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CASE

DEN.FM

STUDY

Text Meets Audio:
Producing a Modular
Newsletter and Podcast

IN SHORT

Den.fm designed a flexible weekly news product that blends a modular newsletter with an accompanying podcast, allowing audiences to choose how deeply they want to engage with each topic. The format was prototyped, tested, and repeatedly refined based on interviews, surveys, and community feedback, resulting in a news product directly shaped by user expectations and listening habits.

ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Den.fm is a Bulgarian media outlet published by the Documentaliste Foundation and known for its in-depth multimedia documentary journalism. The team specializes in audio-driven storytelling, investigative reporting, and long-form narrative formats, producing content that explores Bulgaria's social and political landscape with rigor and creativity.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Den.fm aimed to create a modular weekly news product that blends text and audio, strengthens audience habit-building, and responds directly to listener demand for a renewed podcast format.



IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

The team prototyped a combined newsletter-podcast format, conducted interviews and questionnaires to shape content, refined structure through ongoing audience feedback, and adopted shorter production sprints to keep workflow manageable.

Transitions

WHY THIS PROJECT?

Several reasons led Den.fm to pursue this project. Firstly, the podcast builds on the team's history of producing a daily news podcast, which was discontinued because of limited resources and financial constraints. But its core audience continued to express interest in audio products, prompting Den.fm to attempt to meet this demand. The weekly format also allows Den.fm to deliver consistent content, helping to build a habit of listening regularly among its audience.

HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

Applying the principles of design thinking helped Den.fm to gain a deeper understanding of its audience. Prototyping enabled the outlet to test the new format in real-world conditions and adjust its content and structure accordingly. Moreover, team meetings facilitated an efficient transformation of the audience's insights into concrete ideas.

DID DEN.FM'S APPROACH CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS AUDIENCE IN ANY WAY?

Yes, Den.fm's approach emphasized engagement with its audience by conducting two rounds of in-depth interviews, sending out questionnaires, and communicating within its Discord community.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID DEN.FM ENCOUNTER AND HOW DID IT ADDRESS THEM?

The main challenge was to produce both the newsletter text and the audio. This required reformatting the podcast script and adding more content into the newsletter to ensure modularity, which proved to be a time-consuming process. Moreover, the email's limited framework does not support interactive features. To solve this, the email contained only a summary and linked to the full version on Den.fm's website. Finally, applying design-thinking methodologies took more time than expected. Den.fm responded by implementing shorter sprints and lighter prototypes to match its capacity.

HOW WAS DEN.FM'S PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

The modular newsletter and podcast were well received, with audience members praising the reporting quality, news selection, and user-friendly format. This success was mainly attributed to the fact that the project was directly shaped by audience demands, which were discussed during initial interviews and follow-up feedback. The data also showed high open rates and listener retention throughout the episode.

WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID DEN.FM GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

A key takeaway for Den.fm was the invaluable role audience feedback can play in developing a successful product. The project's design, production, and testing demonstrated that a design-thinking approach is useful even for a small media outlet. Working on a modular project such as this one also showed Den.fm that hiring a technically proficient journalist would be a worthwhile investment that could have saved them time and improved the efficiency of their work.

WHAT DOES DEN.FM PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

Den.fm plans to continue publishing the newsletter regularly, having secured funding for the next year or 30 episodes and newsletters. This funding allows it to market the project and attract donations from the audience, with the goal of becoming self-sustainable. Den.fm also plans to align the project with an upcoming geopolitical podcast, enabling it to generate synergies and cross-promotions to diversify its portfolio and reach new audiences. In the long term, the project should improve audience loyalty, diversify revenues, and confirm the position of Den.fm as a small yet innovative and independent Bulgarian media outlet.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD DEN.FM GIVE TO OTHER JOURNALISTS OR ORGANISATIONS CONSIDERING A SIMILAR PATH?

Den.fm points to the value of in-depth interviews with audience members, noting that "even a handful [...] can make a big difference." These interviews enabled Den.fm to direct the project effectively, thus saving resources and ensuring that the project met the demands of the target audience.

Няма сделка - срещата в Аляска приключи с формална победа за Путин

Здравейте,
Изпращаме Ви третия прототип на новия подкаст „Ден“ – седмичен обзор, в който ще представяме най-важните новини с контекст.

Това е финалната публикация преди официалния старт през септември. Ще сме Ви много благодарни, ако не сте го направили, да споделите мнението си чрез [този линк](#).

 Няма сделка - срещата в Аляска приключи с формална победа за Путин
▶ 0:00 / 12:00 ▶ 1x

Няма сделка - срещата в Аляска приключи с формална победа за Путин

от Пламена Крумова-Петкова • 16.08.2025 г.

Отваряне в браузър

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Изпращаме ви третия прототип на новия подкаст „Ден“ – седмичен обзор, в който ще представяме най-важните новини с контекст.

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 Няма сделка - срещата в Аляска приключи с формална победа за Путин
▶ 12:00 • Click to play audio

A preview of Den.fm's modular newsletter-podcast prototype, refined through continuous audience feedback.