



## Partnership

Project Kookaburra is an independent research program designed and run by Megan Brownlow and Simon Crerar, with participation from Mediality (formerly AAP Studio), in partnership with the Google News Initiative. Project Kookaburra worked with five independent regional publishers across Australia to try five new business models over a six-month period, from April to September 2020. The results were shared with publishers and journalists in a series of free ‘lunch and learn’ webinars in November 2020, hosted by the [Walkley Foundation](#), Australia’s leading organisation for celebrating and supporting Australian journalism. Megan Brownlow is a strategy consultant and non-executive director, who, as a partner with PwC Australia, ran the national technology, media and telecommunications practice. Simon Crerar is a strategy consultant and journalism start-up founder who was the founding editor and general manager of BuzzFeed Australia.

## Overview

The *Narrandera Argus* has served the small New South Wales town of Narrandera for 140 years. Narrandera is located in Riverina, one of the country’s most productive farming regions. Proprietor and managing editor Liz Lawrence—who began her 54 year career at the *Argus* with a journalism correspondence course—has worked to modernize the newspaper, building digital capability to open up new audiences and diversify revenue streams. The *Argus* maintains a small newsroom with an editor and managing editor, a part-time reporter, a production lead, an advertising sales person, and an office administrator.

### AUTHORS:

- **Megan Brownlow**, Project Kookaburra
- **Simon Crerar**, Project Kookaburra

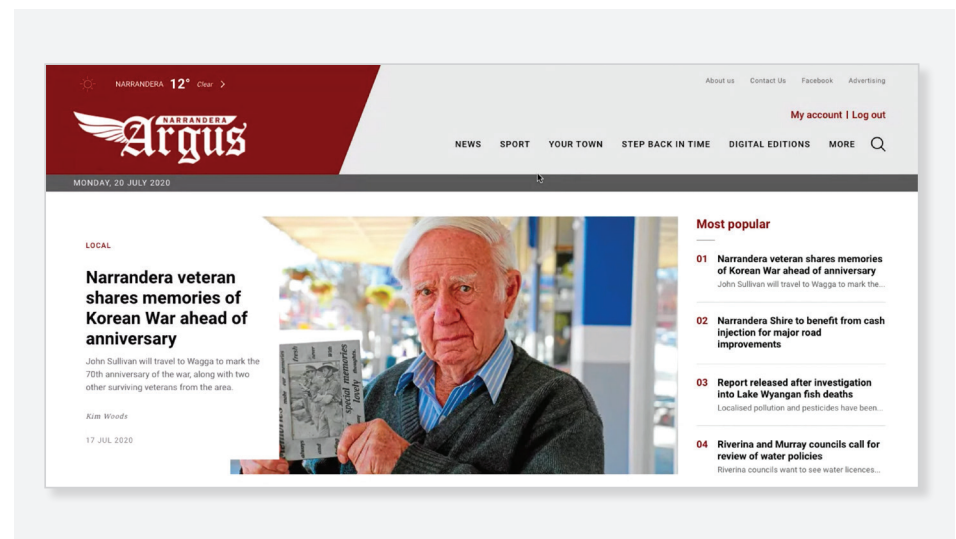
## Extending your geographic footprint with a digital rebrand

*How the Narrandera Argus used digital to expand its geographic footprint.*

### The Project

#### Extend geographic footprint with a digital rebrand

The *Argus* aimed to broaden its reach and relevance with a redesigned website and a content and marketing plan aimed at winning new audiences in the neighbouring towns of Lockhart, Coleambally and Coolamon. Closures and mergers had left these communities with a shortage of local news service, presenting an opportunity for the *Argus*.



### Map competitive landscape and develop a strategy to serve readers and advertisers

The *Argus* team identified these targets after completing a detailed analysis of surrounding markets, mapping local competitors, and exploring audience and revenue opportunities. This exercise helped them determine which of six possible nearby locations they should expand to, and map in detail information needs they could address.

### Create a culture of ongoing data analysis to monitor content performance

Before going live, they developed a content plan to serve these new communities, based on the audience needs they had mapped. They redesigned their website and logo, and then ran a cross-platform marketing campaign featuring in-paper, poster, postcard, website and social media collateral.

## The Results

The transition to a new website dramatically increased the paper's reach and relevance. In just a few short months, the *Argus* doubled the number of site visitors and boosted page impressions by more than 600%.

The *Argus* expanded its horizons by identifying a market opportunity and developing a strategy to take advantage of it. An analytical approach led the team to rethink their existing print-focused strategy. Once they were willing to move beyond the constraints of a weekly 16-page print paper, the team embraced the opportunities a digital focus made available to them.

# 2x

Unique monthly visitors thanks to extended coverage

# 6.7x

Increase in monthly page impressions due to greater volume of content, and improved SEO

# 8%

Growth in Facebook followers

To make the most of their newly expanded audience's revenue potential, the *Argus* team developed a media kit that included a pricing leaderboard, display and sponsored content ad options, plus key website statistics.

The *Argus* hit its growth goals, broadening its reach and growing audience, by recognizing the potential of a digital strategy. The success of this experiment shows how a willingness to change can help regional publishers flip the narrative of an industry in decline — and develop a compelling audience story for advertisers.



Project Kookaburra consultants Megan Brownlow, Liam Runnells, Luke Donnelley and Simon Crerar with staff from the Narrandera Argus. Photo: Kim Woods.

## Argus moves to new era

THE *Narrandera Argus* has some exciting news to share with its readers – it will soon have a new website and payroll to welcome in a new digital era at this local independent newspaper.

For some months now, staff have been working with AAP Cognitives on the development of a new website and payroll, and undertaking training as part of a Google project initiative.

The *Argus* was selected as one of five publishers in Australia to take part in Project Kookaburra pilot program sponsored by Google.

"Together we are all working on a strategy to not only keep the *Argus* business afloat and

ensure its future but to make it strong and ready for the new digital world after the COVID-19 crisis is over," managing editor Liz Lawrence said.

"While we will still continue in print, we see it is imperative we enter the digital world and offer readers more options," she said.

After 140 years proudly serving the people of Narrandera, the *Argus* intends to extend its footprint to neighbouring towns with a digital rebrand. It aims to broaden the paper's reach and relevance in the hopes of winning new online audiences and opening up new digital revenue streams.

Part of this new strategy is

digital training for the *Argus* team and the creation of new content, marketing and sales plans.

Together with Liz, *Argus* journalist Kim Woods and graphic designer Fran Macdonald have been working with former *Times of London* journalist and BuzzFeed general manager Simon Crerar to make this complete plan come to life by September 30, 2020.

The new website and payroll is expected to go live next month.

The *Argus* office will reopen on July 2 and staffed each Thursday, Friday and Monday, with editorial and advertising copy deadlines being Friday.

“The website has enhanced our news content and given us a much wider reach and appeal, especially with younger subscribers. It has widened our horizons and shown us ways of enhancing our online presence that I would have never thought possible.”

LIZ LAWRENCE, MANAGING EDITOR, NARRANDERA ARGUS

Learn more at [www.narranderaargus.com.au](http://www.narranderaargus.com.au)

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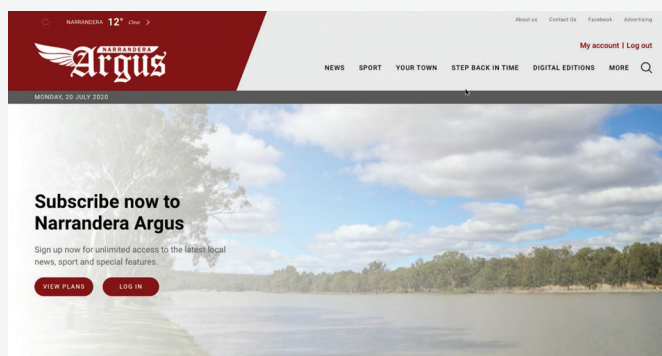
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