

A New Funnel for Local News

Executive Summary — Built for Attention, Designed for Revenue

Local news providers still produces some of the most emotionally resonant and trustworthy content online. But it's being delivered through fragmented websites and aging formats, while attention and revenue flow through platforms that don't fund journalism at all.

This platform doesn't replace social media—it fills the gap. It's a scrollable, emotional, geography-based feed that pulls people in through **shared memories and a deep sense of place**—and gently reconnects them to local journalism.

The Core Opportunity

- **People don't search for "news"—they search for themselves.** Places they lived. People they loved. Stories that matter to them personally.
- **This is a news experience in disguise.** Built around emotion and curiosity—not headlines or breaking news.
- **The power of community memories is the hook.** It pulls people in where traditional journalism formats cannot.
- **The big idea:** Monetize the attention of people who will never visit a news website. That's never been done at scale.

Why Now

- **AI makes it possible.** What used to require massive staff—tagging, sorting, personalizing—can now be automated, enabling scalable relevance and revenue.
- **The emotional connection to place is the hook.** It pulls people in where traditional journalism formats cannot.

What Makes It Different

- **Industry-owned.** Built to support newsrooms, not extract from them.
- **Discovery-first.** Designed to engage people who don't seek out news.
- **Built around personal geography.** Users can follow every place that matters to them—not just where they live now.
- Revenue from new audiences. Monetizes curiosity and **engagement with hometown memories**, not just subscribers and clicks.

The goal isn't to compete with TikTok or Facebook. It's to give the journalism industry the infrastructure it needs to reach, engage, and monetize the audiences it's been missing—without asking them to search for "news."

iGrewUpIn.com White Paper

Local news organizations have what every major platform wants: emotional connection, geographic loyalty, and real-world relevance. What they don't have is a shared delivery system. And that's the difference between surviving—and scaling.

There was a time when local news arrived with a thump on your doorstep—personal, direct, impossible to ignore. Then the delivery system flipped, and local news never fully recovered.

Now, people are pulled into endless feeds—entertaining, addictive, and mostly useless. Memes, trends, noise. Meanwhile, the stories that actually shape their lives **rarely scroll by**, out of context and unnoticed.

It's not that people don't care. It's that journalism isn't showing up where their attention lives.

If local news wants to survive, it needs more than stories. **It needs a better delivery system.**

The Core Problem

Local news doesn't suffer from a lack of value—it suffers from a lack of visibility. It isn't woven into people's digital habits. Most local outlets still publish like it's 2005: hoping readers come to their homepage, open an email, or search for a headline. But the way people discover content has changed.

Attention today is driven by feeds. Scrollable, personalized, emotional. Social media platforms dominate because they meet people where they are—with content they didn't know they were looking for. Local journalism doesn't stand a chance in that environment because it's not delivered in that format. Not because it isn't important, but because it isn't present.

Meanwhile, local outlets compete for traffic on a story-by-story basis, scattered across thousands of fragmented websites. The product isn't the journalism—it's the delivery. And right now, local news doesn't own the platform. It doesn't own the feed. It doesn't own the data. And that's the core problem.

Nostalgia & Personal Geography as a Re-Entry Point

People may not search for local news, but they do search for themselves—their past, their people, their places. That's the opportunity.

Nostalgia is one of the most powerful engagement drivers online. It's why "I Grew Up In..." Facebook groups have hundreds of thousands of members. It's why throwback photos get more shares than policy reports. When people feel emotionally tied to a place, they want to revisit it—and share it.

This isn't just feel-good content. It's a re-entry point. **Connecting with shared history** builds bridges back to civic awareness. A memory about a neighborhood park can lead to interest in zoning decisions. A photo of a downtown diner can stir concern about local economic development.

A platform built around personal geography—where users can follow not just where they live, but where they grew up, where they vacation, where their family still lives—creates space for local news to surface naturally, across the full landscape of someone's emotional map. Not every story needs to be hard news. But every scroll can be a chance to reconnect.

Local news has always had the advantage of proximity. Now it needs the advantage of relevance. **The emotional resonance of community memories** and personal geography give it both.

Common Pushback: "But This Already Exists on Facebook..."

"You'll never get people to leave Facebook."
"There are already groups for that."
"People won't go to a new platform."

These are common refrains—but they miss the point.

This isn't about competing with social media. It's about **starting a realistic path to sustainability**—one built for journalism. Facebook was never designed to support local reporting. It doesn't share revenue. It doesn't prioritize accuracy. It doesn't deepen trust.

We don't need to replace Facebook. We just need to **own a path that leads back to us.**

There are platforms built around local content—NewsBreak, Patch, Nextdoor, even Facebook's local groups. But they're not built to support journalism.

They don't fund reporting. They don't share revenue. They don't strengthen newsrooms. They simply extract the value of local storytelling—without giving anything back to the people who produced it.

This is the difference: the industry owns the journalism. It should own a platform that delivers it—without expecting people to abandon the platforms they already use. This isn't about replacing what exists; it's about offering something the others never will: a space owned by journalism, built to serve the public interest. People can still browse their usual platforms—but this would be the one that brings them back to something real.

Industry-Owned = Industry-Amplified

One of the hidden strengths of a shared, industry-owned platform is distribution. Not the algorithmic kind—but the real kind. If hundreds of local news organizations participate in a shared experience, they can promote it across their websites, newsletters, columns, and social channels.

That means instant, widespread visibility. Built-in trust. And a user base that already has emotional ties to the places being featured.

Most platforms have to spend millions to build awareness. This one would launch with organic reach baked in. Headlines like:

- "Explore Your Hometown in a New Way"
- "See What People Remember About [Your City]"
- "A New Kind of Feed, Made Just for the Places You Care About"

Every article, every promo, every call-to-action from participating publishers becomes a kind of soft invitation—a way to bring readers in without asking them to subscribe or pay upfront. It's free advertising, powered by the very network it's meant to support.

And it could start with the believers—the loyal readers who already value their local news source and are most likely to spread the word. But the real breakthrough comes when the platform reaches the people who would never seek out local journalism on their own. These are the people the industry has never found a way to monetize—people who don't subscribe, who don't click headlines, who feel disconnected. And yet, they're still connected to a place.

A platform like this doesn't rely on them opting into news. It meets them through memory, pride, curiosity—and in doing so, it does two things: it creates a new path back to local journalism for some, and more critically, it provides a sustainable way to monetize the attention of those who will never return to local news sites at all. That monetization opportunity—reaching the unreachable—is the key to funding journalism's future.

Control the Feed, Control the Revenue

Whoever controls the feed controls the attention. And whoever controls the attention controls the revenue.

That's the reality Big Tech has mastered. Platforms like Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter didn't win by creating content. They won by owning it—into endless, personalized, emotionally driven feeds that keep users engaged and give advertisers a direct line to behavior.

What fuels those platforms isn't news. It's data. Every click, view, linger, or swipe feeds into a system that sells precision-targeted ads, recommends the next thing to watch, and trains algorithms to keep people scrolling.

Local news organizations still produce some of the most relevant, emotionally resonant content online. But they don't control the delivery mechanism. They don't control the feed. And so they don't get the data. They don't capture the attention. And they don't get the money.

And yet, local journalism collectively controls one of the most valuable content libraries on the internet—trusted, geo-specific, timely, and deeply human. Thousands of stories are created every day, covering everything from school board meetings to obituaries to championship games. But it's all scattered. Fragmented. Trapped in silos that algorithms can't see and audiences can't find.

A shared delivery system would change that. It would allow local journalism not just to publish, but to perform—within an experience built for engagement. A place where stories don't compete with memes and misinformation, but instead, are surrounded by context, emotion, and place-based identity.

This isn't about replicating Big Tech. It's about creating a way for local news to compete in the same attention economy—on its own terms. It's about reclaiming the value local journalism already creates, and finally building a platform that can turn that value into revenue, relevance, and reach.

AI Makes This Possible

For decades, this kind of platform—personalized, place-based, and scalable across thousands of communities—was simply out of reach. It would have required enormous staffing, industry-run moderation, and high-cost technology infrastructure. In short: something only Big Tech could afford.

But the tools have changed. And with them, so have the possibilities.

Today, AI can automatically summarize, tag, and sort content. It can help match stories to the towns they're about and deliver them to users based on personal geography. It can learn from what people engage with—not just to keep them scrolling, but to surface the places and memories that matter most.

This doesn't replace journalism. It reduces the friction that has always made scaling local engagement impossible. AI can handle the mechanics. Local reporters still tell the stories.

And for the first time, the local news industry could use the same kinds of tools that made global platforms so powerful—not to replace human connection, but to amplify it.

This isn't about building an AI product. It's about recognizing that AI now makes this kind of industry-owned delivery system possible. And if local journalism doesn't act on it, someone else will.

A Local Search Engine the Industry Has Never Had

A platform like this wouldn't just engage audiences—it would become something local news has never had before: its own search engine.

Instead of sending people to Google—where local journalism competes with SEO spam, AI junk, and endless content farms—users could search directly within a trusted, industry-run ecosystem. They could ask about the town they live in, the town they grew up in, or any place they care about—and get verified, relevant, local journalism in response.

This isn't the old model of search. It's where search is heading: ask a question, get an answer. Push a button, get a feed. Ask about a school board, a landmark, a storm, a memory—and be shown real coverage tied to real places.

AI makes this kind of intent-based discovery possible at scale. Stories could be automatically:

- Tagged by location
- Clustered by event or theme
- Filtered by trustworthiness
- Summarized for quick understanding

The result? A cleaner, more direct path to real local reporting—and a new source of traffic for every newsroom involved.

And while the search engine is the core utility, a searchable map layered on top would unlock a second experience: a visual way to explore any town, city, or neighborhood through its stories. Another way to help people find what matters—even if they weren't looking for it.

Conclusion

This isn't a pitch for another product. It's a call for the local news industry to do something no tech company ever will: work together in its own interest.

For too long, local journalism has been expected to compete on platforms it doesn't own, using delivery systems it didn't build, while watching others monetize the very content and communities it works to serve. But the tools have changed. The timing is right. And the opportunity has never been clearer.

A shared, industry-owned platform wouldn't just strengthen local journalism—it would **future-proof it**. It would give publishers a way to reach new audiences, monetize previously unreachable ones, and do it all while reinforcing the public trust they've spent generations earning.

This doesn't require replacing social media or reinventing the wheel. It requires infrastructure. Vision. And the **collective will to stop building in silos.**

People still care about the places that shaped them. They just need a better way to reconnect.