

The
Economist

How we build newsletters*

**Hint: by first asking why*

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Newsroom Summit, October 29, 2018

Sharing is caring

1.

How (and why) we build digital products

2.

How (and why) we build newsletters

3.

Case study: weekly newsletter

4.

Ask Me Anything



Hello! I'm Sunnie



Reporter

2013-2015



Student

2015-2016



Social-media writer

2016-2017



Newsletters editor

2017-present



Why invest in digital products?

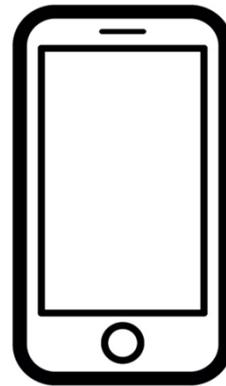
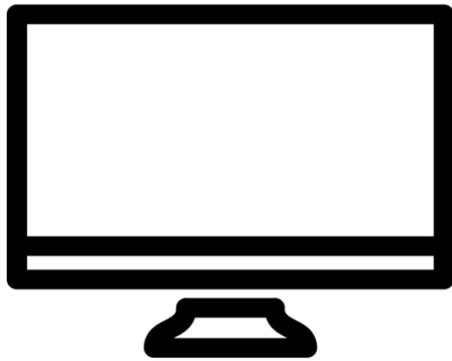
“Complement **world-class journalism** with a **world-class digital experience**. If we aim to reach, acquire and retain more subscribers, **we must invest in our digital products**”

-Denise Law, head of products





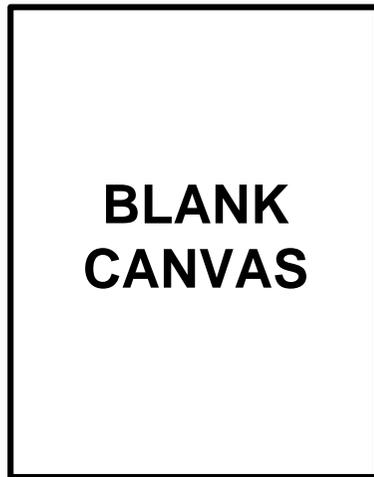
But not just any digital products





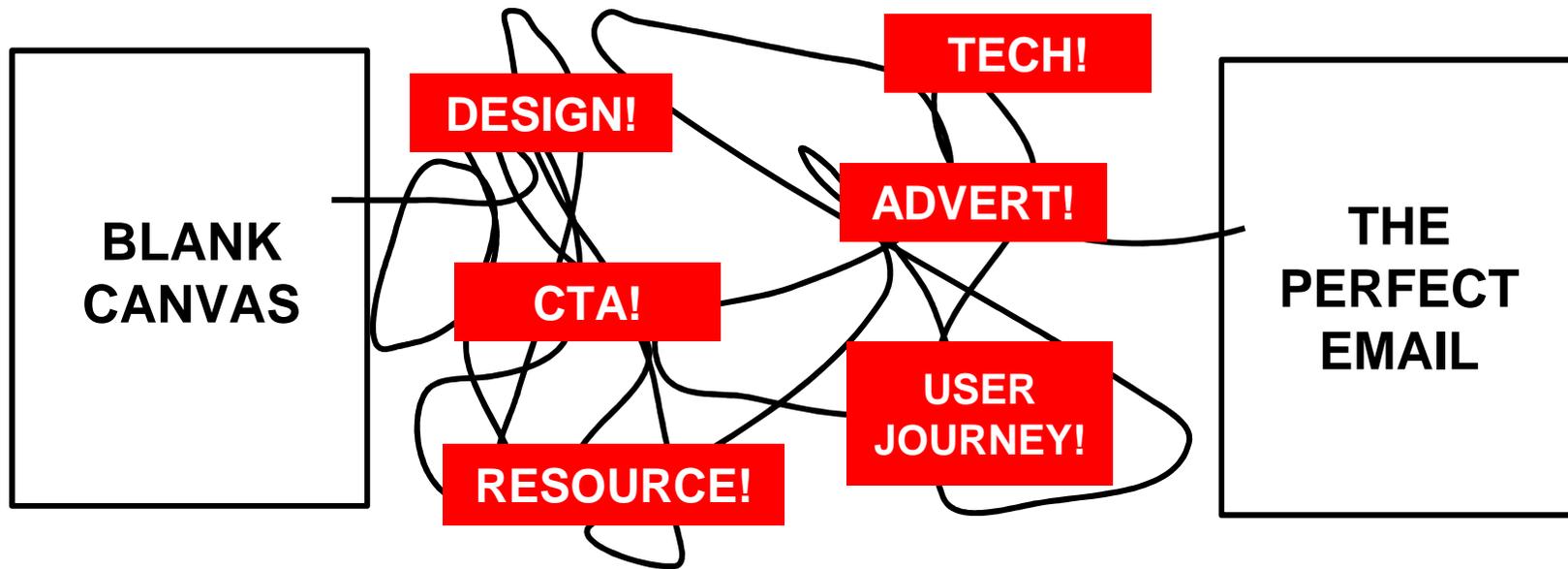


Possibilities galore





In reality... 🤯





Let's take a step back

*“People don't want to buy a **quarter-inch drill**,
they want a **quarter-inch hole**”*

- Theodore Levitt



Connecting with readers



A screenshot of a tweet from Bill Gates. The tweet text is: "I read @TheEconomist cover-to-cover because its content makes me think critically about the world. Its editors recently asked me a tough question: What is the one thing you'd do to create a more open world? See my answer below and share your answer here: b-gat.es/2LTs1WM". The tweet includes a profile picture of Bill Gates, his name "Bill Gates" with a verified badge, and his handle "@BillGates". There is a "Follow" button and a dropdown arrow.

Bill Gates ✓
@BillGates

I read @TheEconomist cover-to-cover because its content makes me think critically about the world. Its editors recently asked me a tough question: What is the one thing you'd do to create a more open world? See my answer below and share your answer here: b-gat.es/2LTs1WM



A screenshot of a news article from "the ONION". The article title is "'The Economist' To Halt Production For Month To Let Readers Catch Up". The article text is: "LONDON—World-renowned news and opinion magazine *The Economist* announced plans to suspend any new online and print content for the next month in an effort to finally allow subscribers a chance to catch up. 'It's only fair to our readers,' said *Economist* editor Winthrop Parker, adding that there was no reason for subscribers to feel ashamed for not necessarily knowing every last detail about the current economic and geopolitical climate. 'Even just scanning over some of the feature stories can sometimes take two or three daily bus commutes to finish. After all, some of these issues have as many words in them as a short novel. No one should be expected to do that in one week.' In related news, *ESPN The Magazine* announced Monday it would be suspending publication indefinitely until its readers learned to read." The article includes the "the ONION" logo, the text "NEWS IN BRIEF", the date "4/19/11 9:00am", and a link "SEE MORE: WORLD".

the ONION

NEWS IN BRIEF

'The Economist' To Halt Production For Month To Let Readers Catch Up

4/19/11 9:00am • SEE MORE: WORLD

LONDON—World-renowned news and opinion magazine *The Economist* announced plans to suspend any new online and print content for the next month in an effort to finally allow subscribers a chance to catch up. "It's only fair to our readers," said *Economist* editor Winthrop Parker, adding that there was no reason for subscribers to feel ashamed for not necessarily knowing every last detail about the current economic and geopolitical climate. "Even just scanning over some of the feature stories can sometimes take two or three daily bus commutes to finish. After all, some of these issues have as many words in them as a short novel. No one should be expected to do that in one week." In related news, *ESPN The Magazine* announced Monday it would be suspending publication indefinitely until its readers learned to read.



Connecting with readers



Pain points:

- Content overload
- Too much noise
- Lack of time
- Unread copy guilt
- “*The Economist* is a difficult read”



Needs:

- Stay on top of important and timely analyses
- Discover interesting / surprising stories they wouldn't otherwise read
- Filter and prioritise what to read in *The Economist*



Generate ideas

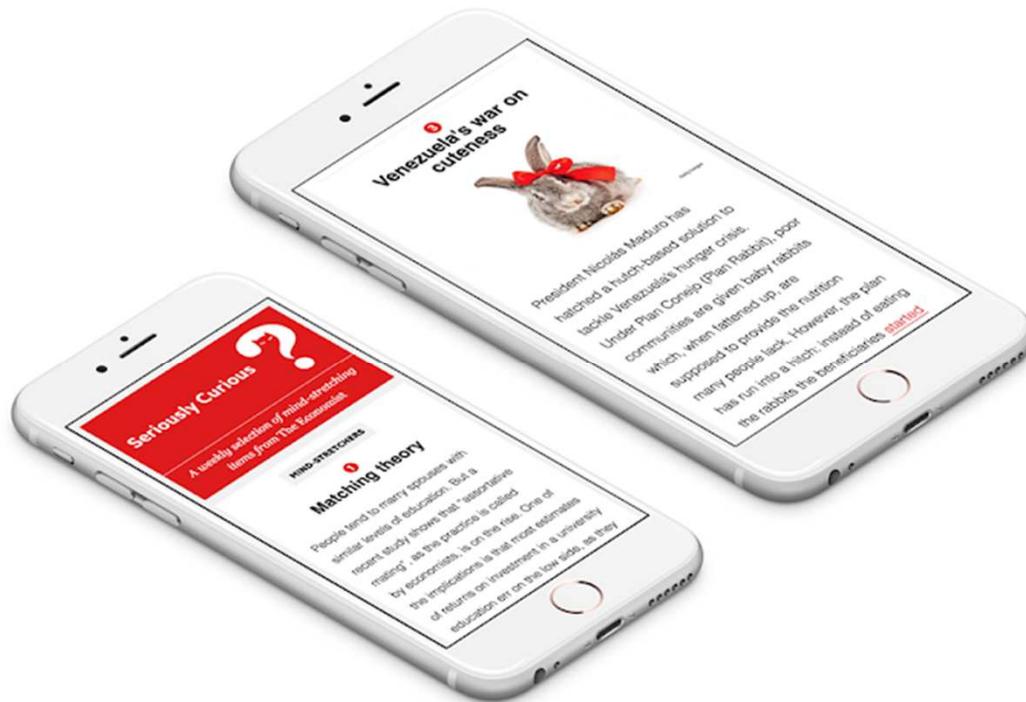


What you need:

- **Snacks**
- **Sticky notes & Sharpies**
- **A cross-functional team**
 - Editors
 - Marketers
 - Product managers
 - Designers
 - Developers
 - And more



Test and iterate



What to look for:

- What's (not) working?
- What are users saying?
- What are users doing?



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Case study: weekly newsletter

Generate ideas



Identify readers' needs and pain points:

"I find The Economist a difficult read and I struggle to finish it"

"I'm overwhelmed by the amount of content and I feel guilty about not reading everything"

Develop hypothesis:

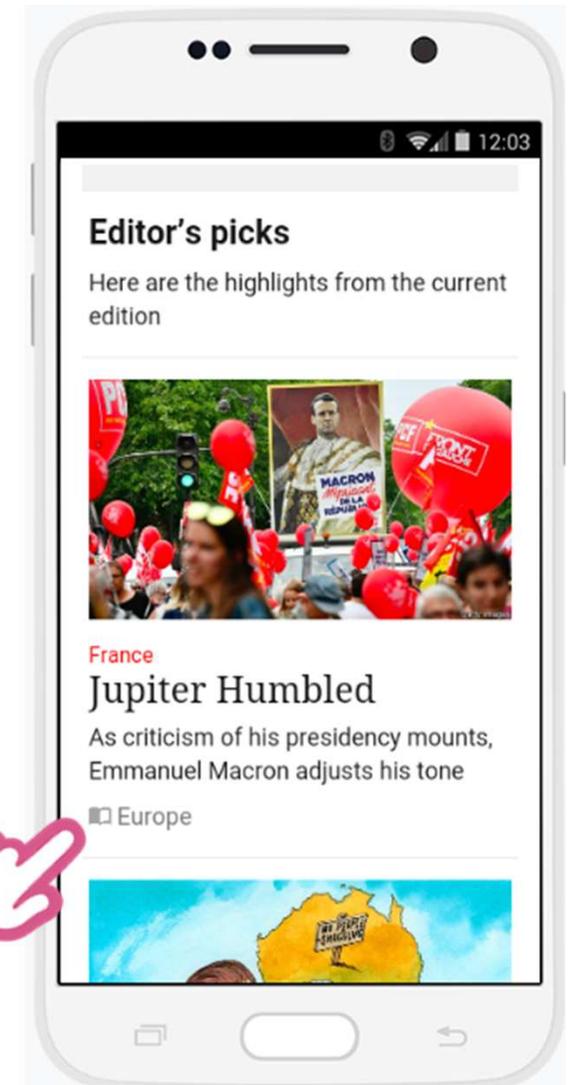
By better **guiding** readers through the weekly edition, we can allow readers to **quickly discover** important/interesting stories and **prioritise** what to read, therefore making the weekly edition **more accessible** and **combating unread copy guilt**



Develop prototypes

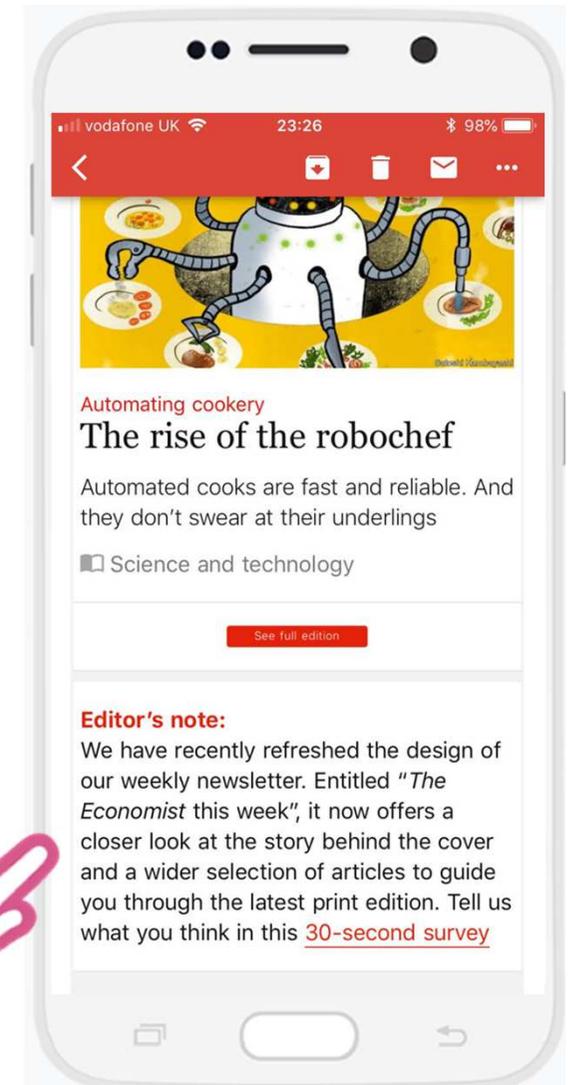
Features and experiences we developed:

- A longer introduction and more prominent covers to build excitement for the weekly edition
- Increase the number of picks from 3 to 7 to better showcase breadth and diversity of content
- A more accessible “See full edition” button
- Section indicators for easier browsing



Test and iterate

- Tested the new design on 20% of the recipients and compared the usage against the business-as-usual version
- Conducted a survey and collected 400 comments
- Fixed bugs and introduced new sections based on reader feedback
- Rolled out the new design to 100% of the recipients
- Continue to evolve the product



Key takeaways

1.

Develop a readers-first vision

2.

Inspire stakeholders to share the vision

3.

Experiment quickly and learn quickly

4.

Sharing is caring



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Thank you

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