

Sponsorships, advertising and special projects opportunities



In this third installment of the series “Building a sustainable media with solutions and constructive journalism,” we look at how media outlets can leverage their editorial focus on solutions journalism to generate revenue from corporate stakeholders interested in making their brands more visible.

This is one of the more ethically thorny propositions to explore, requiring media companies to be strict in maintaining the editorial work’s independence from commercial teams’ objectives.

Provided all parties are clear on journalistic standards and respecting rigorous boundaries in day-to-day operations, a range of products and services can open up previously untapped revenue streams. Endeavours hinging on or adjacent to constructive journalism offer particularly attractive selling points.

Børsen Case Study: large Danish publication taps potential

For several years, Børsen, a Danish publication dedicated to business news, has leaned into solutions-oriented journalism to cover incremental entrepreneurial developments that address important societal issues.

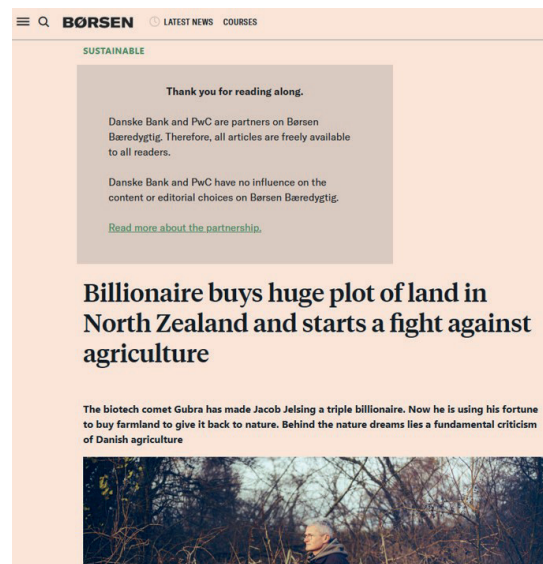
Conversely, this editorial approach has also influenced actors in the corporate world to be more informed, receptive and eager to pursue improved products, production methods, supply chains and methods to mitigate societal harm.

In 2020, they launched **the Sustainability desk** with the purpose of using constructive journalism as an editorial approach to cover successful or failed environmentally-minded innovations happening within Danish and foreign industries. Since then, the sustainability angle has permeated other beats in the newsroom, but it was conceived as a sandbox to test more solutions-oriented coverage and assess how it resonated with the newspaper’s audience.

Although funding for the beat doesn’t depend on the commercial revenue it generates to exist, according to Sustainability Desk editor Katrine Grønvald Raun, this was a moment ripe for attracting sponsors that could underwrite its work for an extended period of time.

Two large corporate groups came on board, each setting up a three-year commitment from financial stakeholders, also called “partners”, to support this work.

Explainer boxes make explicit the relationship with them and the lack of influence on editorial decisions.



A box at the top of an article produced by the Sustainability desk states Børsen’s editorial independence: “Danske Bank and PwC have no influence on the content or other editorial choices in Børsen Bæredygtig, which is produced by independent and objective journalists in the same high quality that you can find in the rest of Børsen.”

Commercial revenue around the sustainability beat is an area of sustained growth for the publication. According to Mark Hallander, Børsen’s Director of Partnerships & Education, “by ensuring that our sustainability coverage is both commercially viable and editorially independent, we can produce journalism that is deeply relevant to our audience while securing long-term funding for important topics.”



Hallander asserts that the commercial team does not have to explain to potential partners that editorial influence is off-limits, since they understand this as a given. They see the publication as a reputable and trustworthy institution with which to burnish their own brand.

Hallander’s work involves finding alignment between a business’ expertise and the kind of work or projects the Børsen produces. Setting up partnerships often begins with the commercial team reaching out to set up an introductory meeting. Relying on a comprehensive slidedeck, the team spends “a lot of time on the editorial activities that the client can become integrated with or provide sponsorship for”. The deck emphasises data collected by Børsen about its audience’s high levels of engagement with sustainability content as a data point to prove specific interest in this subject.

While the commercial team have not received any formal training in constructive journalism, they are well-versed in the editorial approach. Breaking down silos, the commercial and editorial teams occasionally meet during what they call “status meetings” to exchange information about their respective priorities and



Examples of slides in the pitch deck Børsen uses when engaging with potential commercial partners. They describe levels of reader interest in matters of sustainability and describe the various initiatives they organise related to their reporting.

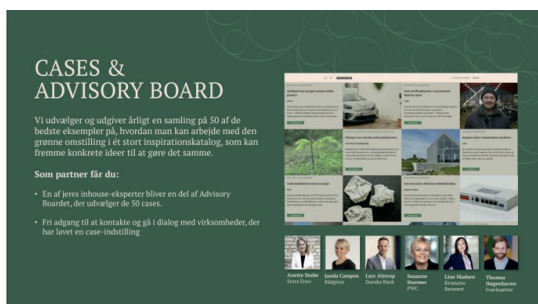
goals, while ensuring that there is no quid-pro-quo. This emphasis on communication is key to identifying opportunities for either of them. **The editorial team will never discuss what stories they are working on though.**

Alongside producing journalistic work Børsen has the resources and staff to produce a range of initiatives that help them bring in revenue from partnerships.

Events

The Sustainability Summit takes place every year and attracts approximately 2,000 attendees, from the corporate, government and nonprofit sectors. It’s free of access and an opportunity for journalists to see their work reflected through sessions that revolve around reporting produced in the previous 12 months. According to Raun this is an opportunity to “highlight and inspire ... giving examples of how to pursue transition to the rest of the business community.”

The Summit’s organization is coordinated between the commercial, marketing, design and editorial team. This requires regular cross-team meetings, while remaining clear on the specific roles each fulfils, from programming to logistics. The editorial team provides input on the framing of information for the event and its sessions. After running it for a few years, this event has become a staple for Børsen, with refined workflows between its various teams.





As part of the partnership deal, corporate sponsors get prominent visibility in marketing materials and a platform to present their work to the event's audience.



An advert for the Sustainability Summit event features the logos of long-term financial partners.

Awards & Project

Sponsorships: this involves adding the logo of partners in marketing by Børsen.

Every year, the Sustainability desk produces a standalone publication with a series of 50 case studies with the aim of highlighting examples of some of the most innovative projects from companies in the Danish business sector. An advisory board composed of members with extensive knowledge on the subject, which includes representatives of the two commercial partners, provides industry insights. Though their perspectives help identify potential subjects for the case studies, they have no say in the editorial team's decisions, ensuring coverage remains fully independent. Journalists and editors decide who they decide to feature and how.

The perk for clients is to be associated with this kind of reporting.

As a spin-off of its award event focused on recognizing company growth, Børsen set up a sustainability focused version labelled **Green Gazelle**, which highlights the improvements made based on a range of environmentally-focused metrics. This initiative was developed after identifying an energy efficiency consulting company with an interest in promoting businesses that made progress in their area of expertise. A company from the energy sector is a commercial partner on this initiative.



The call for submitting examples of sustainable case studies – a preliminary step to producing the annual repository – clearly features the brand of Børsen's partners.

Standard Advertising

Classic marketing: the partners take out display ad space in the newsletters, the print newspaper and online publication.

Branded content: a team of Børsen commercial writers, separate from the newsroom, works with the corporate partners on articles that will be published about their activities. These are clearly distinguished from editorial content produced by editorial staff.



Tips and Insights from Mark Hallander, Børsen's Director of Partnerships & Education

- Create a culture and practices that break down silos between the editorial, commercial, marketing and event teams, to facilitate knowledge exchange.
- If there are no natural workflows for coordination between commercial and editorial teams, explore common synergies to create effective collaboration.
- Ensure alignment on the principles, possibilities and boundaries for coordination.
- Identify common goals to help produce a great product.
- While keeping a robust firewall is key, editorial staff shouldn't be skeptical of their commercial counterparts.
- The commercial team needs to know how the editorial team works and be prepared to explain constructive journalism and journalistic processes that shape a trusted media.
- Journalists can be valuable sources that can be tapped when engaging with partners to explain the nuances of their work and provide expertise on various subject areas.

Elsewhere in Europe

Portugal: Mensagem de Lisboa

In Lisbon, Portugal, Catarina Carvalho, Director of [Mensagem de Lisboa](#), has had success getting sponsorship for a solutions oriented editorial project titled "Heroes of recycling" from Sociedade Ponto Verde, a consortium of companies in charge of waste management in the city. The goal of this series is to explore recycling best practices in cities across the

country, highlighting how the capital could improve its own systems.

Carvalho said foundations and companies which hold tackling social problems as a priority are usually interested in the idea of journalism that focuses on what is being done to address social issues. While she doesn't go into details around the pillars of solutions journalism, she explains how Mensagem works to move people away from being victims of news and into active citizens that can take action in their cities. This approach typically resonates with interlocutors.

Securing financial support requires several phases of relationship building. At first, a friend of Carvalho introduced her to the CEO running the recycling company. They met up a few times, had coffee, discussed their respective work and project ideas. Once the rapport was firmly established, she met with the marketing team, proposing the idea with a price tag for financial support in the form of a slide deck.

Before long, the recycling company committed to supporting the project with a few thousands of euros. The editorial work will start approximately six months after the initial conversation.

In response to concerns about the influence this company may have over content, Carvalho stated that she only seeks sponsorship with corporate groups that share values with the media organisation and does not seek to meddle in editorial decisions.

Engaging with corporate groups can lead newsrooms to open up new revenue opportunities. Companies are likely to see value in associating their brand with solutions-oriented coverage of their commercial sectors or interests. There are myriad of creative ways to secure their financial backing, while maintaining journalistic independence and developing products that can appeal to audiences.

