

# THE GLOBAL MEDIA TREND HUNTERS



Five trends to help navigate  
media relations in q2

## 1 SUBSTACK: Continued Rise of Independent Newsletters

Substack is arguably the largest publisher of newsletters and is becoming an increasingly important platform for media engagement. Started in 2017, Substack has gained significant popularity among writers and journalists as a platform where they can monetize their work, build their personal brand, and create a unique following through their subscriber base.

Currently, there are [more than 2 million paid subscriptions](#) and [more than 20 million monthly active subscribers on Substack](#), making its audience bigger than most news organizations in North America. Newsletter topics on Substack run the gamut from healthcare to policy to technology to culture, with the most popular having readership that rival traditional media. For example, [Platformer](#) by technology writer Casey Newton has a UVM of 91,543. With its success in attracting popular writers and building a large audience base, Substack is expanding its reach in two ways: 1) by [creating local versions](#) of Substack in different countries; and 2) building social media features on the platform, such as discussion threads, live events and group chats. Their latest innovation is [Substack Chat](#), which opens new inroads for writers to engage with their subscribers — on their terms.

### THE TAKEAWAY

- 1 As some of the most popular writers and journalists in traditional media are also writing newsletters on Substack, it's a great source of added intel and potential pitch opportunities reaching hyper-focused audiences.
- 2 Substack readers are extremely engaged, proactively seeking out and opting into newsletters. While not all writers on the platform accept pitches, those that do accept pitches are strong candidates for outreach on relevant stories.
- 3 But keep in mind: While journalists are on Substack, it is not journalism. Substack does not have the same level of editorial oversight as traditional media outlets. Do your due diligence to ensure that the writers and newsletters you pitch are credible and trustworthy.

### Q2 GUIDE

2023 is the year of generative AI. No industry is immune to its impact and we're only in the gestation stage of this transformative technology.

In the Q2 edition of the FleishmanHillard Global Media Trend Hunters Guide, we look at how this technology is likely to change the way newsrooms work.

In the meantime, the media universe marches on and we deep dive into newsletter giant Substack, the state of podcasting, what local media looks like today, and how news avoidance will impact your media engagement.

## 2 News Avoidance is a Thing

Bad news tends to travel further than good news. Selling in the controversial is more likely to get you a front page. Talking up the negative sells papers. Right?

Since the pandemic, the dominance of "always on" negative news has become overwhelming for many and caused some audiences to simply tune out. A [Reuters global survey](#) found that around a third of respondents (36%), particularly those who are under 35, say that the news brings down their mood. This barrage of negativity is affecting people's outlook on the world. Many feel helpless and develop a negative perspective on their day-to-day lives.

At a time when positive mental health is being highly emphasized, the negativity propagated by the news seems to contradict this trend, prompting individuals to eliminate it from their lives.

The Reuters study revealed how publishers are going to tackle this problem. They found that 94% of publishers have said that they will tackle news avoidance with explainer content, while 87% said they will include more Q&As. This was closely followed by 66% who said they will deliver more inspirational stories. 73% of publishers are also looking for solution-based journalism, with the BBC and The Guardian pushing for this style.

## 3 Don't Sleep on Podcasting

Some say the podcast industry is rising while others say it's oversaturated. Despite podcast listenership continuing to grow, publishers are grappling with how to monetize the medium. While there currently are over 2 million podcasts, compared to only 550k in 2018, podcasts are still a tiny fraction of the U.S. advertising market. Advertisers spent nearly \$70 billion on TV ads last year, compared [to just \\$1.5 billion on podcasts](#).

While the media world continues to spin, podcasts are a ripe opportunity to do rich storytelling. An estimated 82 million people ([32% of U.S. adults](#)) say they listen to a podcast at least a few times a month. And while you may think of podcast apps as the place to listen, most people are listening on YouTube followed by Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

On average, podcast listeners tune into eight different shows per week and listen to podcasts in the midday hours. Word of mouth is a powerful avenue for podcast discovery. According to [Pew Research](#), 67% of listeners have recommended a podcast to someone else, and 60% have listened to a podcast recommend to them by a friend. Additional [studies](#) also show that listeners discover new podcasts through existing podcasts and through internet searches.

Ready to take the plunge and pitch? 86% of podcasts receive pitches for people to be on their show. Pro Tip: 55% prefer pitches that are 200 words or less. Plus, most podcast pitches are rejected because of a lack of personalization, confusing subject lines and bad timing. While 1:1 email is generally preferred, there was an 18% increase over last year for podcasters who want to be pitched via Twitter. Additionally, some said they prefer pitches via a form on their website.

## THE TAKEAWAY

- 1 Go beyond the news by supplementing media pitches with infographics and b-roll footage which delve deeper into the background of stories.
- 2 Think about how your news is offering a specific solution to a problem (even putting it in the subject line of your pitch 'Solution found for X...')
- 3 Include diverse and inclusive case studies (for example, UK media has been criticized for heavy use of white Caucasian case studies) to resonate positively with audiences.

### TREND HUNTER SPOTLIGHT



**Fabian Dobree**  
EU Media  
Trend Spotter

Fabian is an account executive in the London office. He is passionate about ex-U.S. earned media relations and is a member of the FH London media team. He advises several large, multinational pharmaceutical and healthcare companies on media implementation and trends.

## THE TAKEAWAY

- 1 Like in traditional broadcast, producers are the gatekeepers of who gets on the show. When pitching podcasts, target the producers first, then hosts.
- 2 Not all podcasts accept guests. Many podcasts from traditional outlets feature interviews with their own reporters. Listen to a few episodes to make sure the show is "pitchable."
- 3 When measuring reach of podcasts, look at their YouTube presence in addition to subscribers and downloads.
- 4 Podcast discovery happens on YouTube and in app — make sure your promotion and amplification strategies include those platforms.

# 4 Local News is Experimenting to Stay Sustainable

Even prior to the Great Recession (2007 to 2009), local newspapers were facing many challenges. But in the intervening years, their woes have only intensified with declining subscribers and loss of ad revenue.

With traditional sources of revenue disappearing, local newspapers in the U.S. have been closing at an accelerating rate. (See the sidebar.) But even in our hyperconnected, instantaneous, digital-first media environment, local news remains important, both for the communities served and for companies that want to reach their readership.

Why is local news important? First, Americans trust their local newspapers — a Knight Foundation poll [found](#) that 6 in 10 Americans trust local news more than national news to give them information they can use in their daily lives. Second, local news outlets tend to have high engagement as they highlight stories readers won't find elsewhere. And third, local publications are more likely to report positive news — or at least take positive angles.

To stay afloat, both startup and legacy publications are experimenting with new business models, including offering non-news services, e-commerce, sponsored content or partnering with local businesses, to name a few.

And there are some interesting, and varied, success stories. The Pilot, a century-old 13,000-circulation paper in Moore County, North Carolina, has thrived through revenue diversification. When the owner saw print revenues declining, [he looked for new ways to serve advertisers and local readers](#), like opening an in-house agency, buying other publications in nearby markets, publishing phone books and e-newsletters, even buying a local independent bookstore.

The [Richland Source](#), a digital publication servicing central Ohio since 2013, maintains a devoted readership by practicing "[solutions journalism](#)" a form of reporting designed to critically but fairly highlight local problems and efforts to solve them. It also [launched an in-house agency](#) that now accounts for a quarter of its revenue.

Cox Enterprise's [Axios Local](#) now delivers e-newsletters to roughly two dozen different municipalities in the U.S. and plans to further expand. The newsletters are free, with revenue coming from ads, content partnerships, sponsored events, premium subscriptions or [other means](#).

## THE TAKEAWAY

- 1 Like any media outreach, make sure your pitch is relevant to the local target audience. Lean in on local stats, facts, anecdotes and even tap locals to offer cogent comments.
- 2 Know the media outlet, know the journalists. Do not paint all local media with the same brush. Do your due diligence to understand the outlet's standing, reputation and gravitas in the local market.
- 3 Do not underestimate the power of local media to reach your clients' key stakeholders like employees, customers and politicians. Craft your pitches knowing it's just as impactful as media on the national or global stage.
- 4 Finally, don't forget that many local stories end up with national syndication. Think big storytelling even when pitching smaller markets.

## SIDEBAR STAT



- 2,500 U.S. Newspapers closed since 2005
- 40,000 journalists have left the field since 2008
- 7% of U.S. counties have no newspaper

Sources: Medill Local News Initiative of Northwestern University; Pew Research Center

# 5 Generative AI: More Reasons to be Cautious

Earlier this year, the worries among many journalists, writers and designers that the growing sophistication of generative AI tools would make their jobs obsolete reached a fevered pitch. But at the time, the reporters and editors contacted by FleishmanHillard's Global Media Trend Hunters for their thoughts on the topic were almost universally cautious — almost dismissive — about the use of AI in writing or reporting, with most saying that the downside risks were too severe. (That full report can be found [here](#).)

Just a few months later, we are seeing newsrooms adapt to the new "AI-is-everywhere" landscape. Nearly every major news organization has hired AI beat reporters to follow developments across industries. [Bloomberg](#), [The Wall Street Journal](#), [The New York Times](#), [Fortune](#), the [Financial Times](#), [TechCrunch](#) and [Ars Technica](#) all have dedicated AI reporters. And more newsrooms are experimenting with AI in their workflow. Bloomberg is currently working to integrate AI coverage across print, radio, digital and TV. [Axios reported](#) recently that Insider will establish a working group to "test ways to responsibly incorporate AI into its workflow," and ultimately set up rules and best practices for its broader use, which potentially includes "AI-written text in stories."

While AI use among media outlets is inevitable, some troubling revelations have also emerged in the last few weeks that show why caution is necessary. In several instances, queries sent to ChatGPT by researchers returned [completely](#) fabricated [stories and research](#) — in some cases, attributing fake research to actual [existing reporters](#) at major publications. It's another example of ChatGPT's tendency to "[hallucinate](#)," and underscores the fact that powerful tools like generative AI can, like volatile chemicals, quite easily do a great deal of damage if not used with extreme caution and care.

## THE TAKEAWAY

- 1 How your organization is using AI will likely be a common line of questioning in future media queries.
- 2 Close fact-checking of earned articles will be even more essential to ensure that media that use generative AI behind the scenes use correct information.
- 3 No company data, personal data, or confidential information of any client, vendor, or other entity or person, should ever be used in a prompt box. Experimenting with the technology is fine, but company and other sensitive information should be kept separate.
- 4 When planning use of AI technology for your company, be sure to have the right people on the team to advise you vis-à-vis the business, legal, strategic, financial, human resources, and internal and external communications perspectives specific to your business and strategies.



FLEISHMANHILLARD

## WHO ARE THE TREND HUNTERS?

FleishmanHillard's Global Media Trend Hunters is a dedicated group of media experts who have developed deep insights into the shifting ecosystem of today's newsroom. The team regularly conducts training courses, insight sessions, and custom research for account teams and clients. Please contact your FleishmanHillard account manager should you wish to learn more about these sessions.