

Aftenposten

How we build digital products

The ingredients of a front page project

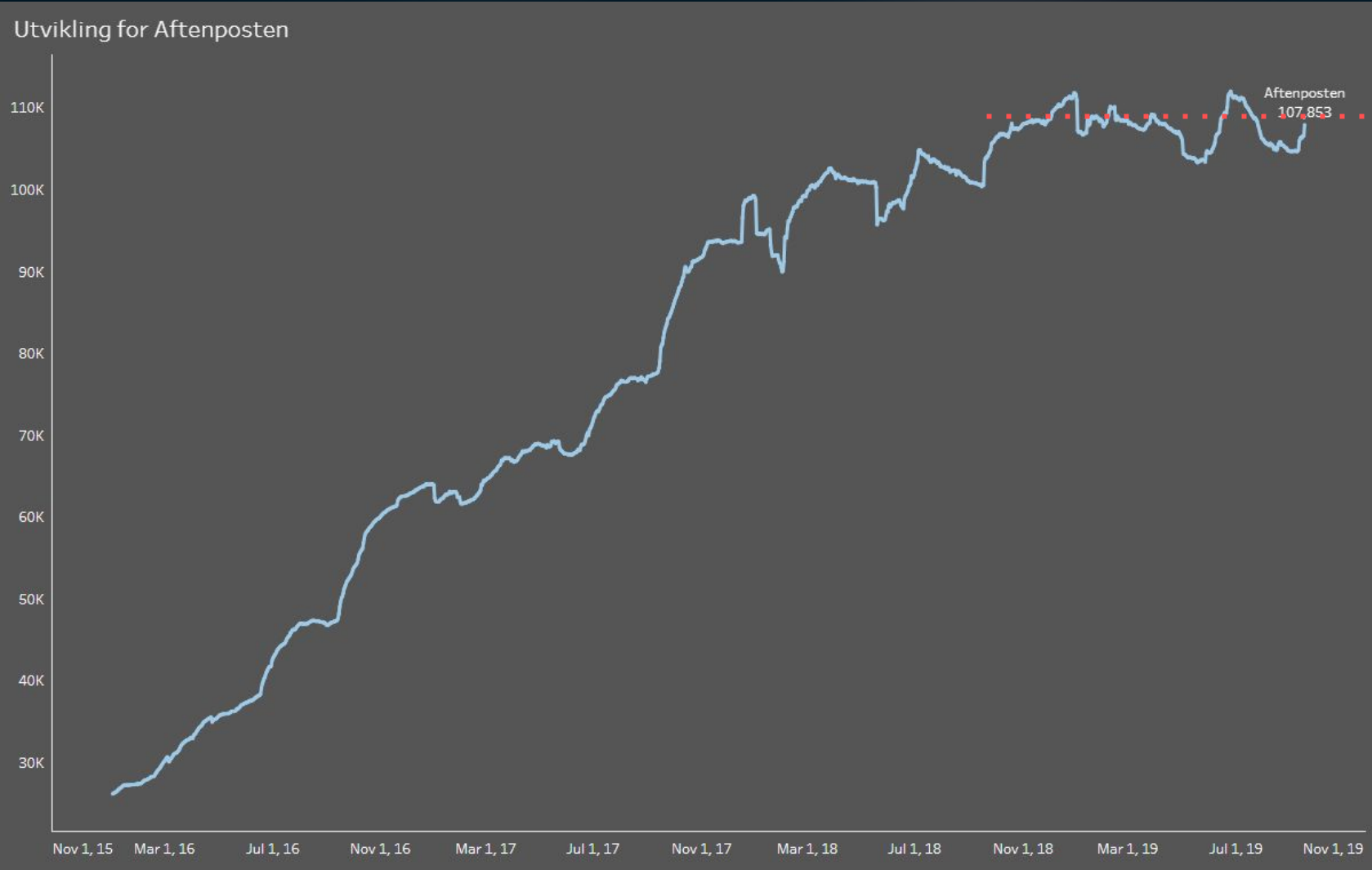
Karl Oskar Teien

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT

Schibsted Subscription News / Aftenposten

INGREDIENT #1

**A unifying mission and
a clear problem to solve**



1,100 interviewees ranked our user experience 🙌



But it was also clear we *could* own certain associations



Explain the news better than anyone else.

Translating the drivers of willingness pay into product principles



Quick and efficient overview

We adjust the product to users' habits and frequency, tailoring the experience to help them spend time on the stories that matter



Knowing what's important

We filter out the noise and clearly signal the relative importance of each story



Understanding context

We make it easy and efficient to grasp a story as efficiently as possible, regardless of prior knowledge



New insight and inspiration

We don't optimize for news value only, and strive for an engaging mix of content based on clear definitions of what belongs where.

A hiker in a purple jacket and red beanie is climbing a steep, rocky mountain peak. The hiker is wearing a backpack and is using a chain to assist in the climb. The background shows a vast valley with a winding river, green fields, and distant mountains under a cloudy sky.

INGREDIENT #2

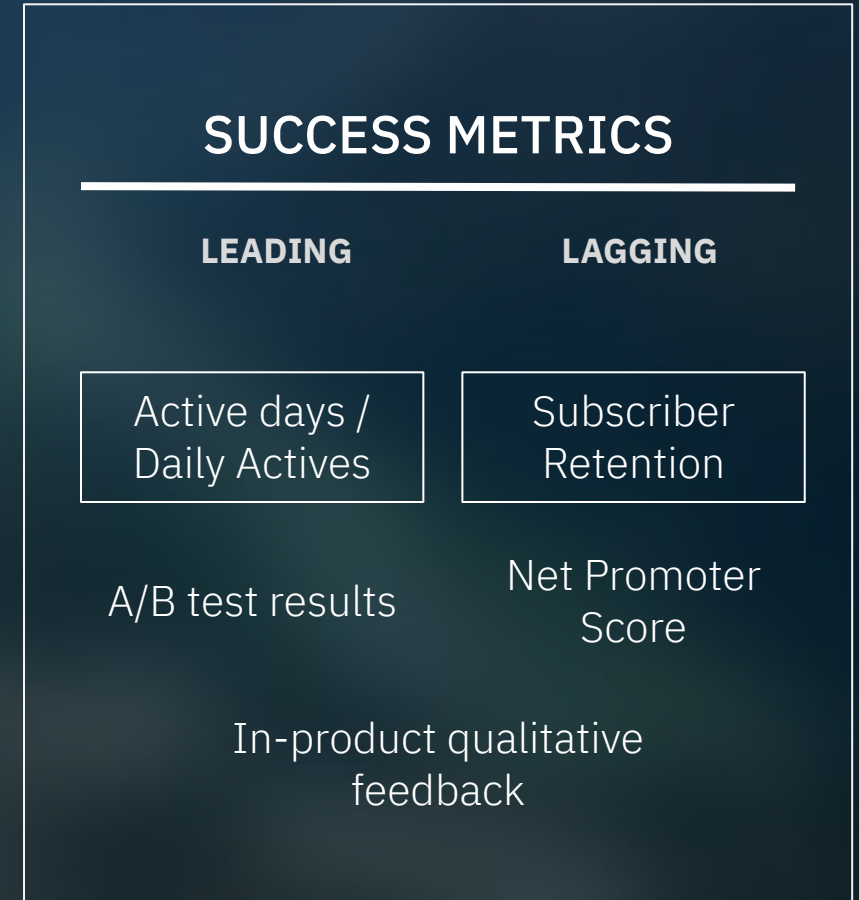
A clear definition of success

Measuring success

The perks of a subscription model

Our front page should, above all else, ensure that our subscribers **spend their time on our best journalism**, regardless of how much time they have available.

It is less important whether subscribers visit us many times per day **as long as they come back on a daily basis**. If we create that habit, our subscribers will stick with us.



A black and white photograph of several children building a tall, tiered structure out of wooden pallets. The structure resembles a large staircase or a tiered pyramid. Two children stand at the very top, while others are positioned at various levels, some holding long wooden planks. The background is a cloudy sky. The overall tone is somber and industrial.

INGREDIENT #3

A process for discovery and delivery
with all functions involved

We specialize in functions...

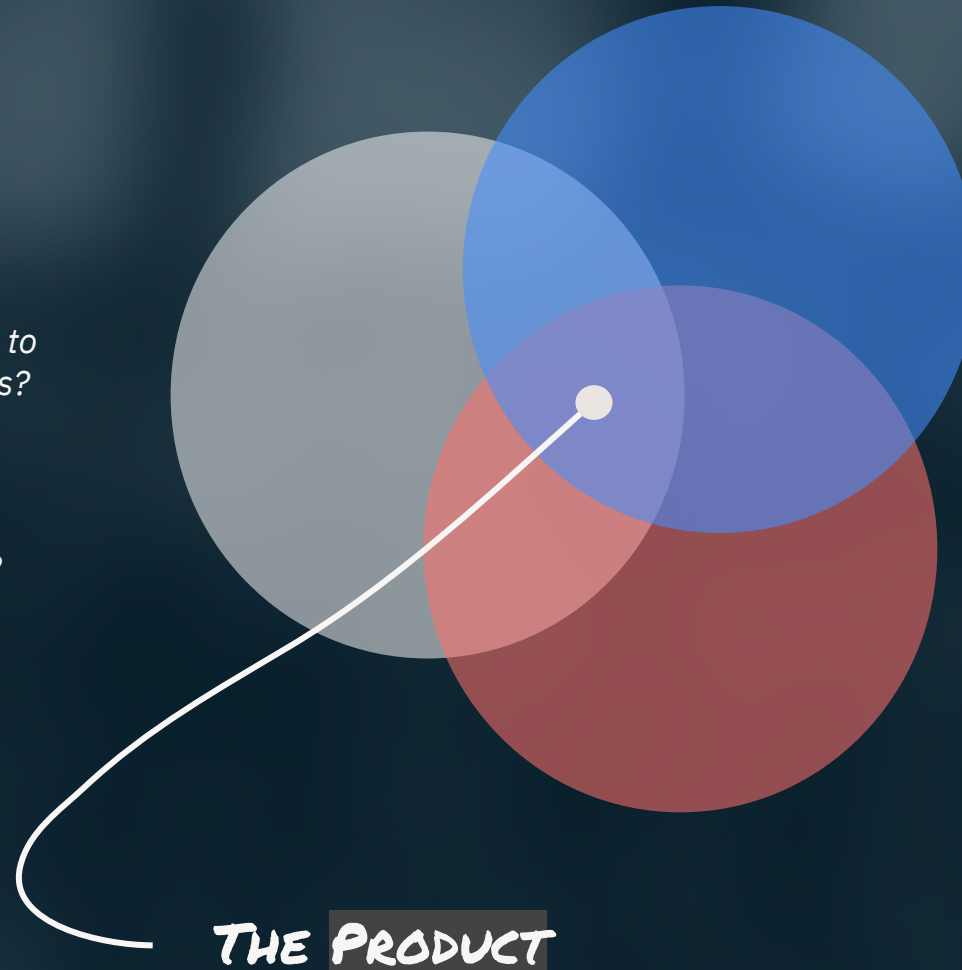
Journalism

Production

Which stories do we cover to deliver on our users' needs?

Prioritization

What is the relative importance of each story?



Product & Tech

Presentation

How to package content and tell stories in a way that takes advantage of digital opportunities?

Distribution

How to reach the right users with the right content at the right time?

Consumer Business

Sales & growth strategy

Which segments do we target, how and when do we ask users to subscribe, and how do we price our product?

Customer experience

How do we welcome users to our product and help them explore the benefits of being a subscriber?

But need to collaborate on key questions and potential solutions

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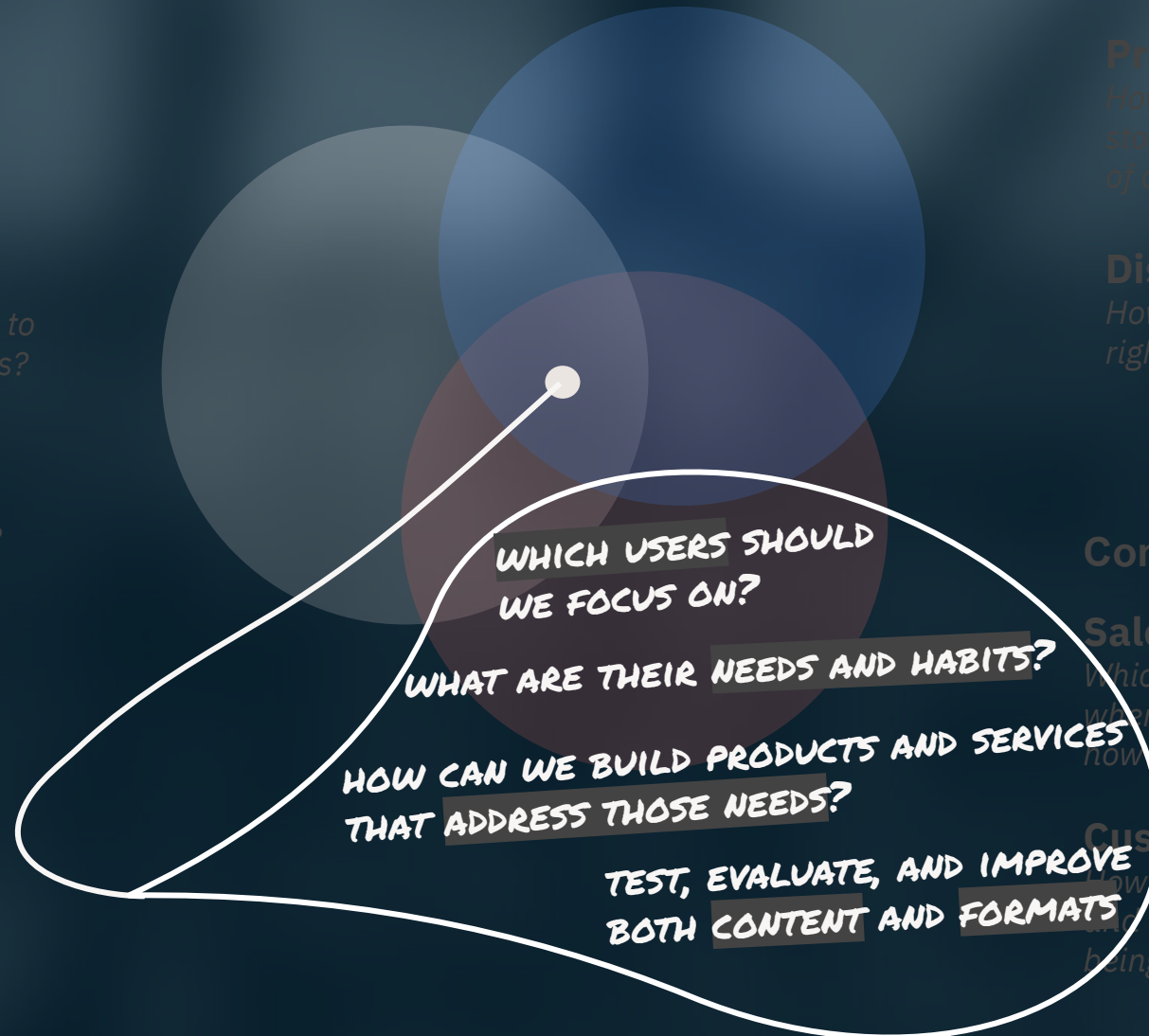
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**INSIGHT-DRIVEN
GROWTH STRATEGY**

Consumer Business

Sales & growth

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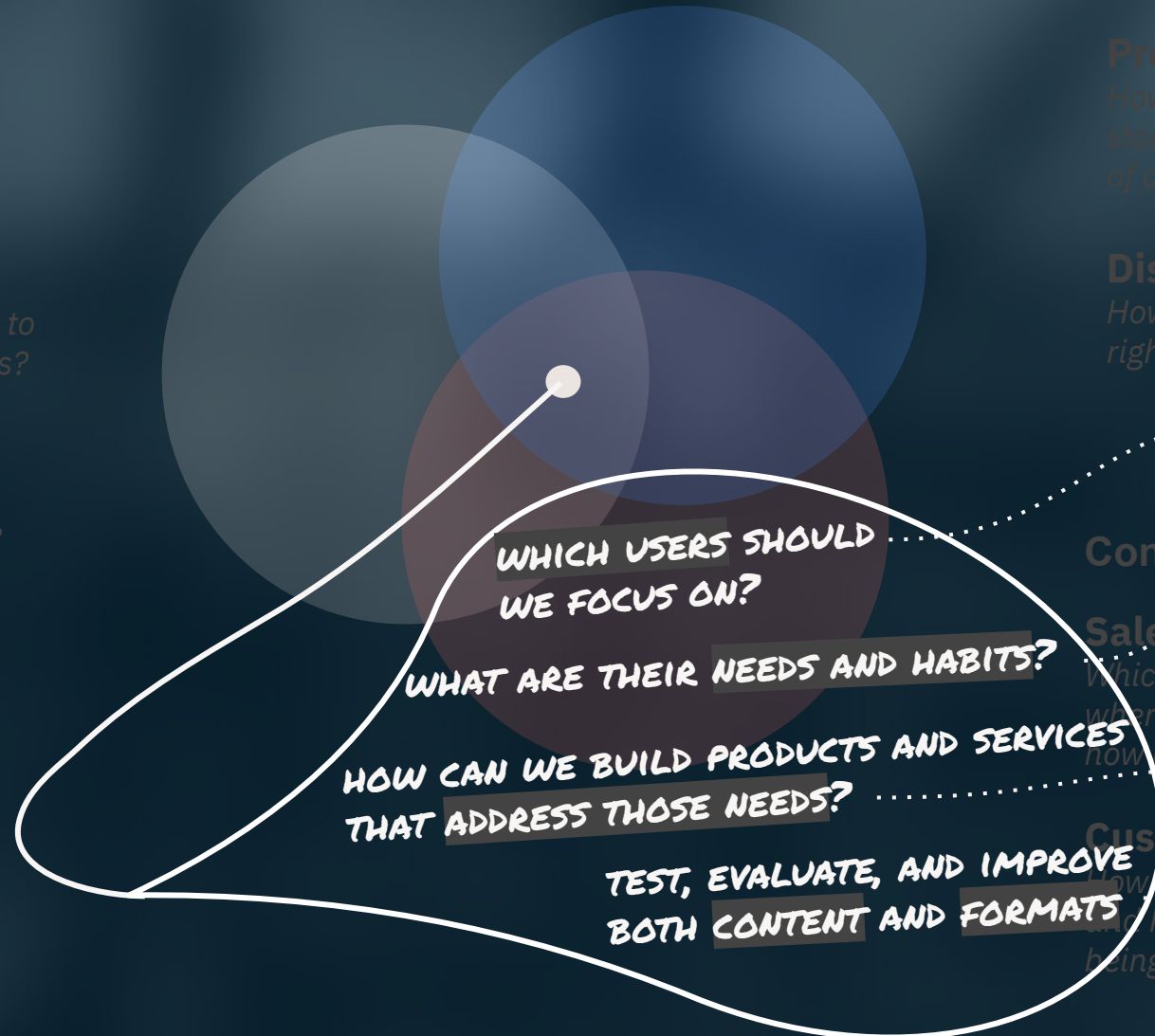
**A SHARED UNDERSTANDING
OF NEEDS AND BEHAVIOUR
OF EACH USER SEGMENT**

**PRODUCT DISCOVERY IN
EMPOWERED CROSS-
FUNCTIONAL TEAMS**

Customer experience

How do we welcome users to our product and help them explore the benefits of being a subscriber?

**COMPANY-WIDE DEMOS
AND WORKSHOPS**



A truly cross-functional effort

Product, Tech, UX, Insight, Newsroom, Consumer Business, Advertising



We organize as a collection of teams with clear missions

Product & Newsroom

Product, UX, Tech, Insign, Editorial

Growth strategy

Subscription growth

Consumer Business
incl. Data & Analysis

Segmentation logic

Personalization

Data Collaboration
Team

Formats and logic

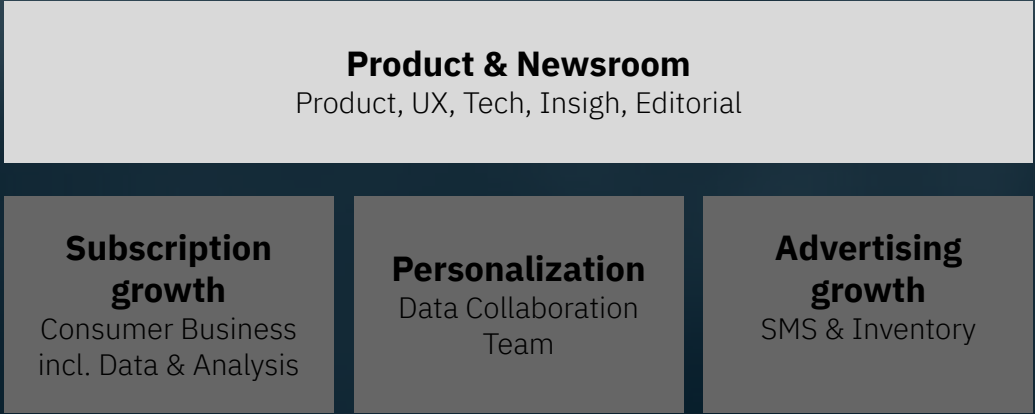
Advertising growth

SMS & Inventory

Weekly demos during which each team:

- Presents findings and progress
- Shares plans for upcoming week
- Receives feedback from the front page project on direction and further iterations.

We're not really working with the product if we don't talk about the content.

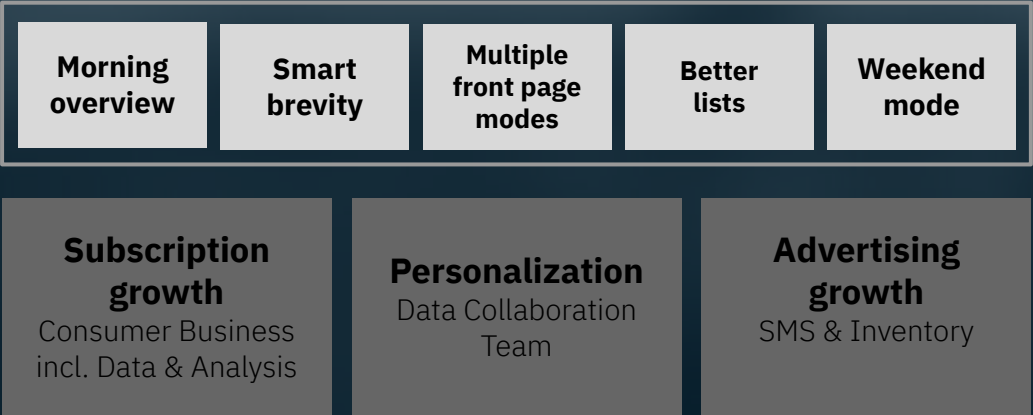


MISSION

Explore what content, formats, and overall editing principles will best deliver on the user insights and the drivers identified in the positioning project. Prioritize user problems and hypotheses from all mission teams.

We spilt into small empowered teams to work on a few selected hypotheses

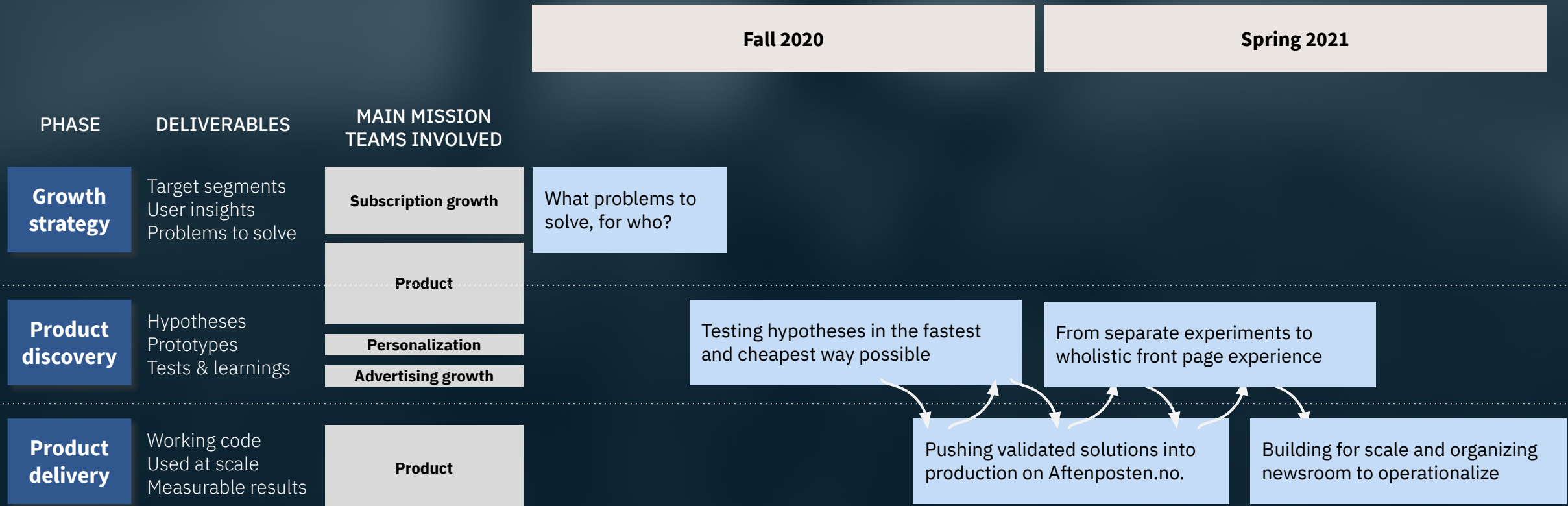
Empowered Experiment Teams



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Process and team involvement



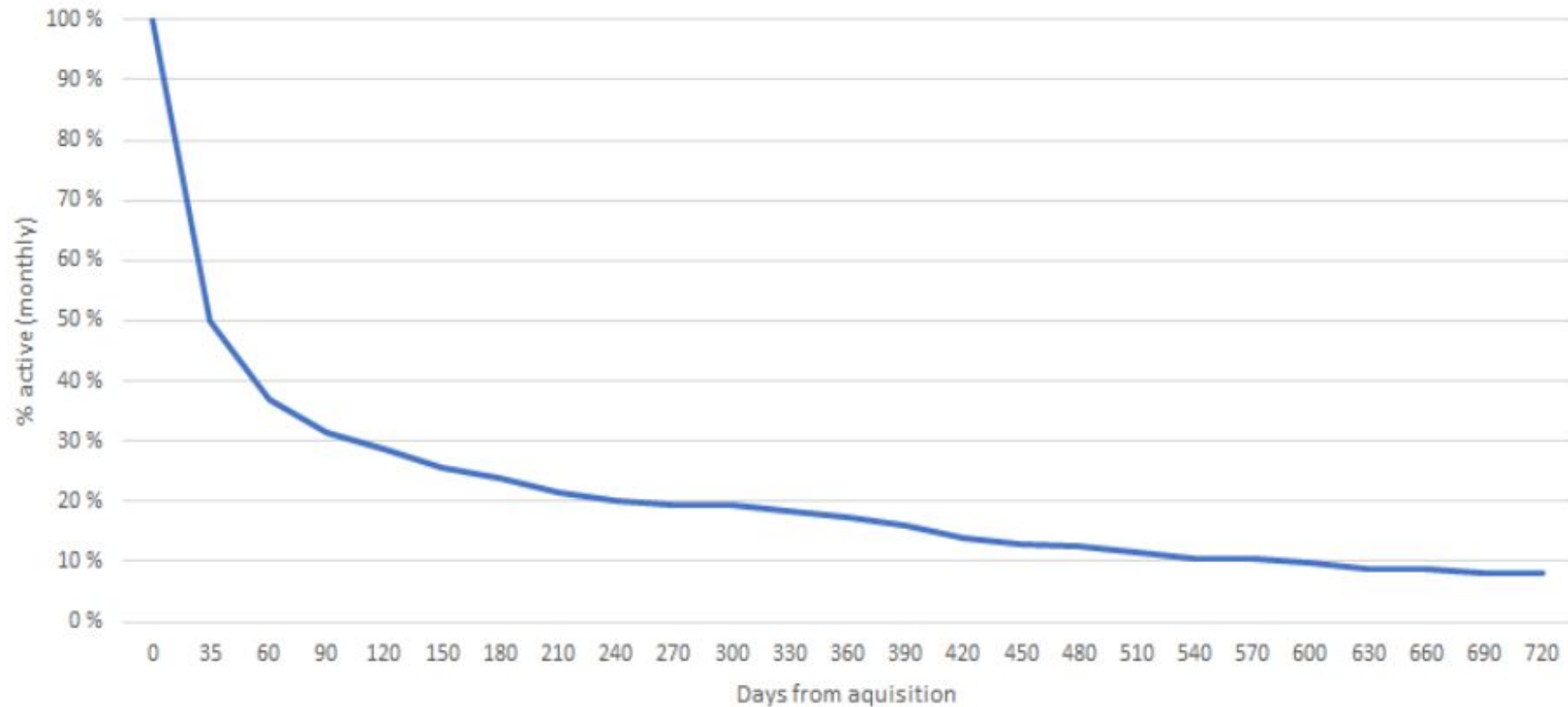
INGREDIENT #4

A clear growth strategy

What problems to solve, for who?

We consistently fail to convince new subscribers to stay.

Retention on "1 month for 1 NOK"



Growth strategy

1. **Low hanging fruits:** Retaining digital subscribers we already have a relationship to.

Growth strategy

1. **Low hanging fruits:** Retaining digital subscribers we already have a relationship to.
2. **Selected growth segments:** Volume growth in selected verticals where we have a strong position to expand on: Parenting, Finance, and local Oslo news.

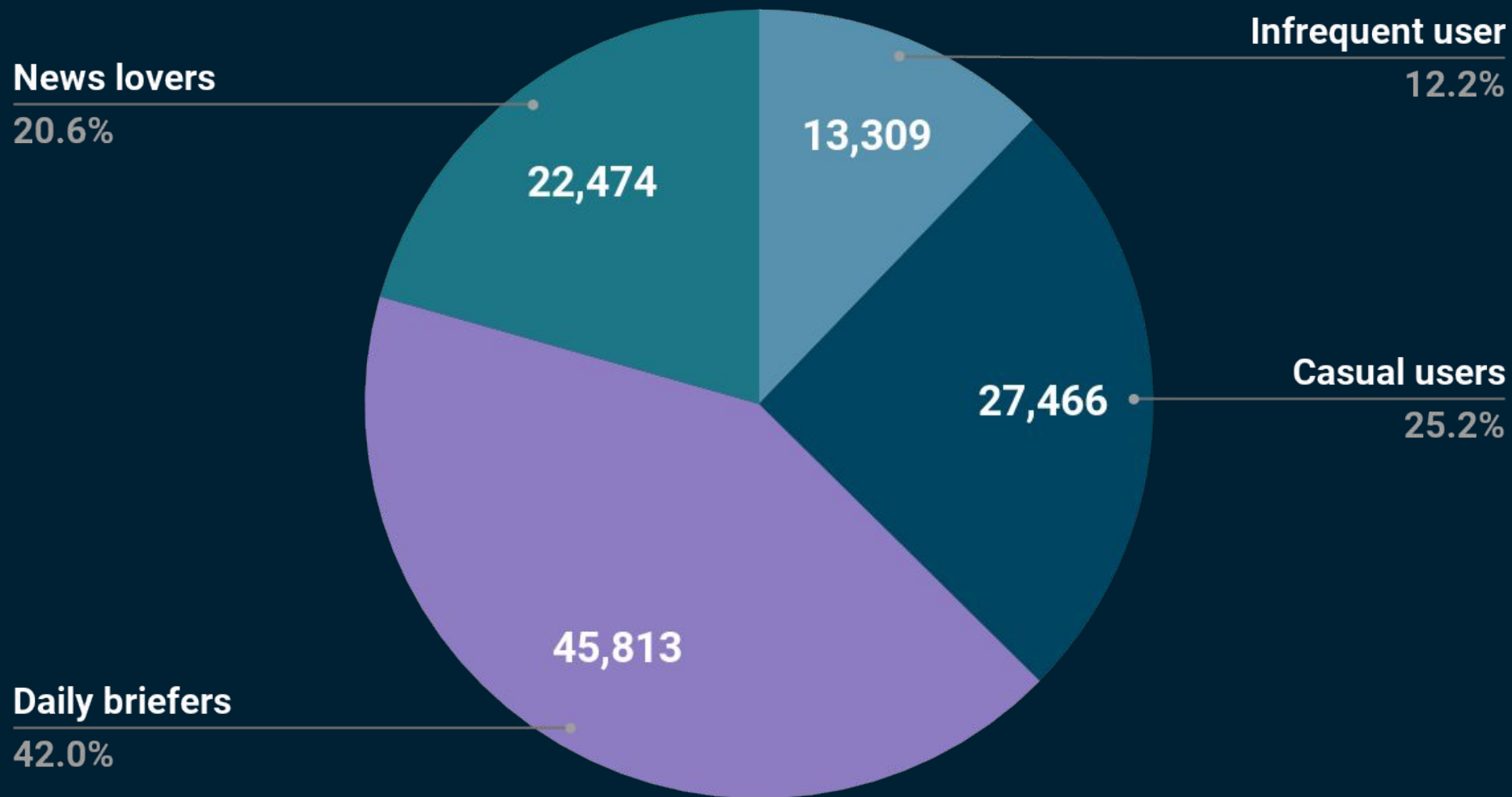
But who are our digital subscribers?

INGREDIENT #4

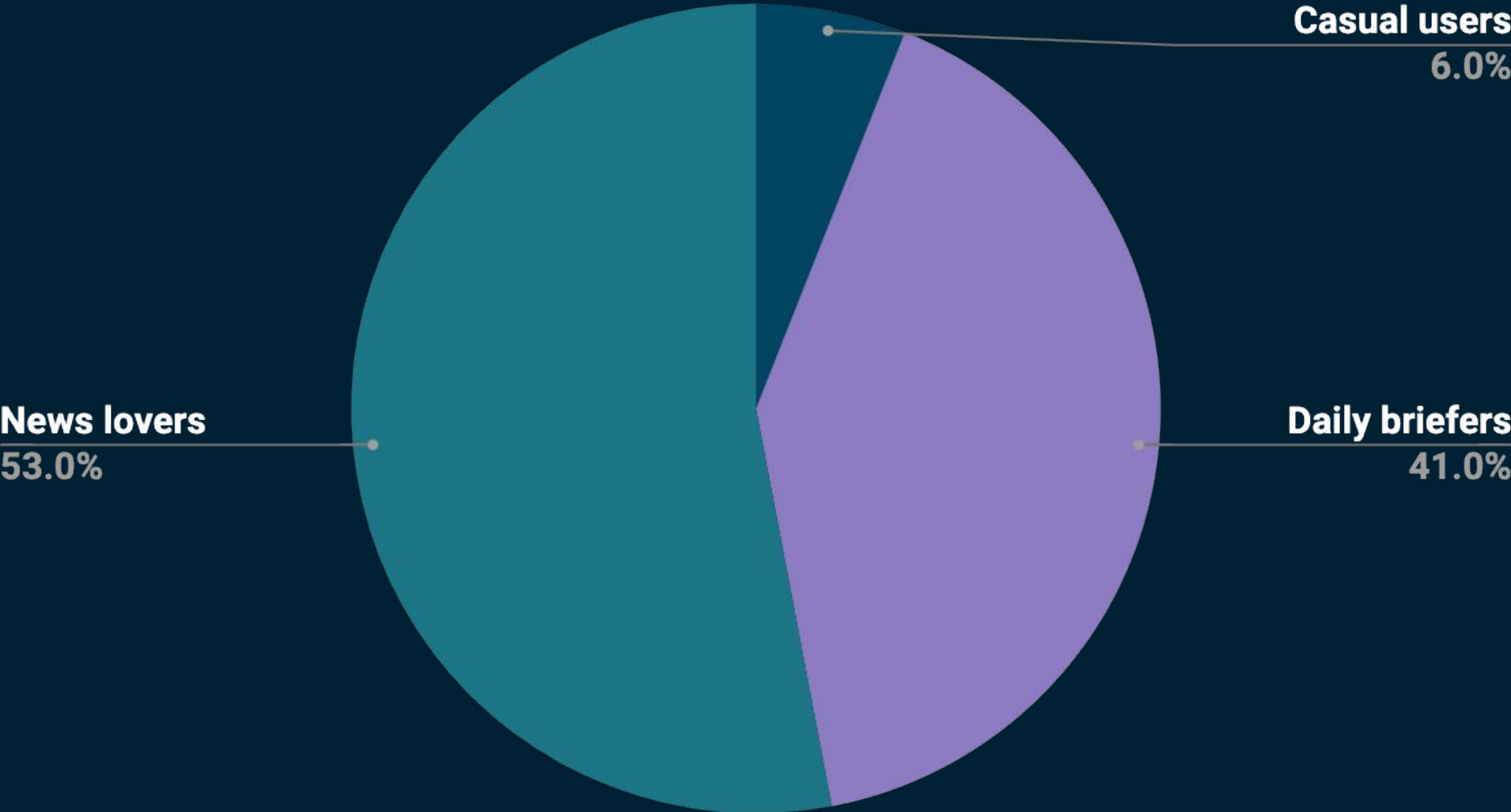
**A segmented understanding of our users and their habits
that affects both product and newsroom thinking**

News lover	4 or more visits per day, on average
Daily briefer	1-3 visits per day, on average
Casual user	Less than 1 visit per day, on average
Infrequent user	Less than 4 visits per month

Subscribers per frequency segment



Share of sessions



The majority of trial subscribers visit us less than once a day.

Trial subscribers represent 25% of the subscriber base.

Retaining these low-frequency trial subscribers is the most important source of subscription growth.

Share of users with less than one front page visit per day



**If we want growth, we need to succeed with
casual users and daily briefers.**

Yet we assume users visit us all the time. And we optimize for many different goals.

Top of the front page, 7. aug 2020



Meanwhile:

- Beirut in ruins - massive demonstrations and government crackdown in the streets
- New national corona-regulations announced by prime minister
- Corona-scandal on Norway's biggest cruiseline. Our journalists are on TV discussing an opinion piece on the topic we published the same day.

The first visit has to show our best journalism.

Product Strategy → Product Discovery & Delivery

With clarity on growth strategy and key insights on trial users, we have a strong foundation for building a front page that powers growth.

DISCOVERY PROCESS: KEY ELEMENTS

Product, Newsroom, Commercial team members
Defined problems to solve, not features to ship
One-week sprints
Weekly demos

A couple of solutions
we could only build by doing it together



***Quick and efficient
overview***

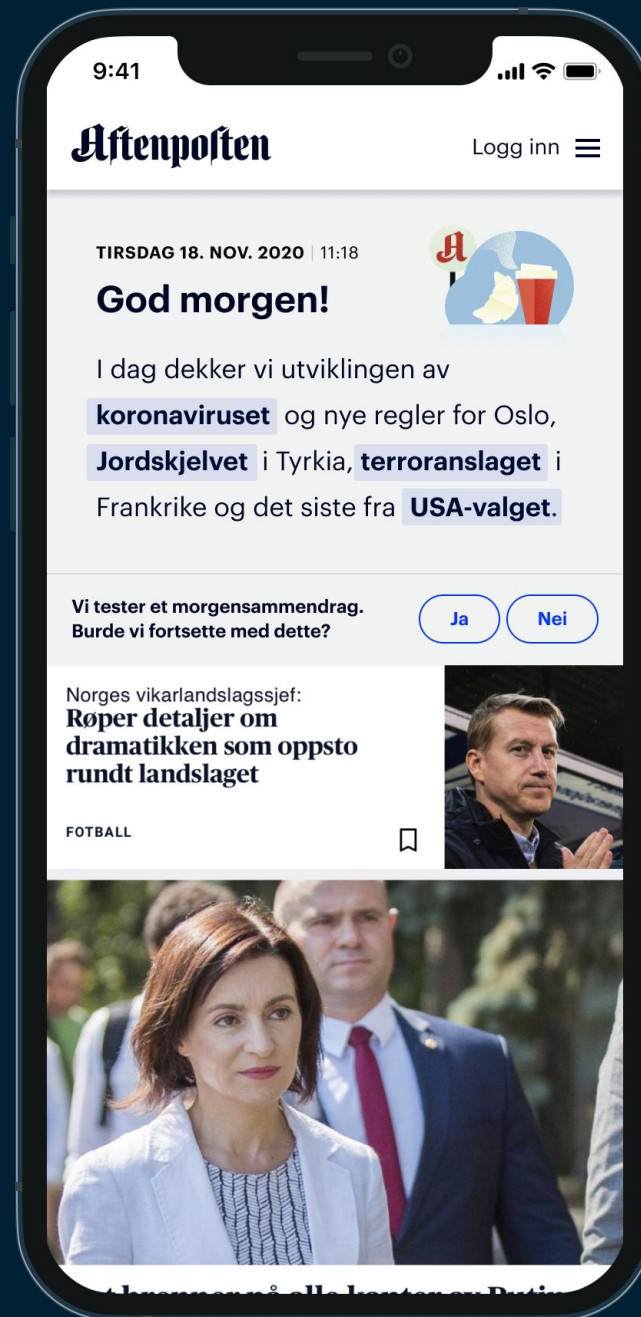
How might we give users a quick way of catching up
on *only* the most important stories of the day?

The morning brief

Newsroom Curated summary

P&T Feedback mechanism

- Shown in the morning hours or upon today's first visit
- The most important stories and the best journalism of the day
- 80% of users indicate they want to see it on a daily basis



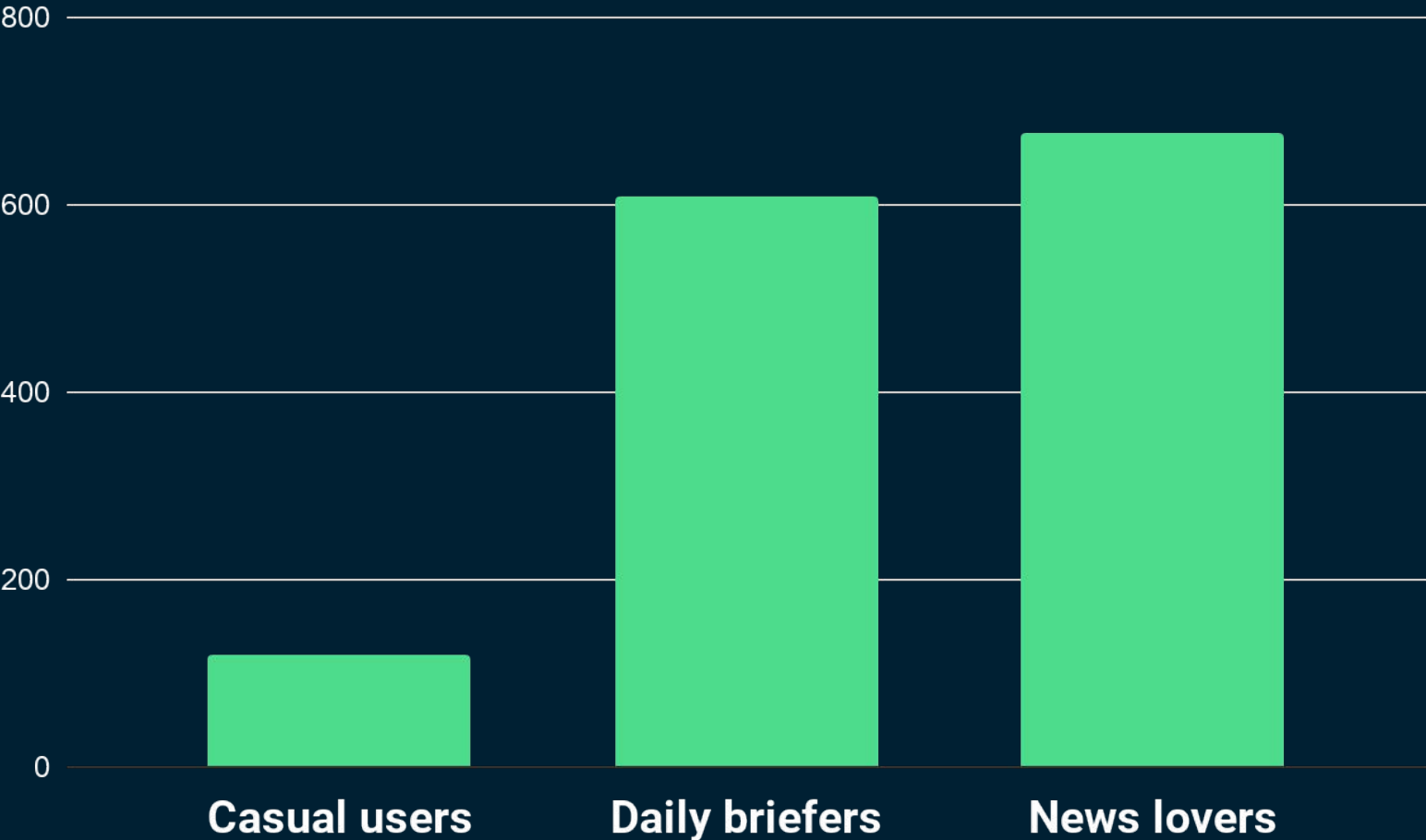
77%
APPROVAL



Selection bias

MORNING BRIEF

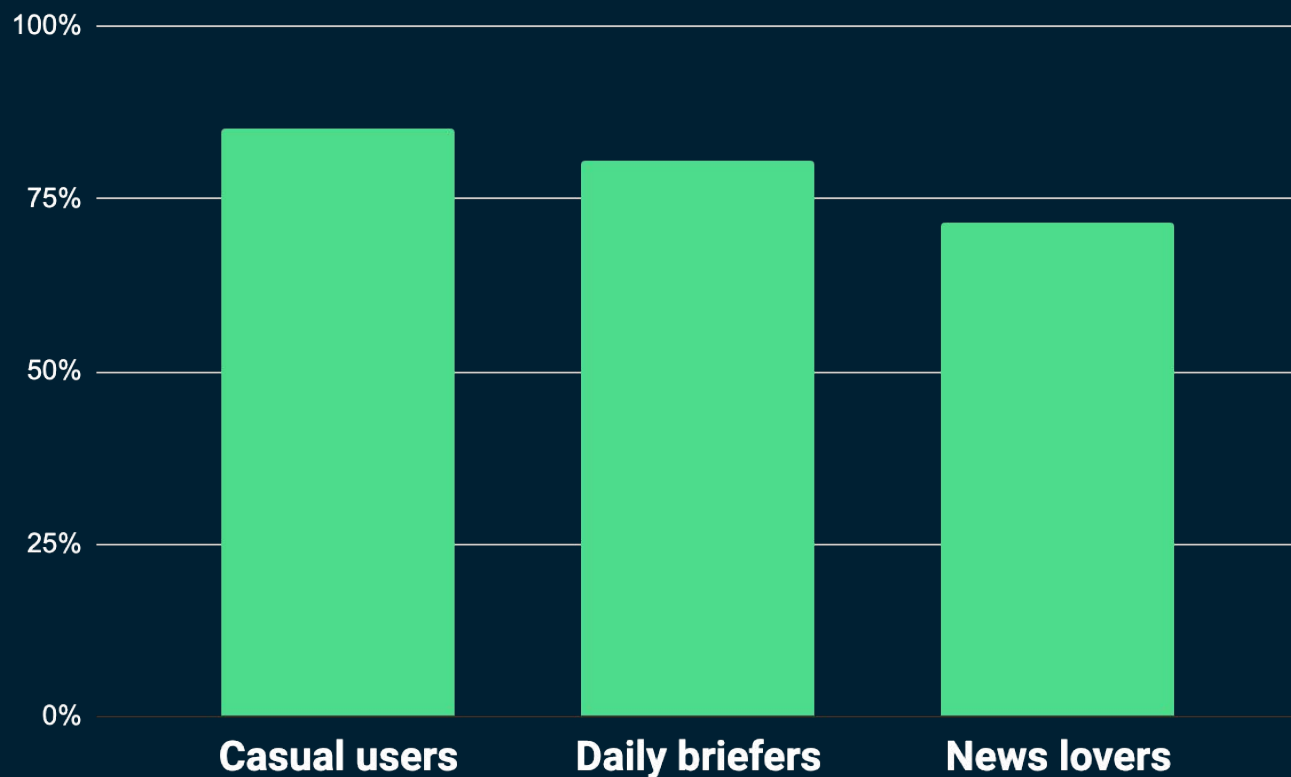
Number of respondents per segment



MORNING BRIEF

A segmented analysis tells us who we are really improving the product for.

Approval rating, per segment





Understanding context

How might we help users get more context on the front page, making it better for users with little time?

A *snackable* front page

Brief summaries explaining what has happened and why it matters

Newsroom Briefly explained

CB Subscribers only

P&T Feedback mechanism



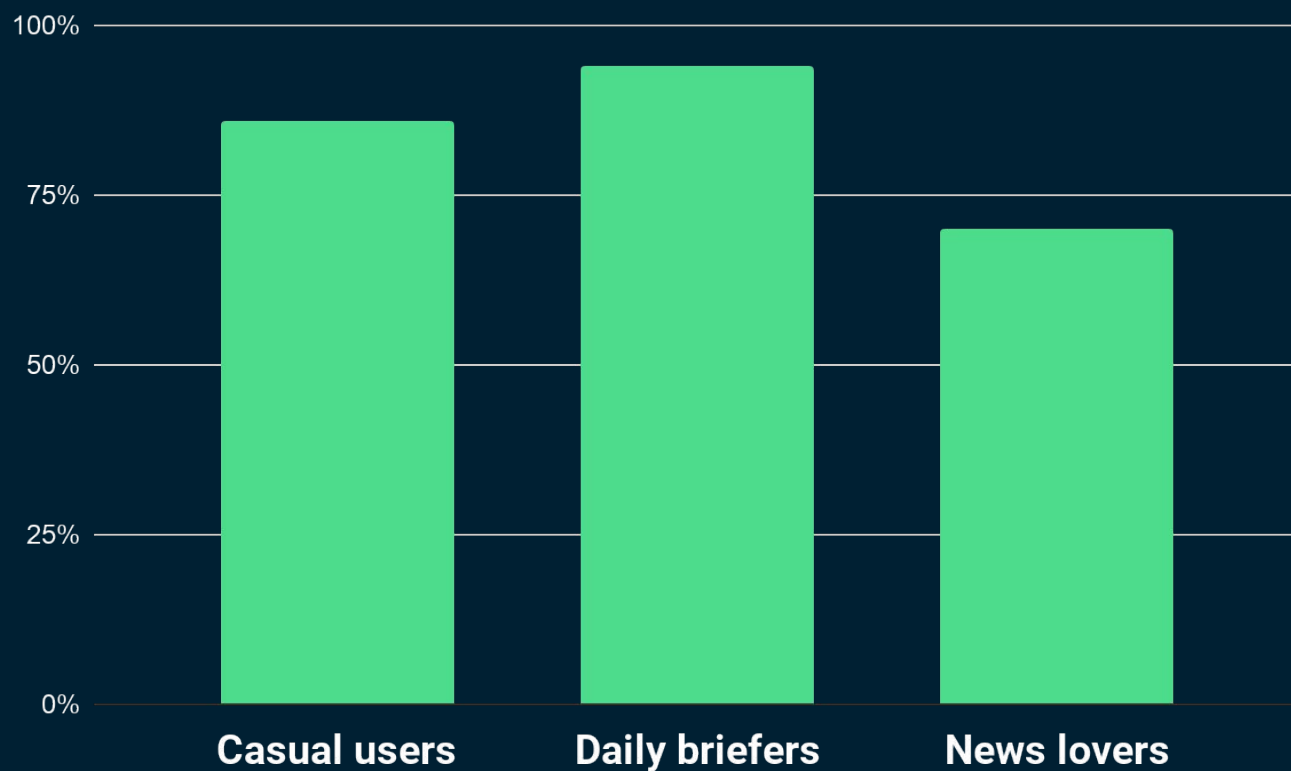
80%
APPROVAL



BRIEFLY EXPLAINED

Especially popular among low-frequency users

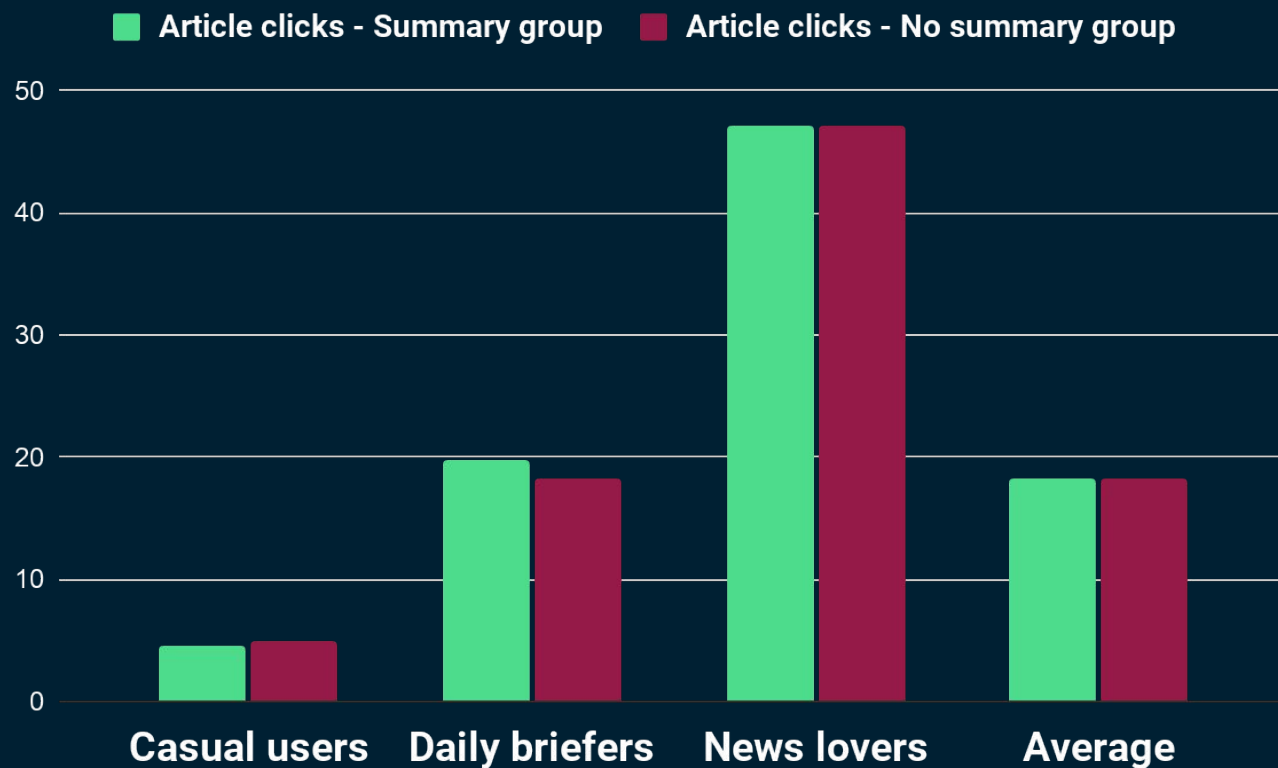
Approval rating, per segment



Impact on article views?

BRIEFLY EXPLAINED

Users exposed to the smart summaries *did not* end up reading fewer articles *in total*.



Next →

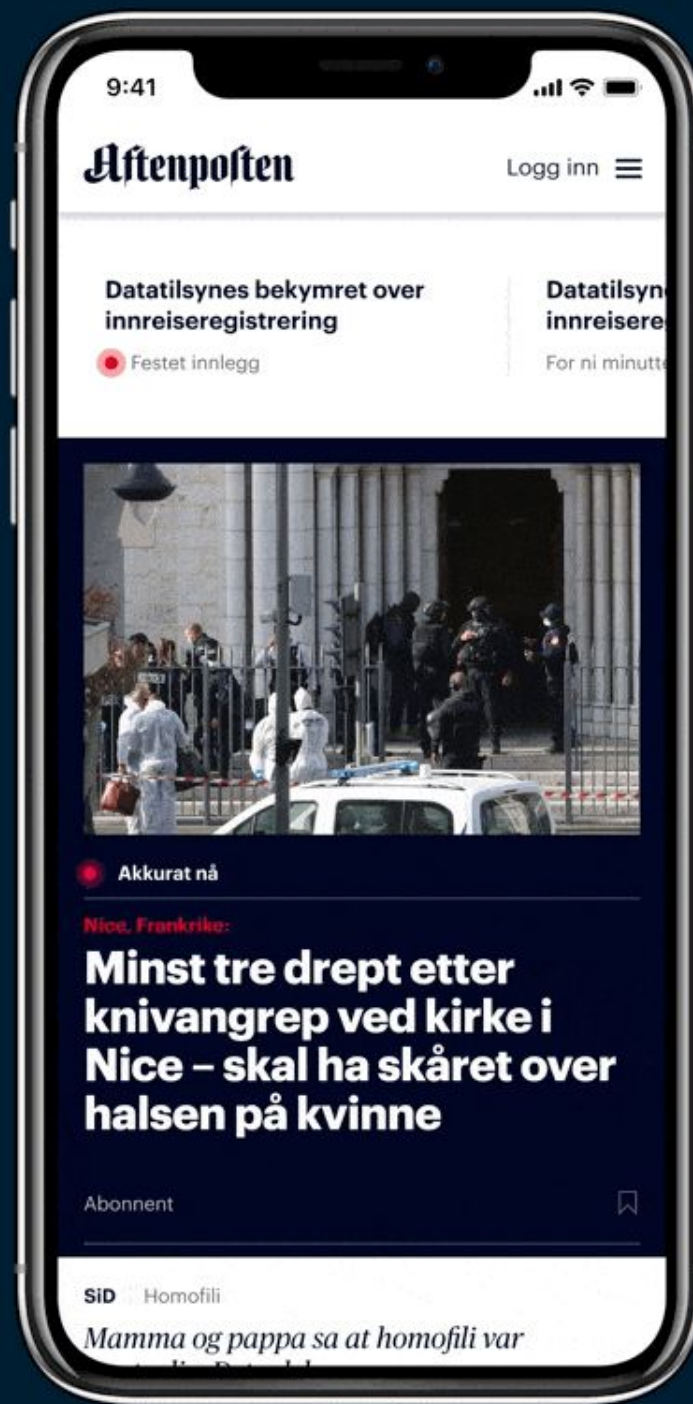
Putting it all together

New editorial principles, validated concepts, new design, and intentional use of personalization features.

Newsroom New editing principles

AD + UX Clearer signalling of importance

P&T Combining validated concepts in one product



The ingredients of a collaborative effort



A **unifying mission** and a defined problem to solve



A clear **definition of success** and how we measure it



A realistic process for **product discovery and delivery** with all functions involved



A clear **growth strategy**



A **segmented** understanding of our users and their habits that affects both product and newsroom thinking



Small, **empowered experiment teams** that own a **user problem**, not the implementation of a specific solution