Annual Report 2016

The 2016 Innovation and Social Impact Assessment
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Our mission at Sourcefabric is to make professional-grade technology available to all who believe that quality independent journalism has a fundamental role to play in any healthy society.

To better communicate how we are delivering on that promise, we have turned our annual report into an innovation and social impact assessment.

This year’s report details the ways in which we provided news organisations and journalists a technology advantage in 2016. From the public beta release of Superdesk, our digital newsroom system, the use of Live Blog as the foundation for new revenue streams and business models, to improved broadcasting and publishing tools that support independent creators, our focus is on open-source innovation that helps more members of the news community grow and prosper in the digital age.

We also aim to have a wider social impact, through projects that empower reporters, artists and activists with the tools and training needed to tell their stories under challenging conditions. We continue developing technologies that benefit journalists and all those who serve as the public’s eyes and ears at a time when the role of news organisations in society is being tested as never before.

Sava Tatić
Co-founder and Managing Director
Superdesk: A platform for newsroom innovation

In production at AAP and NTB: meeting the future-oriented needs of newsrooms to succeed in the media industry

Rewiring the news business

Superdesk is not just a tool for journalists. It is created alongside journalists in newsrooms around the world. The result of intensive development work with our media partners, Superdesk is designed to make everyone’s job in a news organisation easier and more creative, while amplifying the reach and power of their message.

April

Norwegian national news agency NTB announces Superdesk will become its new digital newsroom system.

Helen Vogt, NTB’s head of innovations, said, “We looked at a lot of other products, but Superdesk won hands down,” she said. The system is designed for extensibility, to be updated and modified to match or anticipate those emerging media trends that client organisations might adopt, adapt and monetise. Vogt said of Superdesk: “Even more than what it currently offered, we saw the potential.”

Because the code base is open source, each Superdesk update by any organisation’s development unit creates more features and capabilities for other members of the development community.

“We looked at a lot of other products, but Superdesk won hands down.”

NTB
2016 was a big year for our flagship product.

May
Superdesk has its first public release.

While Superdesk was already complete in terms of features, making the release official was a way of announcing our plans for what it can accomplish in the media industry as a whole. “Superdesk is more than an end-to-end news creation, production, curation, distribution and publishing platform,” said Sava Tatić, Sourcefabric’s managing director. “We at Sourcefabric also see it as the cornerstone of the new common open source code for quality, professional journalism.”

September
The first production implementation of Superdesk goes live at the Australian Associated Press (AAP).

Superdesk replaced two of AAP’s legacy systems, which distributed content both internally and externally to its wire service customers, as well as to digital clients.

AAP publishes much of its content from its central newsroom in Sydney, with 600 employees spread out all over the world. Those editorial staffers are using Superdesk to keep up with a 24-hour news cycle, editing nearly 16,000 stories a week and reaching more than 11 million readers. The AAP also chose Superdesk to meet its future needs. Thanks to its flexibility, the system can evolve in tandem with AAP’s business roadmap for the years ahead.
News organisations can develop new offerings with the right newsroom software system. In our view, two elements are especially important as building blocks for innovation: the first is structured data, and the second is APIs.

With a traditional newsroom CMS, there is no easy way to take data out of an internal database system or even identify what it contains in a systematic way. Finding past stories and images can be difficult at many newsrooms even if they have an archive.

The reason? Unstructured data. The information in most newsroom systems is like a filing cabinet without folders or labels: there’s no easy way to know what’s inside.

Superdesk is different, because it is built on a foundation of structured data. Every story created in Superdesk has metadata that defines it in different ways for individual newsrooms. This makes it easier to find content because you can use metadata as search filters. For example, you could request news articles that are tagged Summer Olympics, an urgency level of 3 (which your newsroom might define as a gold medal win), along with a specific date range.

Another advantage of structured data is the ability to reuse content and combine it in different ways. For example, a photo of someone holding their gold medal is stored as an individual item.

That means that it might illustrate one article about the Olympic finals, but could then could be reused in a separate story about the athlete or as part of an image gallery of Olympic highlights.

Another way we built innovation readiness into Superdesk was by taking an API-first approach to open source media management. Having an API that outputs content makes it easy for a newsroom to create new products and services. APIs are especially important for news organisations looking to get more out of their existing content and develop new revenue streams. If a news organisation wanted to develop a mobile app for a specific type of coverage, all they would have to do is provide the Superdesk API and authentication information to the app developers so that the developers could take the relevant content out of the archive. This not only helps that news organisation reach new audiences on mobile, but also opens up new ways of attracting advertisers.

The possibilities offered by APIs are almost unlimited. There are a lot of great tools out there for presenting content and visualising data. By connecting them to the Superdesk digital newsroom system via an API, our customers can use those tools to innovate and bring their ideas to life.
Elevforlaget is an online platform based on Booktype created for schoolchildren in Norway to publish their own books. Launched in fall 2016, Elevforlaget lets kids collaborate on writing, editing and publishing books in print and as e-books.

NGOs like Amnesty International typically produce a large number of publications and reports every year. But with dispersed teams of editors and translators, it can be difficult for these organisations to manage the production process. Booktype’s single-source publishing paradigm resolves these issues for both printed and digital documents like Amnesty’s annual report, thanks to:

• Structured workflows that keep track of individual assignments and different versions of documents so there’s no confusion during the editorial process.

• Flexible publishing options that push content to a variety of output formats, from web and print to e-readers, all in one click.

We compiled the top features that Booktype users rave about:

• single-source publishing
• quick revisions
• multiple design layout options
• browser-based
• multiple output options, from screen PDF to XHTML

Airtime makes internet radio fun and friendly enough for anyone to use. In 2016, we added new features to boost Airtime Pro’s social and creative possibilities.

With Twitter integration, Twitter followers can stay updated on a station’s broadcasts in real time. Using template tags, listener notifications can be customised. Meanwhile, automatic track tweets let listeners know what’s playing and gives them an idea of what type of content the current show features. DJs also have the ability to manually tweet from the Airtime Pro dashboard.

The new Radio Page unveiled at the end of the year makes programming more social, shareable and fun to use. For example, the Share Track button lets listeners share Now Playing tracks via Twitter, Facebook, Google +, or their email accounts.

The Embed Button takes sharing one step further. Listeners can embed a station’s player widget on their own, wherever they want.

The new Radio Page comes with responsive design for a variety of devices, as well as customisable background images and new colour schemes.
Live Blog: A reporting tool that gives SMEs a competitive advantage

The Live Coverage Ecosystem project is building the foundation of new media business models

Last year, Google’s Digital News Initiative Innovation Fund awarded a grant to our Live Coverage Ecosystem (LCE) project. Why an ecosystem? Because we want to create an environment where news organisations as varied as national news agencies and local newspapers can exchange and subscribe to one another’s breaking news coverage. This means that the hard work of covering breaking news can be better rewarded, with more opportunities to monetise content. It’s how syndication should work in the digital age.

The basis of the ecosystem is Live Blog, which is currently being used by five European news agencies. We partnered with Deutsche Presse Agentur (dpa) in Germany and Agencia EFE in Spain to start work on the project.

As Germany’s biggest press agency, dpa has relationships with nearly all other German media outlets. It was important for dpa to be able to syndicate content across its entire customer network, but because most of those customers use proprietary content management systems, dpa was unable to send content from its own Live Blog system to theirs.

In the space of a few months, dpa-newslab, the innovation arm of dpa, created an open source solution, a “translator” component called Livebridge. It allows dpa’s Live Blog and any other content management system, such as ScribbleLive, or the messaging app Slack, to talk to each other.

Livebridge is already being used in dpa’s newsroom. Going forward, Live Blog syndication will have the capacity to be customised, allowing subscribers to decide how to integrate each publisher’s content with their own. They can embed the publisher’s Live Blog completely into their own website, or they can show the publisher’s posts as articles in their own format. When content does not always have to flow in one direction, news organisations of different scales and orientations can reach wider audiences and monetise their coverage along the way. So, publishers and subscribers can swap roles back and forth, opening up further possibilities for cross-syndication.

Moving independent media forward

Launched in February, the purpose of the FWD:Media initiative was to provide free live blogging tools and services to NGOs and independent media outlets. When the award was announced in May, the winners included Contexto, an online newspaper in Spain, and Radio Bullets, a podcast from Italy. Though dispersed geographically and by focus, the winners saw Live Blog not only as a key tool for increasing engagement with their audience but also, as one put it, “an opportunity to shape the future of social storytelling.”
Live Blog case study:  
**An early Live Blog adopter shapes its latest features**

As one of Germany’s largest news organisations, Zeit Online gets over 625,000 unique visitors a day with over 5 million page views. Sourcefabric began working with Zeit Online back in 2014 with one of the earliest versions of Live Blog. Feedback from Zeit Online’s editorial staff has been key to developing new features that have improved the platform as a whole, such as:

**Custom themes:** With a focus on flexibility, these layouts let editors choose which updates to highlight in a Live Blog timeline. An improved sharing function also makes it easier for readers to post about a live blog in their social networks or email.

**Scorecards:** Live bloggers can do more with data when they have an instant way of showing points scored during a sports match or the vote tally in an election.

**Activity indicator:** In the Live Blog dashboard, active blogs are highlighted with a “live” banner while inactive blogs are marked “closed.”
Training journalists

For the past several years, we have been supporting Microwav.fm, a youth radio project in the South Caucasus aimed at capacity building in the region’s emerging democracies. The radio network is running on Airtime Pro. A number of new stations were added to the network in 2016, and several groups of young journalists were trained in PR and social media strategy as well as the basics of radio programming.

Early in the year, we developed mobile applications for online stations including Activist Radio (Armenia) and Helping Hand Radio (Georgia). They are available as free downloads from both Google Play and the App Store.

At the end of October, over 50 participants from the microwav.fm project gathered in Minsk for a Radio Summit. They exchanged knowledge and experience among themselves while also receiving training on Airtime’s features and functions from Sourcefabric representatives.

A number of new stations were added to the network in 2016

Providing technology tools and infrastructure

Insajder.net, a news outlet aimed at exposing corruption in the Balkans, was launched as a video portal based on our open-source CMS, Newscoop. The site we created is fully responsive, with the focus placed on videos and images. Central to the design was the presentation of serial investigations within timelines, both on the homepage and on the page of each serial as well. All the content related to one serial, such as videos, articles, snippets, or even PDF documents, is bundled in one spot.
Creating new forums for dialogue and exchange

From Potsdam

The M100 Colloquium is an international forum that brings together Europe’s top editors, commentators and media owners with public figures to assess the role of the media in international affairs, and to promote democracy and freedom of expression. In 2016, the event was covered live for the first time, courtesy of Live Blog. The reporters liveblogging from Potsdam were the 25 participants of the M100 Young European Journalists workshop. Parts of the event were also live streamed on Facebook. The event was extended in this way for the first time to a wider audience, all over Europe and the world.

To Prague

At the News Impact Summit that took place in Prague in October, we partnered with the European Journalism Centre to convene a forum to discuss the skills needed to stay ahead in a changing news landscape. Powered by the Google News Lab, these summits focus on how recent developments in technology, tools and methods can change ways of working in the newsroom, methods of storytelling and engagement with audiences. We covered the News Impact Summit with Live Blog, and also held a hands-on session about live coverage in the newsroom.
Who we are and what we care about

29 languages
23 nationalities
14 countries
Freedom of expression as a company value

We provide open source tools for independent media, thus creating an intersection between global civil rights and technology. These are two things I care deeply about. It’s what I talked about in my interview, and whenever we interview new candidates, we ask why they’re interested in Sourcefabric. When we hire people who are invested not just in their job, but in the work we do as a company, we’re building a team. Everyone here is invested in our success as a company and not just on an individual level.

At the same time, individuality is celebrated, even down to people’s hobbies. During our annual meeting outside of Prague, we had a session where people were given five minutes to talk about things they thought were neat. One of our founders talked about Google Cardboard, someone else showed off a car diagnostic tool they had invented, and later in the night our head of communications invited us to watch a documentary she had made.

Giving people an environment where they’re free to express themselves helps your staff get to know each other better. For me this has brought me close to a lot of the people I work with, and I’m lucky enough to say I have friends all over the world, primarily from the opportunity to work at Sourcefabric.

Your culture as an organisation says a great deal about what you value. At Sourcefabric, we’re committed to providing tools for individuals to express themselves freely. You can see that mirrored in our corporate culture and the unique environment it has created.

Josh McLain
Head of Support & Documentation

“Everyone here is invested in our success as a company and not just on an individual level.”
Open source is our DNA

The simple fact that we have multiple business models wrapped around various open source products is something we take for granted, and it’s usually only in conversations with others that I realise what a mammoth task it is to combine all that under one roof. Since 2012, we have added four more products to our portfolio, we successfully launched Airtime Pro and developed Superdesk together with the Australian Associated Press, we worked with Amnesty International (Booktype) and the MTV Music awards were recently covered with our very own Live Blog. Aside from our core values, change is a constant force at Sourcefabric and perhaps that is why we are still here and why people from all over the world, from NGOs to large corporate companies, keep contacting us and want to partner with us.

Transformation is part of our DNA. We have successfully survived many transitions over the years without sacrificing our core. To this day all of our tools are open source and we are a non-profit organisation with a team of 70 excellent individuals. The complexities have grown and the stakes are now higher than ever before. But our own standards and expectations have grown simultaneously and things that seemed out of reach just 24 months ago have become daily business. I have no reason to doubt that we will keep tackling the challenges that lie ahead because of who we are and who we are working with. Our partners and customers have become valued stakeholders over the years who give us input when we need it, who help us stay on track and who keep pushing us, sometimes outside of our comfort zones. And we are grateful for that.

Fabienne Riener
Chief Operating Officer
Innovation and social impact by the numbers

31
Number of independent media outlets we support

16
Number of civil society organisations we partner with

2
Awarded 2 consecutive Google Digital News Initiative Innovation Fund grants

Our contribution to the open source community:

217 contributors

39 repositories on GitHub

51,000 commits related to the largest projects