If the product is news: The i Paper case study

The case for tighter newsroom and product collaboration – and a radical approach to building news organizations for the future

By: Mariah Craddick

This article is the conclusion of a six-part series.

The i Paper

[The i Paper](#), a UK media brand owned by dmg media (Daily Mail and General Trust), is admittedly still in its early days when it comes to expanding its in-house product talent. They do currently have a head of product and at least one product owner helping to set strategy and execute priorities.

Nick Petrie, Digital Director at *The i Paper*, has an interesting hybrid role that sees him reporting directly to the editor-in-chief but working in close collaboration with his product peers. Petrie's immediate team primarily consists of those focused on audience, SEO, social, and digital innovation and storytelling.

To Petrie, the product versus editorial question and who owns what is a moot point.

"Most editorial work is actually product work," he stated. "The newsroom was the original product team before the Internet. And what I want is a culture where ideas can come from either way."

Petrie mentioned one thing that's been helping bridge some of the divide that starts to crop up between product and newsroom teams is adjusting and clarifying a common guiding metric. *The i Paper* recently introduced an engagement metric to help monitor the success and health of a subscriber *after* the conversion moment.

Petrie noted that the business up until recently had primarily been focused on acquisition and the newsroom did a good job of setting goals around subscription conversion. This was good, because it meant the newsroom was data focused, but now Petrie is charged with helping to transition and motivate the team towards engagement. He noted this has been met with at least some suspicion from the newsroom initially, but fortunately as a younger newsroom (about 14 years old) they are more open to adapting.

In Petrie's future ideal news organization, he described a future where editorial and product are one in the same.

"If you're Dropbox, your product is file syncing. If you're an editorial organization, we all know the product is not the code. But we're also smart enough to know that good code *with* good content is more than the sum of its parts."

Petrie also sees a future world where newsroom structures are disrupted even more. For instance, getting rid of traditional news desks and beats, and instead borrowing some of the flexibility sometimes found in product teams to create dedicated teams for certain coverage areas that can be spun up or down depending on coverage needs – and including product managers, designers, and developers on those teams as well.

"You could literally be evolving the product for readers on a daily basis," he noted.

What could future news organizations look like?

There might not be one "correct" or "right" way to organize a news organization or even a product team within a news organization – but there is at least a terribly ineffective way to operate.

As exemplified through the case studies shared in this blog series, it is past time for news organizations to fully embrace product skill sets, thinking, and people into their core news operations in order to build products and experiences that truly and deeply connect to their audiences. This will be the differentiator and arguably the only way that news organizations will survive the ongoing disruption of generative AI, the "platform reset" of social media, search, and aggregators already underway – and whatever disruption headed for us next.

We're going to need to be more creative, more aware of our audience's changing needs, and more accepting of the notion that if we build it, they will not always come. We can adhere to our journalistic mission and ethics while still considering how to best deliver that message and fulfill that mission.

News organizations that will survive the next decade will need to radically rethink their organizational structures with an eye towards uniting their core product teams — the newsroom creating the content and the product team creating the experiences around it. We will need to break apart traditional and legacy reporting structures within the newsroom, especially those that have stuck with us from the print era and may no longer be serving the right purpose. And we'll need brave, bold leaders who understand the urgency of this need, and will take bigger, decisive steps towards building organizations that will meet this crucial moment.

The path from here

For those organizations that want to begin to bridge the divide between their core "product" teams — that being the newsroom team and the product team – here are some things to start considering today in order to build a better, more collaborative tomorrow.

1) **Consider appointing a liaison.**
   Do your product and newsroom teams currently have limited to no contact? If so, consider appointing someone as a liaison to get started with closing the gap. This could be a product manager, someone from the newsroom, or there could be a liaison from both sides. But the goal would be to have this person sit in with the other team from time to time: listen in on daily meetings, participate in group discussions, or simply shadow to begin building an understanding of how that team operates. Set up checkpoints throughout this process for the liaison to share what they're learning and look out for any opportunities they spot for closer collaboration or better communication.

2) **Pilot a cross-functional project.**
   It's always better to show than to tell, and actually testing out how a more collaborative process might work is a great way to understand how things could operate in practice. Look for an upcoming project or initiative where both editorial and product could benefit from closer collaboration. Use this as a way to test out new ways of working, similar to the *SvD Kompakt* case study noted earlier in the report. You're likely to quickly learn where the teams have common understanding and where there are still gaps. But the best way to work through this and get to more understanding is by trying it out.

3) **Define a set of shared goals for both the newsroom and product teams.**
   It's helpful to have a common, motivating goal to help drive any team, but especially those who historically may have felt as if they exist in two separate worlds or are competing with each other for decision-making power. Like noted earlier in the report, both newsrooms and product teams typically have goals that are a lot more in common than they think, as they both are usually tasked with connecting and engaging audiences. Try making and communicating explicit shared goals across both teams, whether in the form of success statements or objectives, and use it to help guide conversations about what to create or build next.

4) **Reconsider your employee onboarding process.**
   Another way to start changing the culture of your news organization is by rethinking how you onboard and introduce new employees. Instead of only immersing new hires in information about their new teams and processes, consider setting up "101s" or "the

basics" trainings to help new product team members get more familiar with the newsroom, and vice versa. These trainings can go beyond the org chart and who sits where, and instead aim to give new employees an understanding of the other team's core working principles: what motivates the team, how decisions get made, goals and goal-setting, ways of working, etc. This way you can do away with any notions of separation of product and news teams right from the start.

This six-part series is part of a larger research study and project conducted as part of the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY's Executive Program in News Innovation and Leadership. If interested in access to the full report or talking more about anything mentioned in this series, please reach out to the author Mariah Craddick at mariahcraddick@gmail.com.

About the author
Mariah Craddick is a product strategist with deep experience in the news and media industry. She's currently leading product strategy at The Atlantic with a focus on driving subscription growth and enabling retention through feature adoption and delightful subscriber experiences.

Previously, she led teams as product manager at The Wall Street Journal, McClatchy, and Crain Communications, playing a key role in building features that drive readership and engage subscribers. Prior to her product management career, she held several roles across the newsroom – from writing for the legendary Ebony and Jet magazines to executing social media strategy at Crain's Chicago Business.

This "If the product is news" blog series published via the News Product Alliance is part of a larger research study and project she conducted as part of the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY's Executive Program in News Innovation and Leadership which she completed in June 2025.