2021 readership trends and our subscribers

Part 1 for newsroom staff

USA TODAY
NETWORK

Why are we here?

Print subscriptions are declining, and digital ad revenue alone can't make up the gap.

Our current digital subscribers are older and less diverse than our communities.

Reaching new readers & subscribers will require deeper understanding of their needs.

These sessions cover **all-new audience research** that delves into what readers say would win them over and turn them into paying digital subscribers.

You are here

30 mins

Where we are now

Readership trends and a look at who our subscribers are today.

45 mins

Growth audiences

A study of our target audiences and what drives their willingness to subscribe.

90 mins

Putting it to use

Diving into the practical ways we can attract, engage and retain our growth audiences. We'll offer specific tactics, examples of success and prompt participants to apply the ideas to their work.

Takeaways

A discussion-focused session to talk about opportunities, challenges and how to use this research to help grow audiences and new subscriptions at their site.
End goal: Some action steps.

USA TODAY NETWORK

What we'll cover in today's half hour

2021 readership trends:
Growing subscriptions across the network and locally show the potential growth we have ahead.

2022 challenges and goals:
Reaching new audiences to diversify readership and avoid subscription plateaus is a primary focus for the year ahead.
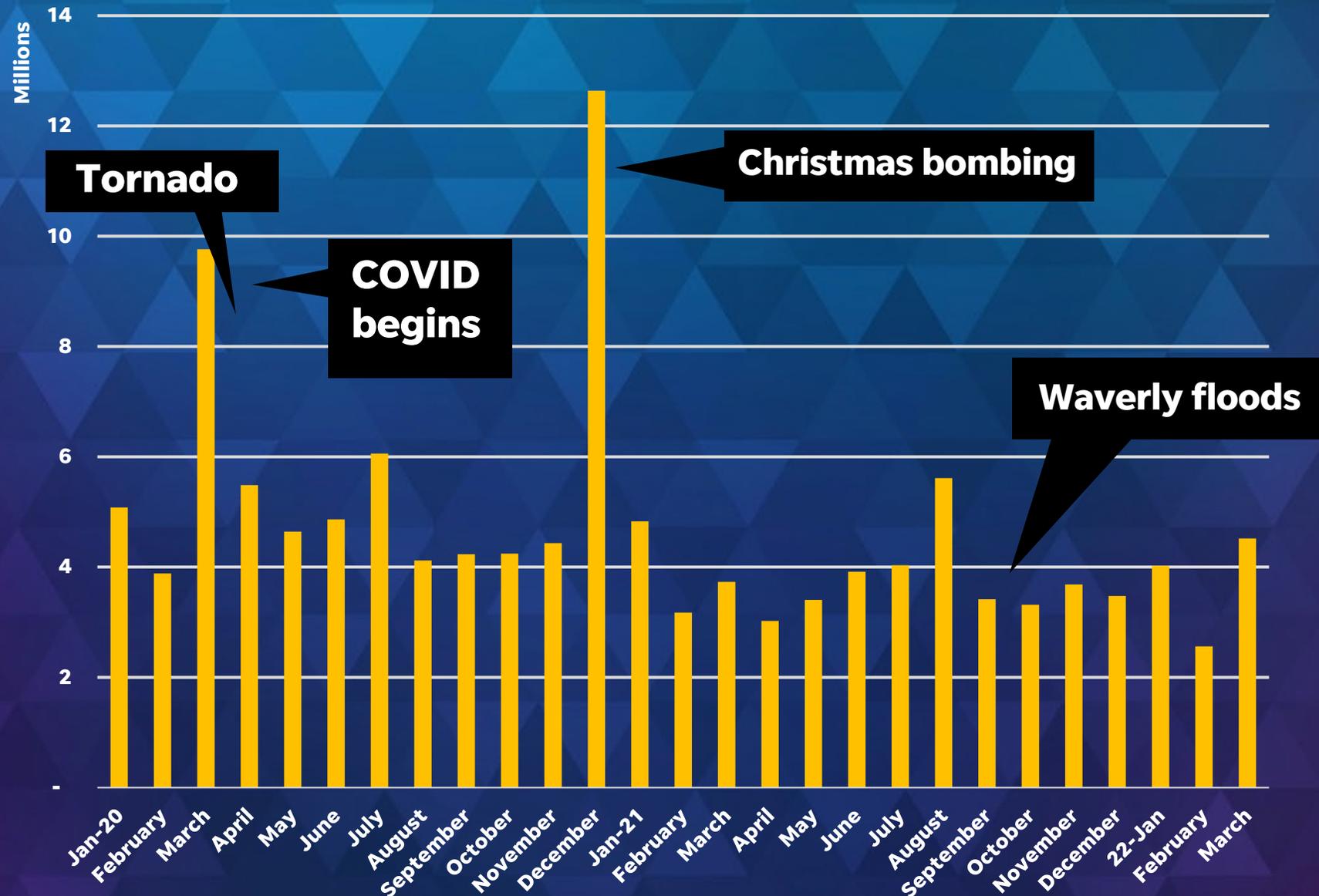
Our current subscribers:
An entry into our latest audience segmentation research - what we know about our most loyal readers, our subscribers.
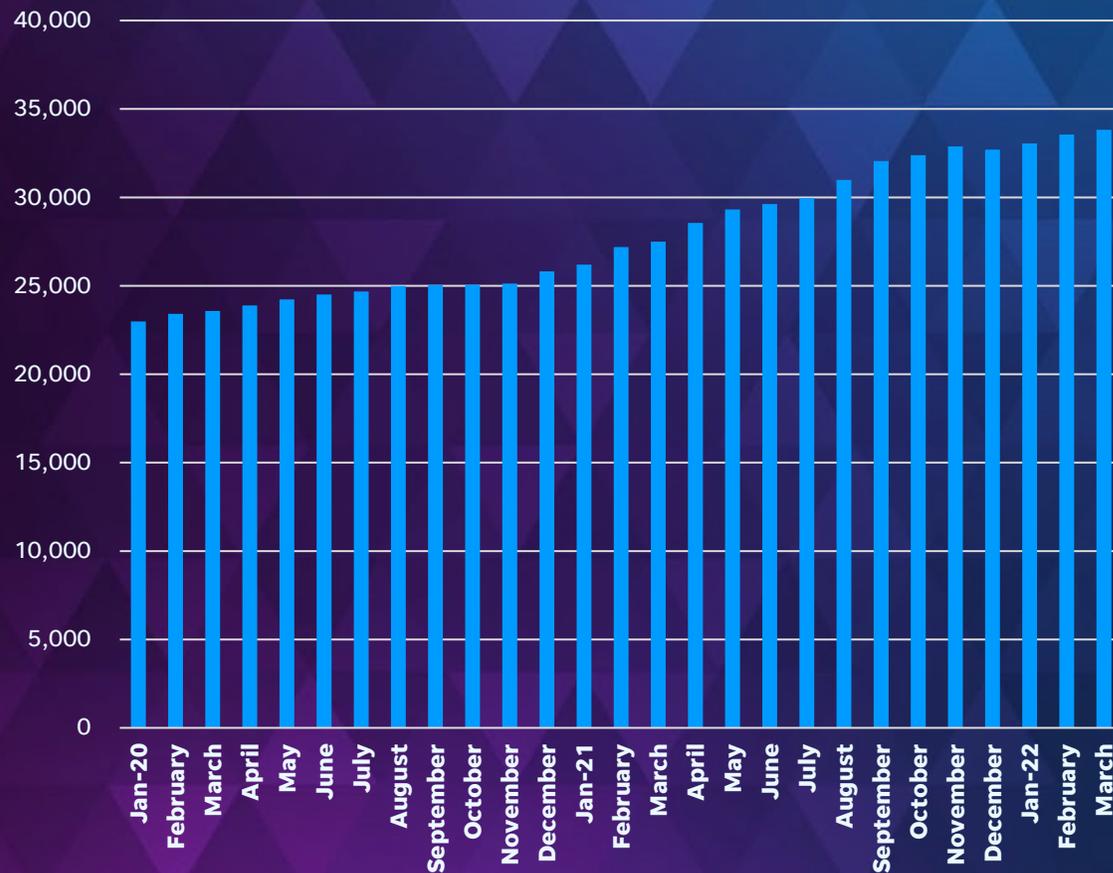
Locally, subscriptions accelerated, growing 27% in 2021. We're now at nearly 34K.

Nashville digital subscriptions

2021 Nashville starts, stops, net gain

Starts　　Stops　　Gains

Digital subscriptions in 2021, Gannett CMS reports

2021 *victories*

—

☑ **Consistency in traffic**

☑ **Growth in digital subscriptions**

Win – win.

**(Take a minute and feel good about that.
The last two years have been a hell of a ride.)**

Our 2022 goals

There's no shortage of data to listen to. From SEO volume to engaged time to social interaction rate, each can be useful, but they're collectively overwhelming. This is the minimum set of data points needed to understand audience trends.

Three main *challenges* to our continued growth and stability:

- ☑ **Growing and retaining our subscribers**
- ☑ **Finding the next set of subscribers**
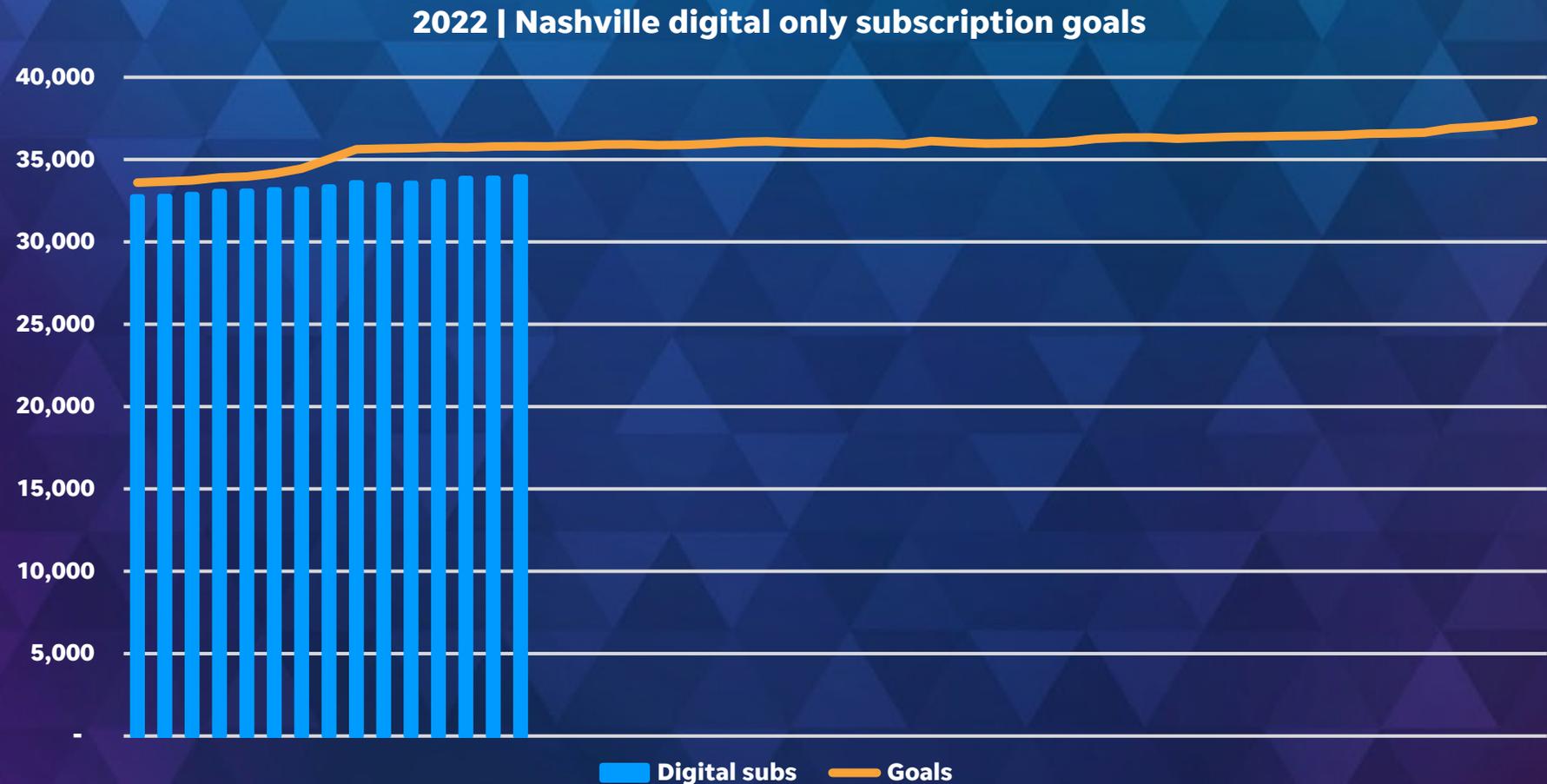- ☑ **Improving the ROI on our work**

Our North Star: Grow digital subscriptions: 2.4M as a company

Our Tennessean goal: 37K

Tennessean:
37,366 by year end, an increase of 14% (compared to 27% in 2021).

2022 | Nashville digital only subscription goals

Legend: ■ Digital subs — Goals

Y-axis: 40,000 / 35,000 / 30,000 / 25,000 / 20,000 / 15,000 / 10,000 / 5,000 / -

Additional ways we'll measure our *success and growth*

- Maintain consistent overall traffic to our digital sites and attract new readers

- Grow subscriber visits to our site and their frequency of return (retention)

- Reach more readers age 25 to 44 with our work to help us grow future subscribers

- Improve the efficiency of our work. Reduce 0 and 1 start premium stories and low-performing content overall

Anonymous Sessions (top of funnel)

Subscriber Sessions

Sessions per month

Anonymous sessions measures broad community impact and is a check to ensure we're not losing reach among future subscribers. Visits from target segments will be monitored as well.

Subscriber sessions are our direct supporters. All sites will be goaled on subscriber visits in tandem with net subscriber goals. There is a separate breakout for target segments.

Avg. monthly sessions per subscriber measures engagement of subscribers. This is the single biggest predictor of retention.

Takeaways: *What to remember*

Our subscription base is growing – but there's still **huge potential** to keep growing.

Reaching **top-of-funnel readers** is key to maintaining digital traffic and reaching potential new subscribers.

Retaining subscribers is just as important as gaining new subscribers.

Questions, discussion before we move on?
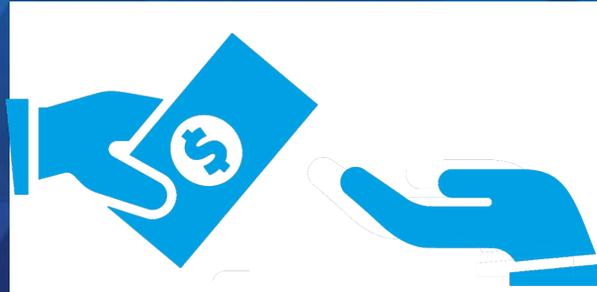
Introducing our audiences

A 2021 study of news consumers willing to pay for subscriptions

Why now? We've updated our research

A company merger and hundreds of new hires in the past 4 years means not everybody has seen segmentation research before. **That data was gathered in 2018. A lot has changed.**

The 2018 dataset was based on surveys from anyone in the general public who consumed news. **Our new data also specifically surveyed people who are willing to pay for news.**

Knowing whether previous efforts worked involved guesswork. This year, we'll be able to **track story readership from specific segments** to know whether our work is making a difference.

What you need to know about the research

What data is the research based on?

- A May 2021 survey of 2,750 news consumers in the US, including 1,000 Gannett subscribers.

- 955 of those s... were between ... of 25-44.

- Later in the process qualitative in-person interviews helped us flesh out more details.

The results: 6 distinct audience segments

Segments were ... ... skewed demographically, particularly by age.

Translated into this training:

It's a mix of specifics on these audience groups, ... from our familiar ... readership trends ...cessful examples of ...atic work as well as ...nt funnel strategy ...sed down to be ...le and applicable for journalists.

Our goal and why you're here:
Connect this extensive and valuable audience research to existing knowledge about our readership trends and convert it to daily journalism practices.

6 distinct, sizable, and actionable segments

SEGMENT 1
16% of news consumers

Image-driven, apolitical, entertainment-focused

- This is a social group.
- Enjoys staying current on what's popular across social media.
- **News is as a form of entertainment** that competes with TV, music, watching tv/film and gaming.

SKEWS YOUNGER

FUTURE GROWTH AUDIENCE

SEGMENT 2
15%

Trendy, opinionated, casual

- Enjoys being the center of attention and known for staying up to date on the latest trends.
- They feel knowledgeable. Around others, but they don't need to develop in-depth opinions.

SKEWS YOUNGER

LOWEST POTENTIAL TO PAY

SEGMENT 3
12%

Social, plugged-in, curious

- Extroverted and optimistic.
- Love being the first to learn about news.
- Turn to the news to feel in-the-know and be a part of the conversation.

SEGMENT 4
20%

Self-reliant, content, open-minded

- More established with their lifestyle & content with who they are.
- While reliant on social media for news, they're less drawn to what's trendy. **News is a way to satisfy curiosity, push horizons, and help them build their own opinions.**

NEXT GROWTH AUDIENCES

SEGMENT 5
12%

Civic, family-focused, moderate

- Older, civically engaged, and family-oriented group
- Comfortable in their ways.
- Seek to be broadly aware of news
- News is a **resource for making informed, safe choices for themselves and their family.**

SKEWS OLDER

DIGITAL & PRINT READERS

SEGMENT 6
25%

Cautious, independent, pragmatic

- Older and very offline group that is set in their ways
- Approaches news with a dose of skepticism.
- Trust in the familiar is foundational for them.
- Turn to the news **to stay informed with a well-rounded picture and to form their own opinions**.

SKEWS OLDER

PRINT READERS

Overlay text:

These are a bigger challenge — we should nurture our relationship with them, but they're not our most likely subscribers this year.

Our highest priority: We'll talk about these in detail in the next session.

What we know about our *current subscribers*

An important part of our portfolio with whom to optimize our relationship and grow engagement.

<u>POLL</u>: Network-wide our current digital subscribers are .....

A

Are younger than our traditional print audience, ages 25-45

B
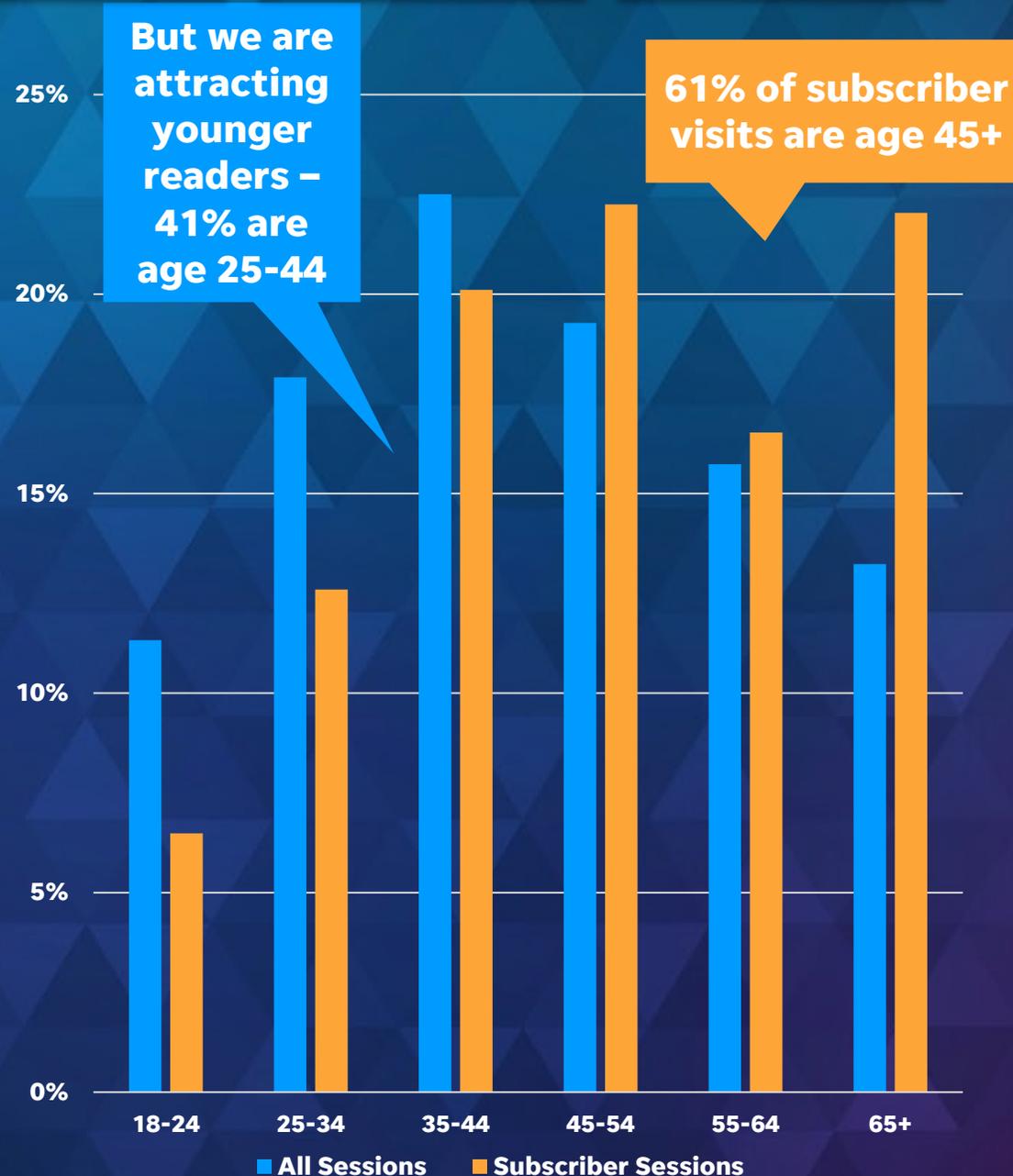
Are primarily women

C

Look a lot like our traditional print audience, and are mostly men

Our *current subscribers*

Network-wide and Nashville our subscribers still tend to over-index as 65+.

Diversifying who subscribes is key to our growth.

But we are attracting younger readers – 41% are age 25-44

61% of subscriber visits are age 45+

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+

■ All Sessions   ■ Subscriber Sessions

The segments: Our current subscribers

SEGMENT 5

Current print and digital audience

An older, civically engaged and family-oriented group who is comfortable in their ways. They seek to be broadly aware of the news, seeing it as a **resource for making informed, safe choices for themselves and their family.**

SEGMENT 6

Current print audience

An older and very offline group that is set in their ways and approaches news with a dose of skepticism. Trust in the familiar is foundational for them, and they turn to the news **to stay informed with a well-rounded picture and to form their own opinions**.

What we know about Segment 5: Our current digital and print subscribers

12%
NEWS CONSUMERS
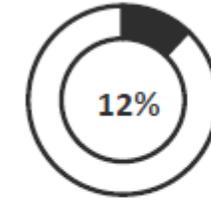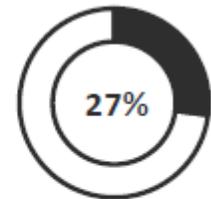
27%
CURRENT SUBSCRIBERS

They're older:
76% over age 55

Most are done working:
50% are retired

If we change, will we drive these readers away?
No, many attributes of what younger news consumer seek resonate with this group of "current" readers as well. We won't drive them away and believe some maneuvers bring us closer to reaching the more casual readers among them too.

Our *current subscribers are still pretty traditional*

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Subscribers show a significantly higher affinity for local politics/government, investigative news, business, sports and opinion.

What is most important to you for local content?

% OF SUBSCRIBERS

61%	Local breaking news
17%	Weather
23%	Crime in my community
55%	Local politics/government
38%	National news reporting
38%	Continuous coverage of ongoing news stories
40%	Investigative/watchdog news
36%	Local business/industry news
22%	Local things to do, including concerts and events
16%	Human interest stories
11%	Education news in my community
2%	Job opportunities and workplace environments
32%	Local sports
15%	Consumer issues/scams
15%	Reviews/recommendations: local restaurants, bars
18%	Local arts, theater and cultural events
22%	Editorial/opinion articles
20%	Obituaries

Highlighted areas rank higher in importance for subscribers compared to the general population.

Source: Gannett Brand Equity survey 2021

But the *general population* is interested in more "lifestyle" topics

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Non-subscribers and younger readers have higher interest in crime, local entertainment, education news and employment opportunities.

What is most important to you for local content? (Top 5 mentions)

18-34	GEN POP.	SUBSCRIBERS	
59%	65%	61%	Local breaking news
44%	**48%**	17%	Weather
43%	**42%**	23%	Crime in my community
37%	39%	**55%**	Local politics/government
34%	37%	38%	National news reporting
30%	34%	**38%**	Continuous coverage of ongoing news stories
18%	22%	**40%**	Investigative/watchdog news
20%	21%	**36%**	Local business/industry news
27%	**24%**	22%	Local things to do, including concerts and events
19%	**20%**	16%	Human interest stories
18%	**15%**	11%	Education news in my community
20%	**15%**	2%	Job opportunities and workplace environments
14%	15%	**32%**	Local sports
15%	**17%**	15%	Consumer issues/scams
18%	14%	15%	Reviews/recommendations: local restaurants, bars
16%	13%	**18%**	Local arts, theater and cultural events
6%	5%	**22%**	Editorial/opinion articles
4%	4%	**20%**	Obituaries

Highlighted areas rank higher in importance for the general population and younger readers than our current subscribers.

Source: Gannett Brand Equity survey 2021

Takeaways: What to remember

Our **current subscribers** are older, retired and tend to like traditional news topics.

We want to **diversify** our subscriber base to include more of the younger readers visiting our sites.

The **general population and younger readers** favor more lifestyle-oriented news topics.
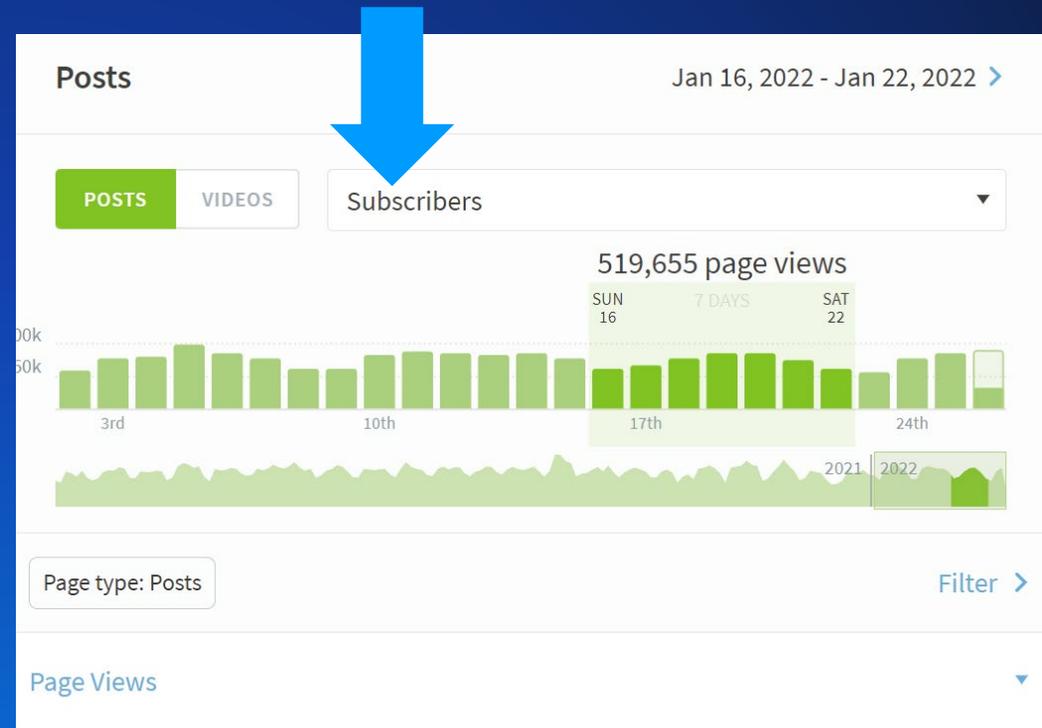
Questions? Discussion?
Let's put it to use

- Open Parse.ly for last week. Choose the "Subscribers" drop down. Scroll down to the stories. What trends about the stories are you seeing perform best with subscribers?

- Now switch back to "All audiences"? What do you see different?

- Go to your author page and do the same for last month.

- How does that align with what we've discussed?

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NEXT SESSION: *We'll take a deeper dive on the growth audience **segments 3 and 4** and understand what motivates their willingness to pay for news.*

Resource:
A guide to our audience groups.