

AI in Media & Communications

Media & Communications

What changes for the media company as AI enters its industry

“The coordination gap between editorial, ad sales, and streaming is where audience growth dies slowly. AI makes this problem both more visible and more solvable.”

01

Where does audience growth come from when advertising declines?

02

What happens when senior people spend time on authority, not production?

03

Does your editorial position survive the next senior departure?



What changes for the media company as AI enters its industry

Nordic media companies have invested heavily in AI where it is easiest to measure: recommendation engines, ad targeting, production automation. The leadership layer remains untouched. Editors-in-chief, commercial directors, and CEOs make the decisions that determine whether the company wins or loses its audience. Those decisions happen without AI augmenting the judgment, without cross-functional intelligence in the room, without the editorial instinct of senior people encoded anywhere a system can learn from.

Two structural shifts are converging. First, the coordination gap between editorial, ad sales, streaming, communications, and corporate is becoming the existential gap. Each function optimizes locally. Nobody owns the audience relationship across touchpoints. When editorial greenlights a new series, it takes weeks or a full quarter before ad sales adjusts what they pitch. AI makes this coordination problem both more visible and more solvable. The company that builds cross-functional audience intelligence creates a compounding advantage. The one that keeps optimizing silos gets faster at the wrong things.

Second, editorial knowledge is a depreciating asset in its current form. The senior editor who "just knows" what works holds irreplaceable pattern recognition. But that knowledge exists only in their head. When they leave, subscriber engagement declines visibly in their coverage area. AI can encode and amplify that judgment for the first time. The company that does this turns a fragile dependency into a durable advantage.

Meanwhile, advertising revenue is in long-term structural decline. Print advertising has dropped 60% or more in the past decade. Digital ad revenue grows but flows to foreign platforms. The transition to subscription, intelligence products, and community revenue requires senior people spending less time on production and more on authority-building and audience relationship work. AI augmentation enables exactly this redeployment.

This briefing is about the two structural shifts that determine which media companies win their audience, and how a management team acts on them before the next senior departure makes the urgency visible.

The coordination gap is now the existential gap.

A media company's functions each optimize locally. Editorial maximizes audience. Ad sales maximizes yield. Streaming maximizes engagement. Communications manages the brand. Corporate manages the P&L. Nobody owns the audience relationship across touchpoints. The content team greenlights a new series. How long before ad sales adjusts what they pitch to advertisers? How long before streaming optimizes recommendations? Weeks. Sometimes a full quarter.

This coordination problem is not new. What is new is that AI makes it both more visible and more solvable. Cross-functional audience intelligence is now possible at a speed and depth that was technically impossible two years ago. The company that builds it creates a compounding advantage: editorial decisions informed by streaming data, ad sales positioned around editorial momentum, audience strategy that connects every function in real time rather than through quarterly reviews.

The coordination gap between editorial, ad sales, and streaming is where audience growth dies slowly. AI makes this problem both more visible and more solvable.

At the same time, the editorial knowledge that drives competitive advantage sits inside senior people. The editor-in-chief who knows what story to commission, the commercial director who reads the advertiser market, the programming director whose instinct about audience taste is the product. That knowledge exists nowhere a system can learn from. When these people leave, audience relationships follow. Subscriber engagement declines in the coverage area of a departed senior journalist. The media company that encodes institutional knowledge before the next departure protects itself structurally. The one that treats departures as an HR problem loses its competitive position one person at a time.

THREE QUESTIONS

Revenue. Profit. Valuation.

Under the old model these three questions had three different answers. AI ties them together. Build the audience intelligence and you move all three at the same time.

01 · REVENUE

Where does audience growth come from when advertising declines?

Advertising fell 60%+ over a decade. Digital growth flows to platforms you do not own. Subscription growth stalls when editorial cannot differentiate from AI-generated alternatives. Revenue depends on whether the audience relationship is deep enough to command a premium.

02 · PROFIT

What happens when senior people spend time on authority, not production?

Senior editorial and commercial people spend 40 to 50 percent of their time on production, preparation, and administration. AI eliminates that overhead. The profit question is whether leadership redeploys that capacity toward audience relationship work or cuts it.

03 · VALUATION

Does your editorial position survive the next senior departure?

Foundation and family owners value editorial mission alongside financial return. Institutional audience intelligence that survives leadership transitions is durable. Editorial authority in three senior heads is fragile. Same property, two different valuations.

Two columns. Every function in the company sorts itself between them.

The pattern is consistent across every function in a media company. Draft production, research synthesis, campaign reporting, and compliance documentation are compressing toward commodity. The work that appreciates is the work that depends on editorial judgment, audience trust, source relationships, and the cross-functional instinct that no AI can replicate. The further a function sits from the audience relationship, the more pressure it is under.

DEPRECIATING

Draft production, research synthesis, SEO optimization

Pitch preparation, rate card assembly, campaign reporting

Content recommendation tuning, A/B testing

Press releases, stakeholder mapping, social monitoring

Board pack assembly, budget tracking, compliance docs

APPRECIATING

Editorial judgment, source relationships, investigative instinct

Advertiser relationships, creative deal structuring

Programming instinct, franchise development, community

Political judgment, spokesperson credibility, crisis decisions

Capital allocation judgment, cross-functional prioritization

Whichever column the management team trains the organization into over the next three years is the company it becomes. The decision is not whether AI affects media production. It is which side of the line the leadership deliberately moves the organization toward.

Two paths. Same technology. Opposite outcomes.

The same AI technology, deployed into the same media company, produces opposite outcomes depending on what the leadership team chooses to defend.

THE DEFAULT PATH

Automate production

Use AI to cut content costs. Fewer people, more output. Visible savings.

Optimize silos faster

Each function gets its own AI tools. Editorial, ad sales, streaming each get faster independently.

Let editorial knowledge stay personal

Senior people carry the institutional memory. Every departure is a capability hit.

Defend advertising revenue

Chase platform ad spend. Compete for a shrinking share of a structurally declining market.

THE REPOSITIONING PATH

Redeploy for authority

Use AI to free senior people from overhead. More time on audience relationship and editorial work AI cannot do.

Build audience intelligence

Connect editorial, ad sales, and streaming through shared audience data. Coordinate in real time, not quarterly.

Encode editorial judgment

Capture the reasoning, the instinct, the pattern recognition. Make it organizational before the next departure.

Build subscription depth

Invest in first-party audience data, intelligence products, and community revenue that compounds with editorial quality.

Same technology. Opposite outcomes. The difference is the strategic choice the leadership team makes, not the AI tools they buy.

The growth levers that compound when used together

Repositioning is not a single decision. It is four levers, each available to the company right now, that compound when pulled together. Used in isolation, any one produces a modest gain. Used together, they rebuild the competitive position on foundations that get stronger over time.

1

Build cross-functional audience intelligence

Connect editorial decisions to ad sales positioning to streaming recommendations in real time. Stop coordinating through quarterly reviews. When editorial greenlights content, ad sales and streaming should know within hours, not weeks. The audience relationship becomes organizational, not departmental.

2

Encode editorial judgment before the next departure

Not content archives. The reasoning. Why this story was commissioned, what audience signal triggered it, what the editor saw that the data did not show. The editorial instinct, the commercial pattern recognition, the audience intuition of senior people becomes organizational capability rather than personal attribute. They become more valuable, not less, because their judgment now scales.

3

Free senior people for authority-building

Senior editorial and commercial people spend 40 to 50 percent of their time on production and preparation. AI eliminates that overhead. Every hour freed is an hour they can spend on the work AI cannot replicate: source relationships, investigative instinct, creative deal structuring, audience trust. Scale and quality stop being a trade-off.

4

Migrate the revenue model from advertising to audience depth

First-party audience data, intelligence products, community-based revenue. These revenue streams compound with editorial quality and audience trust. Advertising revenue shrinks as platforms capture the spend. Subscription and community revenue grows as the audience relationship deepens. The revenue model follows the competitive position.

Business first. Technology second.

GRAIL is an AI-native management consultancy. We help European mid-market leadership teams figure out the one or two things that fundamentally change about their business as AI enters their industry, and then build the capability to act on it before competitors do. For media companies specifically, we are not a media technology vendor and we are not a strategy consultancy delivering slide decks. We sit in the gap between the two: the cross-functional coordination problem that determines whether your AI investments compound or plateau, diagnosed from the leadership layer where the consequential decisions actually happen.

The market offers two things: vendor lock-in dressed as transformation, and consulting reports dressed as strategy. GRAIL delivers a third option: working AI capability that you own.

WHAT YOU GET

Senior advisory direct to the CEO and GMT

Working AI capability you own from day one

Custom agents built around your business logic

Outcomes in weeks, not quarters

No lock-in at any phase of the engagement

WHY IT MATTERS

Founded by operators, not technologists

Business-first strategy, technology second

Context architecture, change management, workflow design

Results before you commit to scale

Each next step earned, never assumed

Three sessions with your management team. No IT involvement. Working tools from week one.

GRAIL starts with the management team because organizational transformation cannot outrun the leadership team's personal understanding of what is possible. Three workshops. Each delivers standalone value. Each earns the right to the next.

WORKSHOP 01

How to think

The strategic foundation. Where AI creates real value in media and communications and where it is noise. The coordination gap as strategic frame. The "strong core, untouched leadership" diagnostic applied to your organization. Security and governance within your ownership structure. Your leadership team leaves with a shared frame and the first working agent built live in the room.

WORKSHOP 02

Your AI team

A half-day activation. Each member of the management team receives a personal suite of five to ten custom agents. Editorial Intelligence Agent. Commercial Bridge Agent. Audience Strategy Agent. Board Reporting Agent. Working tools from week one, not slides about tools.

WORKSHOP 03

Competitive edge

Refinement from real usage. Agents upgraded based on how the team actually used them. The cross-functional coordination architecture. The audience intelligence roadmap. The recommendation for what comes next, earned by what just shipped.

Three weeks. No IT involvement. No board approval needed to start. The sharpest strategic conversation your leadership team will have this year, backed by working tools they are already using.

What to ask in your next leadership meeting

The questions where the room cannot agree on an answer are the ones worth a longer conversation. Ask these honestly. The point is not the polished response. The point is whether the answer would survive a senior editor leaving for a competitor next quarter.

When your editorial team decides what to commission next season, how much of your streaming data, ad sales intelligence, and social audience signals are actually in that room?

If your most senior editor left tomorrow, how long before subscriber engagement in their coverage area recovers, and what system exists to prevent that loss?

What percentage of your senior editorial and commercial people's time is spent on production and preparation versus the authority-building work that actually differentiates you?

If advertising revenue drops another 20 percent over the next three years, which revenue streams are growing fast enough to bridge the gap, and are they structurally durable?

Does the leadership team agree on what "AI in media" actually means for this company, or are five functions each pursuing their own interpretation without shared strategic direction?

If any of these questions land somewhere uncomfortable, that is the conversation worth having.

IN THIS SERIES

There's a version of this briefing for every seat at the table.

GRAIL has produced industry briefings calibrated to the specific reality of each C-suite role.

CEO

▶ YOU ARE READING

Revenue. Margin. Valuation.

Three numbers your board reads. AI is rewriting all three in your industry.

CFO

Capital. Forecast. Story.

What you allocate this year is the story your board reads next year.

COO

Cheaper. Better. Faster.

The triple threat that used to be a tradeoff is now table stakes.

CHRO

Capacity. Capability. Promise.

The biggest talent transition of a career. Compete on capacity, not headcount.

CPTO

Moat. Speed. Allocation.

The platform moat that survives 2028 is being chosen this year.

CCO

Margin. Pace. Position.

The whole GTM playbook is being rewritten in real time, across every commercial team at once.

Visit grail.works for the full series.

GRAIL

An AI-native management consultancy helping European mid-market leadership teams figure out what fundamentally changes about their business as AI enters their industry.

www.grail.works