

ISOJ 2019: Day 1, Afternoon Session

Subscriptions and memberships:

Reinventing the relationship with your audience

Chair: Emily Goligoski, Research director, **Membership Puzzle Project**

- **Tim Griggs**, Digital Media Consultant/advisor, **Leader of Facebook's Local News Subscriptions Accelerator**
 - **Tony Haile**, CEO, **Scroll**
 - **Jason Tuohey**, Senior Deputy Managing Editor for Audience Engagement and Digital Platforms, **Boston Globe**
 - **Amanda Zamora**, Chief Audience Officer, **Texas Tribune**
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Emily Goligoski: I'm very happy to be here. I'm Emily Goligoski and we're here to talk about how working different differently with your audience members and different forms of revenue and engagement the organizations are likely undertaking or will be soon.

We've seen a massive amount of interest in this work from around the globe, and I'm here to talk about why it matters and how to operationalize it with a few good friends including: Amanda Zamora, the Chief Audience Officer of the Tribune; Tim Griggs, digital media consultant and adviser and the leader of Facebook Local News Subscriptions Accelerator; Tony Haile, CEO at Scroll, a paid ad-free premium site reading experience and; Jason Toohey, the Senior Deputy Managing Editor for Audience Engagement and Digital Platforms at the Boston Globe.

As I mentioned I'm Emily Goligoski. I'm a former user researcher at the New York Times who now directs research at the Membership Puzzle Project. We are a grant funded public research project studying how to optimize news for trust. We're led by Jay Rosen and we partner with The Correspondent a member backed platform that aims to include its readers' knowledge in its coverage. We studied the social contract between news organizations and their audiences. And I say audiences plural very specifically with the idea that you don't have one monolithic faceless audience. We conduct our work through qualitative research, open publishing, communities of practice with reporters and audience development staff, and a new

membership and news fund to green light promising experiments in revenue generation audience governance and more.

In understanding what membership means we've also looked vertically to understand what people expect from other communities they contribute to. Today, in partnership with the Knight Center. We're thrilled to launch a new report about our study of themes that we identified in setting open source software, faith based organizations, alternative currencies, eco and intentional communities and more. This report is also coming soon in Spanish and Portuguese and I wanted you to be amongst the first people to hear about it.

A quick preview about some of the insights in this literature for news: First, there is deep value in listening testing and being fascinated with what members value. Instead of just assuming what members want, we see that successful membership organizations outside of journalism have developed ways of listening to fresh thinking about what their members actually want and strong feedback loops to get it right. They're empathetic and open to learning and we can be too. Next, we see that inspiring membership driven organizations connect individuals' passions to a larger shared purpose. They sell more than a product or a cause which is something that I'll talk about in a minute. Third, membership is one way to restore what's broken. Successful programs connect to the present Zeit Geist in which something crucial is broken or out of balance. They offer membership as credible grounds for optimism.

And finally, other organizations in adjacent spaces have flexible means for participation that we can learn from. These organizations play to their members' strengths abilities and goals. They don't just expect them to fit in a sort of one size fits all, come answer phones during a public radio pledge drive. They really go to them to understand what they might be able to offer. We hope you'll find the report actionable and I also want to share a little bit about how we think about the different revenue models that are at the core of that work and of our project.

In a subscription model audiences pay money to get access to a product or service. It's transactional and I should mention that this actually is different from free email subscriptions. These terms are often conflated. We see that subscription works really well for many businesses but where our project is fascinated is around membership that goes a layer deeper we think of membership as a model where community members give their time, money, connections, professional expertise, distribution to their network, and/or their ideas to support a cause that they believe in.

Increasingly we're seeing individuals give to sites that don't have paywalls because they want to see more people make use of that information and analysis. More like giving to the Guardian to underwrite your neighbors use of it. This is a really exciting development. And the idea that these organizations are keeping access to their core news product free and then having members pay to participate in conversations online and at events is something that we're watching with great interest.

Put another way, if we think about how our organizations can be best poised for growth aligning our business incentives and our users incentives is really important. If journalism production, including newsgathering and distribution, is built on transactions membership is built on relationships like ongoing communications and learning what expertise and experience our members have. We're seeing that in some cases members are actually identified by more contextual names. As in the Colombian site la Silla Vacía's Super Amigos or Novaya Gazeta's Accomplices in Russia. I would encourage you to find out what your own members want to be called.

One quick methodological note is that we study sites most engaged supporters their most loyal one to 10 percent of audience members because understanding what those people need can have virtuous effects on everyone else they serve with their work. To do this, we sit down in person with small groups of news supporters around the world to hear about their needs and what frustrates them about mainstream news.

The short answer, a lot. Here we are at the Urban Journalism Labs City Bureau in Chicago. and their members are not alone in feeling frustrated and fed up with organizations that pile onto the same stories with sound bites, distracting ads, and sound bites on stories of serious consequence. We hear this as a call for uniqueness to stand out from the news of the day. The sites that stand out most we hear are those that are distinct and that offer smart analysis with depth and discipline. They know what they're not and who they're not for.

We also hear that sites that resonate are inclusive and participatory. They offer multiple ways for people outside the organization to take part and contribute what they know. They responsibly and enthusiastically let people pass the traditional gatekeeper and include them as comment moderators, event participants and volunteers, fact checkers, translators, contributors of code, technical proofreaders, product testers and much more. If we think about where there might be a match

between your own audience members' motivations some of the ones that we've studied are listed here.

There is likely overlap in the things that your organization needs. Needs like creating high quality work, find audiences who will benefit from that work, identifying additional product areas, and being sustainable financially. And I would encourage you to when you go back to news organizations to think about how you can best find that match. Also if you're going to call on these members and these community members to share their personal lived experiences, close the loop and go back and show the world what you did with their contributions. ProPublica does this really well. As we see more organizations start to publish regular call outs for knowledge, there's one missing piece which is actually showing what you did with that knowledge whether you included it in your final reporting or not. And we see that these more engaged or memberful approaches to conducting our work also help with recruitment and retention, that they boost staff morale at a moment when it's badly needed in our industry.

Because at the news organizations where we interview supporters even longtime members and donors usually can't name more than one or two people behind the news organization they support. This suggests we need to make our staff less in.... We need to make our staff more visible and ourselves less institutional. As our researcher, Dr. Susan Forde has reported on trust scales, journalists rate well down usually in the same range as insurance salespeople, lawyers, real estate agents, there's more, used car dealers, and others who are primarily perceived to trade in dishonesty. I say this not to depress you but because this means that we have more work to do to make our work more accessible and human.

Because in a world where organizations are fighting a battle against being called "fake news" being authentic and transparent is a powerful way to inculcate yourself. And we recognize that in many cases sites need to guard their funding, their staff, and their processes to keep operating, particularly in repressive societies and places where media is under sustained assault. Still, these and other organizations will be well served to grow by clearly describing their missions and being interested in what their community members need. Just one more thought on this point, we see that people behind the organizations that set themselves apart recognize when they don't have all the answers and are quick and thoughtful in asking for help from other people who might be able to offer it.

We're encouraged by experiments in transparency and showing process. Like this "by the numbers" sort of recipe card from outside magazine actually showing what

went into every issue that a reader holds in their hands, or for supporters of global ground in Myanmar being able to see down to the sent exactly where their money went into the site's investigations. These are extreme examples but they point to something really important which is the vital nature of having products with a user experience design that is well thought out, that is clear, that is accessible, and that is calm and considerate we hear over and over again the importance of letting people do what they came to us to do, whether that's understand others opinions, make sense of a complex news topic or pay us for our work.

To wrap up with membership we see that members can contribute what they know; That increased transparency helps earn trust. That there are real differences between communities and paid clubs, and that it's important to conduct audience research to know about the benefits that your individual community members hope to see. With that, I will go ahead and turn to Tim Griggs. He's going to talk more about the similarities between subscription of membership and how they can learn from one another.

Tim Griggs: As an homage to Millie, if she's still here, I'm going to do this BuzzFeed listicle style and give you seven tips. But before I do that a quick story; Years ago, let's go back about eight years and we are about to launch the digital subscription business at the New York Times, and everyone, right Jennifer, thought we were complete morons. "You don't know how the internet works." "No one will pay that much for a digital subscription." "Information wants to be free.. yadda yadda yadda". What's the cursing rule? Is that OK? It's total bullshit, right. And after we had about our first million digital only subscribers suddenly didn't we didn't look so dumb.

What happened though was people from all over the world came to talk to us about what we had accomplished or were setting out to accomplish. And almost always there one of two reactions in those conversations. One was "well that's the New York Times, that doesn't apply to us". The other was "let's just take exactly what the New York Times is doing and try to apply that in our own market without putting any of the resources behind it" and it would inevitably fail. OK, then flash forward a few years, I went to the Texas Tribune, we were doing some interesting things which Amanda will tell you a lot more about. People would come from all over the world and they would have two reactions. One, "Hey that's just Texas and that doesn't apply to us" or they would try to adopt it directly and it would fail.

The reason I tell you that story is that this stuff is really complicated, Alright. How many of you have a membership or subscription business back home? So you

know what I'm talking about. It is really really hard. It is a very complex subject that I can't possibly begin to scratch the surface of in my remaining eight and a half minutes. It is really really hard. It takes a lot of work. It takes a tremendous amount of stamina. But we've also been at this for you know close to a decade. So there are some things that we can learn from each other that are close to best practices and things that are applicable regardless of what you do.

I'm just go a little deeper on what Emily alluded to and this is just my own way of articulating it is a little different than the way you guys say it. I think there are three types of people who contribute financially to news organizations. One, just as Emily said, people who pay for access because it helps them do their jobs better or live their lives better. Two, people who give because they think it's important whether they use it or not. And lastly, people who want to feel like you're part of the club. Alright, so subscribers, donors, members. These are not mutually exclusive. In one enterprise you can actually pursue all three, theoretically. OK.

Here are examples of them. There are many. Subscriptions aren't better than membership. Membership isn't better than subscriptions. They're just different. OK, from a user's perspective everything that Emily just said is absolutely true but in reality from an operator's perspective the hard work that you have to do to attract subscribers and members a lot of it is the same whether you're a for-profit or a non-profit, whether you're a local or state or a national or an international player. Whether you have a legacy media like print or broadcast as well. All that makes a difference but most of the act of going out and attracting and keeping subscribers and members is very similar.

There's a lot we can also learn from those who don't do exactly what we do. In fact, at The Times we learned more from spending a lot of time with people at Spotify than we did from our colleagues at the FTE or the Wall Street Journal or wherever else at the time. OK. There's a ton we can learn from mission-based public interest organization that are not in media and a whole lot we can learn from ecommerce which I'll talk about just a second. OK so, quickly: Seven quick tips. The first is exactly what Emily just talked about. Make sure you have distinct actual unique real value. The first thing I usually hear from news organizations is "Oh yeah yeah we got that covered. Let's move on to the next thing." And in reality this is everything. Just because you're doing great journalism does not mean that people will value it enough to support you financially or otherwise.

The second, which this is going to come up in a couple other parts of this session as well is the concept of audience funnel discipline digitally being really deliberate

about attracting audiences, deepening engagement with them, and with each other and converting those into paid supporters. OK here's an example. Yours doesn't have to be this complicated but knowing where your audiences are and what they where they are in that journey is really critically. Oh yeah! Three, getting everybody on the same page and “marching in the..” you know whatever expression you want to use “rowing in the same direction”, “marching to the beat of the same drummer”, or whatever. Organizations that excel in subscriptions and membership do this and there aren't many of them. OK what I mean by this is we are all aligned around the same common goal around subscribers members donors whatever. Getting there means we get out of our own silos about who's responsible for what and instead we're all focused on serving audiences. Here's an example right, in your organization those of you that have membership or subscription models, do you know what the goal is? Do you know where you stand versus that goal? Do you know what your part of the solution actually involves? All right.

Four, I get the text back right. None of this stuff matters if you don't have a good sense of how your email service provider relates to your CRM which related to your CNS you know having one common pool of data is really critical to be able to enable you to be good at this.

The reason for that is number five which is organizations that excel here are making data driven or even better insight driven decisions. They operate more like e-commerce companies. They test and learn. They have a culture of agility and making decisions based on testing insights and moving fast this which I'm not spending a ton of time on because I can't is the first year or so of growth of digital subscriptions of the New York Times and what this shows is in red are marketing initiatives and in white are product enhancements just related to digital subscriptions and testing insights that we learned over the course of that year. And every single one of those things contributed mightily to subscription growth.

Sixth, be really obsessive about the user experience. Again, whether it's a membership organization or subscription based organization being deliberate about what your audiences see and consume is critical. And this is often a capability that news organizations don't have. This is an example. Don't look too closely at this because you might figure out who these are are on the left is well on the left as the Washington Post. Is it because it's the good example.

Creating a frictionless experience whether you are a hyper local membership based organization or the New York Times is just as important because you don't get many opportunities to convert people into paying supporters. You gotta take

advantage of it. This one on the right is like it asks for the name of your first born and your social security number.

Then, lastly and most importantly don't be so focused on acquiring new members or acquiring new subscribers that you forget about how important it is to keep them what this shows is a very typical look at subscriber or member retention over the course of a year and everything looks pretty similar at the beginning. These things tend to be linear in other words if you lose 5 percent of your subscribers or members in month 1 you tend to lose another 5 percent in month 2 to month 3 and so on. But look at what happens at the end. You now have to work twice as hard if you're at the bottom of this curve than if you're at the top of this curve to get those people back. So most organizations spend 80 or 90 percent of their time focused on acquisition and a small portion of time focused on keeping subscribers the numbers OK That's as fast as I can speed talk.

Tony Haile: Hi there my name is Tony. Some background. I was the founding CEO of a company called Shopbeat, sorry. I'm on the board of the L'Enfant Institute which gives out money to lots of people so ask us for money, and the CEO now of scroll which is where people let me do whatever I think basically which is great. So, I want to spend a bit of time thinking about some of the challenges I see in the membership in subscription world. Some of my more hypotheses around this and I kind of what's happening and practice as we go. It's quite hard to say memberships and subscriptions the whole time. When you want to just talk about direct consumer revenue from the top 2 percent or so. It's quite tempting to say subs to ships or Scriptures but I'm in Texas and you guys might be armed.

So so... So I'm going to avoid that. I do want to point out that the like there's a tremendous amount of heat around memberships and subscriptions, especially over the last year or so.

And this we've got to be clear about why that is. This isn't because of technology or innovation suddenly coming through. This is because these guys in fact the platforms are out competing us on our traditional business model and advertising. So this is not something which is a nice side hustle for many people this is the hustle. This is not something of opportunity that this is something of necessity. So when I think about these kind of problems I kind of think about them in the context of what will actually help our industry to survive.

And when I think about that there are kind of three challenges that I see around memberships and subscriptions in general. The first one being around how we think about addressable market on this side of things. This this is a standard audience. This is the New York Times of a year. They get about 2.5 percent of their audience. And now digital subscribers go which is actually pretty good. And then the edges of edge cases in many ways as you look at this.

But when you're thinking it, often when I'm talking to people they go you have got so many people if you just convert 20% of them into members then we'll be doing great. And we like really your addressable market is somewhere in the low single digits. I mean to give you a context of this if you look at the Seattle Times there at about zero point six percent and they're doing well you know they're an innovative group that pushing out new things. There is zero point six percent of audience are digital subscribers.

So this is the world that we're in right now. And it gets a little bit more worrying when we think about what happens and how zero sum this world can be. Because what we don't know is what happens when every single publisher tries to do the same play at the same time which is kind of what's happening right now. There's in every single, especially in New York, and every single publisher there is a whiteboard up in there somewhere which is how do we make money from consumers. Some of them have some interesting things on them.

So what do we think about when these things a zero sum. We even we heard from Millie earlier that they have more readers in California than they do in New York yeah. Like, what does that mean for the L.A. Times? What does that mean for the San Francisco Chronicle? What does it mean for Cal matters? Folks at Google, When I speak to them reckon that the average number of subscriptions that a subscriber will have will be around one point zero one that's going to be a brutal fight because I and even and what I'm really worried about with regards to that is the kind of third part of this which is the homogeneity of the audience that we start to serve. We know that every business model has concurrent impacts upon the things.

One of things that happen with advertising is we had the rise of click bait. We had the rise of slideshows and all kinds of other stuff that happened as a result of what the economic incentives taught us to do. Now one of the things that we start to see with subscription audience is that they tend to be older richer whiter suburban.

I mean if I were just like you would just up and say something to pick on you. If I would estimate that the Boston Globe's audience were in the 60s and 70s worth at least a million dollars as an average. How far off would I be? You can pretty much.

Okay I'm gonna take that as a yes. And so the thing that I worry about is what happens when all of a sudden we've got this vicious zero sum competition for them this kind of core business model and our audience that we have to try and look for looks like this. Okay, like when we have to serve this guy and keep him happy. What does that mean? Yes it's the worst thing about it is by the way in about 10 years with everything going on I'm going to look like this. So that's a bigger issue. But, what does it mean for the communities that don't get heard that don't become part of our subscriber focus on this

It's a real challenge for how we think about news and what we want to do and how our economic models are going to drive us forward. And so for me the question that I've been obsessing about over the last two years is how do we make money from the 98 percent if advertising isn't going to do it enough. How do we make those people matter when the business people are in the room as we go. And there's kind of three challenges that we see with that. First one is these people do not have enough of a relationship to give you money independently so it has to be a network play. You have to bring publishers together in some way to offer value.

And the economics have to beat the opportunity cost of revenue. You've got to be the best game in town. Otherwise you won't be able get a network together. Secondly you've got to avoid cannibalization you may be thinking about value props that are separate between your small high value audience and your very large low value audience as you go. And three you've got to be thinking about communities that aren't served right now from your kind of from your current subscription flows or unlikely check to come into that.

So, as I start to try and think about that problem the thing that became clear to me was that we had to start with the users problems not ours.

We talk a lot about how journalism's business model is broken. Most people don't know that. They don't necessarily even care when you tell them that. That's not their problem okay. So if we don't start with that let's start with something that it does feel like their problem and their problem is that the Internet itself feels broken to them.

When they go to even premium news sites and they can't trust the links that they see not taking them to dark and dodgy places because they've reset widgets and so forth. When they can't even navigate a story because the ads are jumping the page around so much that it becomes impossible. When that data gets thrown around and sold around to everyone. These are the problems that they feel about and it's not based on one site it's based on the general experience of what happens when they interact with news. So how do you get this Internet the field's done to you and make it feel like it's built for you.

So how do we solve these three particular problems? If we go into the method becomes interesting.

First up do you take all of that stuff and every bit of tracking technology every dodgy recent widget for the top 80 media companies about seven billion dollars in digital ad revenue

And they make that from two hundred thirty four million people. What that means is that the cost per user it's two bucks and fifty cents.

That's how much value the industry gets out of all of that stuff. OK. Which is this. It's a fresh black coffee venti from Starbucks. OK. Every time you see a pre roll ad on a video, every time you see shitty links at the bottom of a great article that that's what it costs you. OK. So the network economics are actually remarkably cheap to get a beat.

The second side of things you can avoid cannibalization by picking two orthogonal parts at the network level. We care about UX and privacy. We don't even know which side we're on but we know the experience we want when we get that for the super fans. That 2 percent they care about access and affinity. So we can keep these things separate. Now some people in there as they're thinking out through their home their own membership thing have been saying you know what. We throw everything in there. We'll give it. We'll have great experience be the prize that we give people when they when they become a subscriber. It's not the prize. It is the pathway to creating new subscribers and members. And if you do not believe me try taking someone on five shitty dates and then asking them to marry you just not.

Finally, how do we think about those the lower income communities who aren't the people that we're targeting right now with our subscriptions. We're still asking them for money in this context right. But this is one of the interesting things in that

these people are already paying low income communities are far more likely to be on pay as you go phones rather than unlimited phones. And here's a typical one. It's fairly mobile. Twelve bucks per gig here's where that becomes interesting.

The average ad load and data tracker load on a page before at the on load events and not with everything just with the first thing is about three point three megabytes. So from that we can actually work out how many page views do you have to click on in order for you to be saving more money than it costs in your phone bill for this to happen.

Only three a day. That's it. If you click on three stories a day on your phone it's literally cheaper for you to do this than anything else.

So those are the things that make me interested in how we get to 98 percent. And to tell you how that is going from theory to practice it has been a slow hard process but now we have a whole coalition of publishers of platforms who've come together to try and see if we can try and build an Internet that feels built for us not done to us. This Tuesday Mozilla is actually going to be starting to open it up to some of their users as they go it's going to be we're taking this very very slowly but we're trying to see if we can create that kind of Web a Web where journalists can eat but where users can get something that is trusted but feels private.

It feels like it was built for them. Because that is a web worth fighting for. Thank you very much.

Jason Tuohey: Hi everyone I am Jason Tuohey. I work on digital and audience in the Globe newsroom. At the globe, we've been charging for our journalism since 2011. We have well over 100000 paying digital subscribers as of now. And I'm going to walk through just a few of the things we've learned on this journey as we've cultivated this readership from a newsroom perspective.

So one of the big learnings we've had is that you need to really get the right metrics in your newsroom. At The Globe, we have dashboards for every journalist individualized and they show five metrics: total visits, New England visits, subscriptions, conversion percentage and subscriber visits. So these numbers quite literally represent the path down a journey to a subscription.

If you don't know what your readers value you're never going to be on the same page with them. So this is our attempt to get these metrics in the hands of every single journalist in the Newsroom. It's had a couple real benefits from what we can see. One is it's getting people away from just focusing on page views and scale

which we know at this point doesn't really lead to subscriptions. But the other thing it has done is it has teased out a lot of the contributions that aren't super obvious in the Newsroom. What I mean by that is not every journalist is going to be a viral superstar but there are a lot of journalists who do a lot of good work that engage subscribers that bring in local readers. And when you have more nuanced numbers like this you're able to see the full contribution to your newsroom.

And I'll give you so this is the breakdown of the Boston Globe's digital readership. It's only 40 percent in Boston and 60 percent outside of Boston. So we might look at this and think that Boston Globe should be going more aggressively at national issues and making a bigger play but we'd be wrong. This is the breakdown of Boston digital subscribers for the globe. It's 70 percent in our city and only 30 percent outside. This insight is actually focused us to look more heavily right in our region. Local news enterprise and investigative reporting sports coverage. It's been so successful that we're now even thinking about expanding this to other areas of New England.

So another thing we've learned is the importance of continuously building relationships with our readers. Now, subscriptions aren't memberships. They're different. We firmly believe at the Globe that our journalism is worth paying for. That it, it's also not just a transaction. This isn't like buying a hat on Etsy or anything. We have to continuously engage and bring these readers around. And I think one thing we've learned is that we all know the tactics right. There's email newsletters or subscribers only benefits there's a lot of things you can do to engage readers but it's really important to do all those in a way that you're leveraging one another into a cohesive strategy so here's one example from our cannabis coverage at the Globe.

In 2017 leadership asked us to check out whether or not we should have more enhanced marijuana coverage at the globe. The background for that is the voters had passed. In 2016 a law to make recreational marijuana legal. So this wasn't just curiosity from leadership's perspective. So we took a look and we found over a 12 month period that the total readership for marijuana stores was roughly akin to the number of people who read Boston Bruins coverage. So any time in Boston you're approaching sports coverage. That's a pretty sizable chunk of people. But what we also discovered was that more than 80 percent of these readers didn't read anything else on the globe and the conversion rate was really low.

So we were piquing their interest but we weren't giving them enough to stick around or explore the site or really stay with us. So we set to work on that. The

first thing we did was create a weekly newsletter. It was meant to be a recap of all the things that happened in the Massachusetts marijuana industry that week. It was an immediate success. I'm trying to avoid saying it grew like a weed but.

We very quickly had tens of thousands of subscribers on this newsletter and it was an industry must read. So we pivoted from that. We ramped up staffing we hired three journalists to cover the marijuana industry. We launched a vertical we created a whole microsite around the topic and we timed it for the launch of recreational shops in Massachusetts which was obviously a very high profile incident and then traffic just exploded. But it wasn't just traffic, we saw readers coming back and back for this coverage.

We were starting to build that habit with readers and now our latest iteration is a paid newsletter that we launched last week. And this is still very early on but we are going daily with this newsletter and we are trying to give something for people to pay for and come for every single day. We're ramping up the coverage even more at this point. We have about 85000 subscriber visits every month on our marijuana topics and this was something we didn't even have on the site last year.

So the final thing is making big projects count. These big projects are the most important pieces of journalism we do. They're also the ones our readers love the most and value the most. So this is these are great opportunities for engagement and experimentation. And I'll just run through a few examples Gladiator which was our project and podcast about Aaron Hernandez the troubled former Patriots superstar. So we accompany that with a really attractive subscription offer.

We launched on the site for the same week and we knew that people were gonna be coming to the Aaron Hernandez story who weren't typical Boston Globe subscribers and by putting the subscriber offer in front of them we made it a little more attractive for them to try being a subscriber and sample our content so meter conversions were seven times the normal rate during that week.

It was so high that our analytics department for the first day and a half was convinced the meter was broken. They they kept calling our developers and telling them to fix the meter and the developer kept saying Oh it's good. The code looks good. So but the really positive part about this is after the deal was up we retained 70 percent of those readers at full price. So these were people who wouldn't have otherwise subscribed to The Globe. But once they got a chance to sample it a little they stuck with us.

Another thing we do is involve our readers directly in the news gathering for a big project. These are two examples here. The one on the left was a story we did about patient surgeons who double book patients surgeries one on the right is for the college admissions scandal which you note up and reading about. We get hundreds of tips through these and we get really strong tips. I mean we've had a number of big stories that we've thought based on the feedback and information we've gotten from readers here. So this is a way of bringing them right into the news gathering process.

And the final one on surface is a race series from December 2017 where we tackled the issue is Boston racist? Obviously, a very high charged subject in the city. We did not want this to be just a series of stories from The Boston Globe. Our attempt was to create a week long discussion in the city about race. We used a number of tactics to do this. We had a Facebook only subscriber group.

We had targeted discussions with readers that were led by reporters where they were talking directly with readers and we offered a number of quick turn stories that we published throughout the week to get casual readers into this longer series. We literally created a subscription funnel right around this project. The results were great. The project was a huge success. My favorite part was the Facebook group and I'm going to close with this testimonial from one of our members who said this is by far the deepest group where we're print.

We took a look. We're pretty sure it was the first time anyone ever called the Boston Globe dope which was good, but you'll notice another thing at the bottom there where Marco says he asks if anyone wants to meet up for coffee. This actually happened dozens of these members of the Facebook group met up for coffee and drinks for weeks and weeks afterwards. Globe journalists joined them and they have really productive discussions about what to do about this issue in the city. So I'll close with saying anytime you can do journalism that gets strangers together in real life and talk about that topic. That's a success

Amanda Zamora: I guess I'll float since I can.

Hello my name is Amanda Zamora. I'm proud to say that I'm pretty sure that I was at the first ISOJ 20 years ago as Rosenthal's journalism undergraduate student. And I'm so thrilled to be here twenty years later to talk a little bit about what membership looks like at the Texas Tribune.

We are the nonprofit newsroom here in Austin Texas. I am the audience, I work on audience development there, and I took membership on last year. It's been a really illuminating experience. A lot of challenges and a lot of really exciting opportunities that I'm going to tell you about and how we think about it strategically.

It's the membership mantra and how we started thinking about it actually. Many of you may know, we finished last year also a strategic plan looking at how we want to be growing and sustaining our journalism and our business into 2025. And I was really proud to see how important audience growth and engagement and diversity and also membership were as a part of that strategic plan

So, I'm going to spend today telling you a little bit about what the program looks like now and where it's going into 2025 as part of how we laid out that strategic plan ok. I can't sit here but I can see it here. In any case, this is how the membership program has grown in terms of people. We're now almost at sixty six hundred member households and I think in 2017 when we set the goal to double the number of people where we're almost there

What's one interesting thing has been that there's been a lot of variation in terms of our year over year growth. And so I think probably by 2025 if we're hitting 20000 thousand member households that would be awesome. So a lot of really great movement in the last year.

And when you look at what that means in terms of our overall revenue picture membership makes up 10 percent of our revenue. We get corporate underwriting a lot of foundation support.

Our events business drives a significant amount of revenue and then membership and within membership we're talking about the part that I'm really overseeing as part of our frankly as part of our audience strategy is people who give us nine hundred ninety nine dollars or less and then we have another smaller that's that's 6 percent of that and another smaller portion from people who give in larger amounts over a period of three years so membership as you could see is not the biggest piece of our revenue pie but it's a really really important one

And the reason we think that it's so important to our sustainability is a nonprofit news organization. It's for all of the reasons that you see here as to why it is that people donate or support the Texas Tribune. They are giving to us not because they have to in order to read what we write. All of our content is free for all to read and free for them to reprint through Creative Commons. But we hope that our

journalism is so useful, so relevant, so meaningful and that it is an expression of our mission which is to engage in and inform Texans on public on politics and policy. That people are inspired to support it because of the value and the relevance of that journalism.

And that's exactly what we see when people are telling us. If you want to be inspired about the future of journalism, look up the hashtag #IsupportTexasTribune on any given day. And there's a lot of really fantastic examples of the value of the work that we do that you do that people are willing to support. So it's not the biggest piece of the revenue pie but it's a really important one and we're excited to continue to grow it.

So, as I said the goal from our strategic plan was to double it by 2025. We're well on our way to doing that. And there's five key things that we said that we wanted to really focus on to get us from here to there.

The first one is all about redefining the relationship with our numbers. For us, that really means again, making sure that people know that when they're donating it's not a transaction. It's not merely a transaction, but that it is they're joining you know a community of people who really believe in our mission. If the only time that people are hearing from us about membership is when we're sending them an email to hit them up for money we're doing it wrong. Right. And I think one of the things that we're really focused on is transitioning the program from just optimizing for revenue necessarily and really optimizing it for participation and getting people again to be inspired to join and be a part of this community.

Here's a little bit about what that looks like. One of the great conversations points again that we had to begin that relationship with our readers and not lead with can you please give us your money was the strategic plan and letting our members our current members know what that strategic plan looked like before we released it to the public. And then for folks who had not who were not yet members really pointing to the strategic plan as a really great reason for them to think about investing in our mission and our future.

The other thing about it is, again, not just giving them inside access into our strategic roadmap and hopefully making them feel like they want to be invested, but yes also frankly rewarding them for that investment. And you can see here this is a little invite to one of our first, It is our first members only event. We're calling them field trips because we don't want them to feel quite like a typical Texas Tribune politics event program where you go and you feel like you're learning and

absorbing news frankly but where we kind of kick back and relax and have a little bit of fun with our members.

So, we've invited best selling author, Ben Fountain, to talk to us about his writing on the 2016 election and what it means. We're gonna have wine. It's gonna be fun. It's an experiment again for us to pull this pull our members together as a community and to engage them in different ways. Another great example of how again we're trying to create value around things that we're already doing is. Last year we combined our Fall Membership Drive and also just a little bit of a back step.

The main ways that we raise money typically we have a spring member drive and a full member drive. If you're accustomed or if you are a public media supporters that that sounds familiar to you. And we also do a lot more news driven fundraising and campaigns. But the biggest campaign of them all for us last year was our first one hundred thousand plus campaign.

We combined our phone number drive with festival and it was awesome. We had a members only breakfast with Evan if you were a member you got VIP access to all of the panels. I mean, it sounds like these are simple things but they take planning and intention and we're seeing that they pay off that they're already paying off a lot with members perking up. And also others being able to see what the value of membership is.

And then of course you'll see, we have some benefits laid out for the first time. You'll hear folks go back and forth on benefits and swag and whether you should or should not invest many resources along those lines. That is not, swag is definitely not the reason that people give and point period, but the stickers super cheap we're gonna do them because they also again they start to visualize that community and I want to see those stickers just proliferate in Austin across Texas. That's a good thing right. We want to be a brand and visible and we want people to feel proud to display their support of our newsroom.

The other benefits two things I'll say about them: A) They usually expand on an experience or something that we already offer, and B) when people to, Tim's point, when you're going to renew someone one of the first questions that they ask us are.. How much am I giving now and what do I get if I give more? We want to be able to tell tell them something. I'm only on number two on them I have to I think I'm gonna have to get faster at this. Number two, creating a culture of membership. This is frankly getting our newsroom more excited. I don't know in what

newsrooms, I mean I don't know if this happens at the New York Times if reporters are super excited to be like hey please give us some money but our newsroom is actually super jazzed to talk to our readers about our membership drives.

If you can see on the very far right. That is one long tweet thread that nobody asked. Our breaking news editor Matthew Watkins to write. But he did because he was so proud of the reporting of our higher-ed reporter and it ended in a really great donation a new supporter.

We talk, we are reporters you know we're not again we're sending e-mails to our members that include behind the scenes notes and insights about the reporting process. Number three it's activating our network and getting people to give on our behalf. That's through crowdfunding. It could be through referral programs and Ambassador programs that we're testing now. We'll skip Evan's birthday but I will let you stare that awesome picture of him. But the point is this is happening organically people are already getting their friends to donate to us for their birthdays.

Growing our newsletter subscriptions as you can see this is Tim's funnel we're hustling like crazy to really build out the middle of the funnel. We're doing really well at the top and in converting members at the bottom. Newsletter subscribers are a really important focus area for us. I don't know that I need to say more on that but we can talk about the details.

You're stressing me out. Rosenthal. But we're making progress as you can see. And the last one on the tech stack again cannot emphasize, Tim said this, I will say it too. If you're a membership folks are not super cooperative working with your engineering folks and your analytics folks to figure out how it is that you're going to make sense of all this data. You are. You need to start that like yesterday.

For us it's not just about getting more people in the door. But it's again about building tools and technology that make the user experience easier for them to donate. To understand what they're giving levels are and for us as a newsroom and an organization trying to build products and services of those people to know who they are how they got to where they are and how we can replicate that engagement.