The Sydney Morning Herald

July – September 2017 vs July – September 2018

Loyalty has increased

 **7.63%**

Average daily loyal audience

 **36.44%**

Direct entry via homepage

 **18.3%**

Average daily loyal pageviews

 **42.09%**

Average daily subscribers

 **41.71%**

Paying % of monthly UBs

The Sydney Morning Herald

July – September 2017 vs July – September 2018

Engagement has improved

A subscriber comments almost **x3** more than a non subscriber

 **48%**

Average daily time per user

 **97%**

Articles with comments

 **181%**

Average daily comments

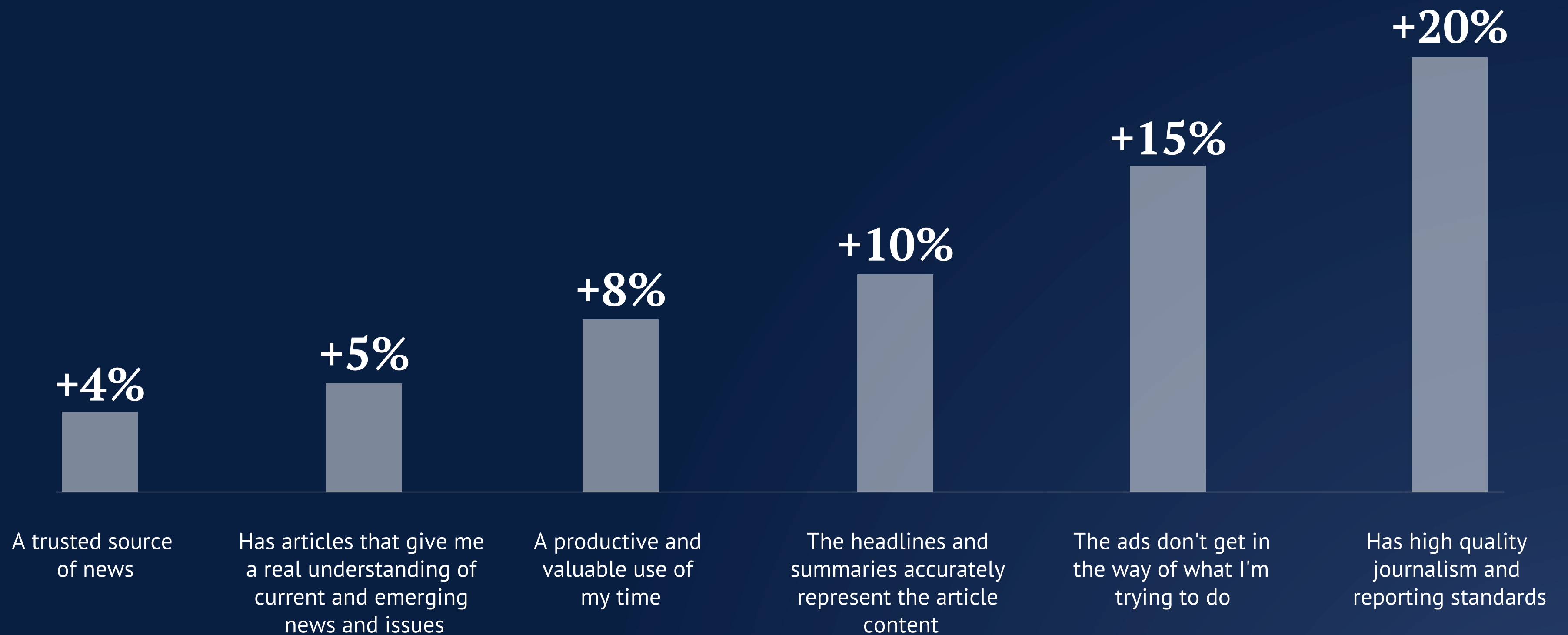
 **22%**

Average comments per article

The Sydney Morning Herald

July – September 2017 vs July – September 2018

Audience satisfaction has improved



All key subscriptions measures have improved

 **25%**

Meter and paywall prompts

 **100%**

Paywall conversion rates

 **42%**

Daily subscribers

 **61%**

Daily registrations
(Subscription prospect pool)

The Sydney Morning Herald

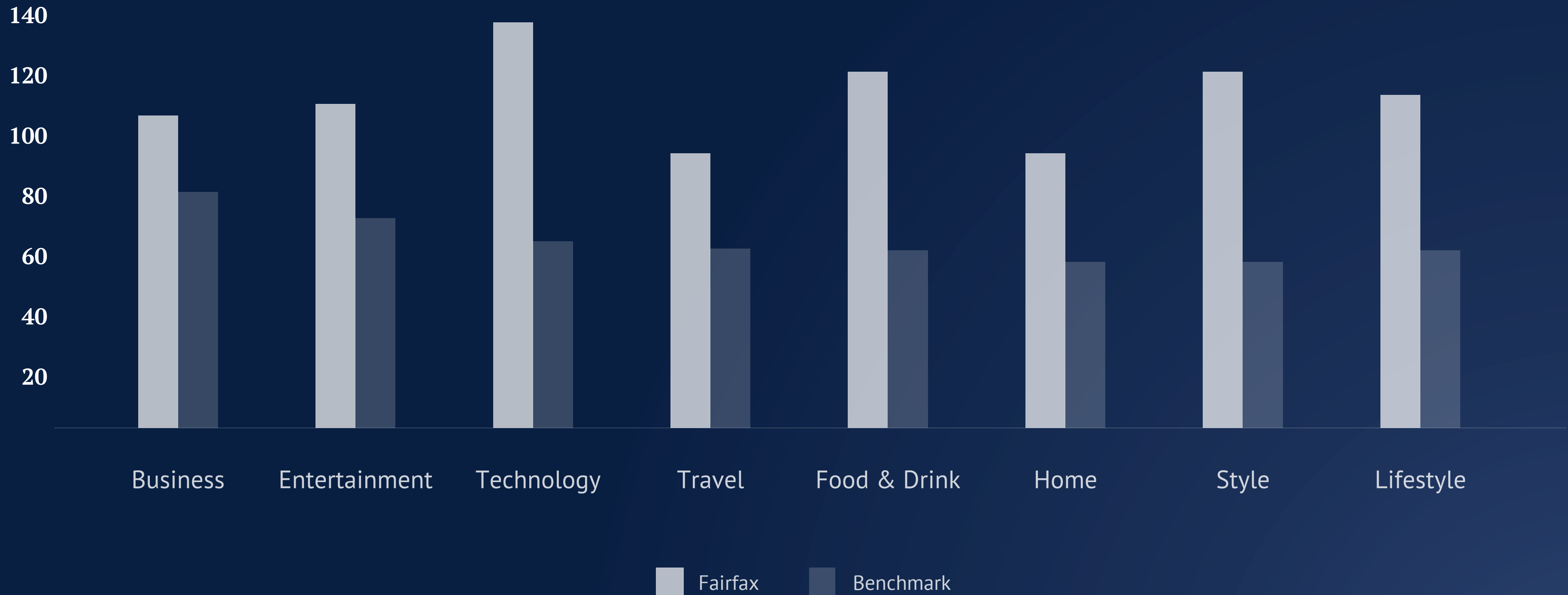
July – September 2017 vs July – September 2018

An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road through a valley. The road curves from the bottom left towards the top right. The landscape is a mix of dense green forest and light-colored, rocky or sandy terrain. The lighting is soft, suggesting dawn or dusk. The text 'The bottom line' is centered over the road in a white serif font, with a thin white horizontal line underneath it.

The bottom line

Sponsored content now sells out

We've been able to transfer the enhanced engagement and attention into significant increases to sponsored content revenue. Our branded content \$ have increased x%



Other key retention measures are all up

 **10%**

Average daily pages per user

 **73%**

Quality page views

 **2x**

Page load speed

The Sydney Morning Herald

July – September 2017 vs July – September 2018

H1 FY19 revenue results

 **14%**

Digital subscription revenue

 **21%**

Digital advertising revenue

 **58%**

EBITDA

News experiences worth seeking out

- New digital products
- New publishing platform
- New ad units
- New commercial strategy
- New editorial measures of success
- Holding our nerve

**But like the news,
it's worth seeking out.**

Jess Ross

If you'd like to have a chat about your product strategy, get in touch

www.linkedin.com/in/jessross