

From anonymous to known: How *The Independent* overhauled its engagement strategy & **increased registrations by 100% in 12 months**

THE CHALLENGE

As the first British newspaper to go fully digital back in 2016, *The Independent* is an agile and innovative publisher. But even with over 100 million unique users per month, the registered audience team, helmed by Philippa Jenkins, could see that audience engagement was lagging, and converting users from anonymous to known was becoming more difficult. Their approach to moderation and the overall user experience were not delivering enough value.

Absence of a Moderation Tool Put a Strain on Resources

With the commenting platform that *The Independent* was using, the team had to read and moderate comments manually, which was nearly impossible to manage and put undue strain on resources. As the team struggled to keep up, comment sections became rife with toxicity, and the conversations here weren't constructive.

Low Engagement Time on Articles

From the page views, the registered audience team could tell that while users were reading articles and comments, they were not actively participating. These "fly-by" users had no reason to engage: the current commenting platform didn't provide an intuitive user experience, and the conversations were often negative and offensive. There was no compelling reason for users to engage.

No Value Exchange

The Independent wasn't providing its users with a space that effectively sparked and fostered productive conversations, and the low engagement rates and registrations proved it. And without data gathered from user registrations, Philippa's team was unable to customize its content strategy and monetize its audience. The value exchange cycle was broken.



INDEPENDENT



Viafoura gives us access to valuable engagement data that helps drive business decisions. We know what content topics and formats are resonating most with our users, so we can deliver more of what they want.



— **Philippa Jenkins**
Head of Registered Audience,
The Independent

THE SOLUTION

To restore the broken value exchange with *Independent* users, Philippa and her team began working on a new strategy, with the goal to improve engagement rates and boost anonymous to known conversions. They partnered with Viafoura to launch a commenting and audience engagement solution to deliver a better experience on *The Independent's* platform, which would in turn allow them to implement a registration gate to help convert anonymous users.

Keeping Conversations Civil with Automatic Moderation

With Viafoura's Automatic Moderation solution, an advanced algorithm is running in the background across *The Independent*, flagging and removing offensive comments and spam in real-time. Viafoura's moderation services team is also on hand to monitor and respond to conversations as they happen. These efforts have effectively shut down toxicity and removed trolls, creating a space for civil conversation that active users want to join.

New Commenting Experience and Registration Gate

Now powered by Viafoura, the commenting experience is user-friendly and encourages ongoing participation. It's a place where users want to have conversations with the rest of the community because it's easy to use and the comments are high quality. Confident in the knowledge that users are engaging, Philippa and her team designed a new registration gate to capture user information at the very moment they're motivated to participate.

Live Blogs and Ask Me Anything Series with Community Chat

The Independent is now able to deliver more innovative engagement experiences for its users. Live Blogs that cover breaking news as it unfolds offer more dynamic features, where users can easily like and share the content and subscribe to receive push notifications with real-time updates. These improvements to the longstanding Live Blog format are generating large volumes of traffic and re-engagement.

With Viafoura's Community Chat solution, Philippa has launched an Ask Me Anything (AMA) series, which gives users the opportunity to participate in a live conversation with a journalist or subject matter expert. Weekly chats with travel correspondent Simon Calder have been invaluable as users try to navigate ever-changing travel restrictions due to COVID-19, and AMAs with experts on global events like the COP26 Summit provide deeper coverage.

Working with Viafoura, *The Independent* now has access to a large data set that gives them insight into how users are interacting with this content. Philippa and her team can see what topics and formats are driving the most engagement, which allows them to produce more content around those topics to increase participation.

All of this, Philippa says, is the value exchange at work.

RESULTS



increase in registrations over 12 months

15x

more time on-site spent by users after registering to *The Independent*

1
MILLION

article views from AMA content



Over 38% month-over-month increase in comments in the month of May



Up to 2,000 monthly registrations driven through comments

3.14

average comments per article reached in October

Hear Philippa tell the story in her own words in this webinar.

