

The Times and its sister title, *The Sunday Times*, are currently the biggest selling quality print newspapers in the UK. In 2018 *The Times*, Britain's oldest national daily newspaper, was named Britain's most trusted national newspaper by the Reuters Institute for Journalism at Oxford University.

Twipe is a Belgian technology company based in Leuven that offers state-of-the-art digital publishing solutions and platforms used by leading newspapers across Europe. They have been recognized as an innovation and technology leader in the area of digital edition based publishing.

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AI-driven engagement at The Times and The Sunday Times

Read how *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* teamed up with Twipe Digital Publishing and the Google DNI to build a bespoke artificial intelligence used to individualise their approach to customer marketing—making sure each of their customers get the content they want, when they want it, and in the format they prefer.

As an editorial business that started in 1785, *The Times* (and its sister title *The Sunday Times*) has experienced shifts in consumer behaviour and expectations following the creation of the internet first-hand.

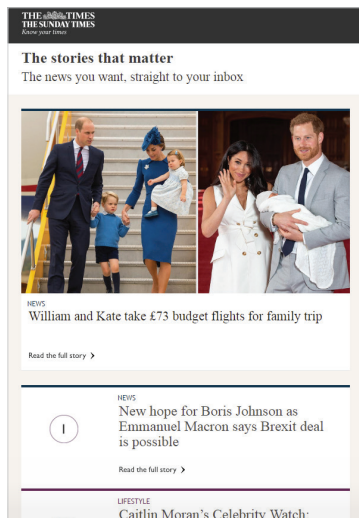
The digitisation of editorial content created significant changes in consumer behavior, and as a result, many firms in these markets were tasked with changing their approaches to customer management, marketing, and in some cases, even business models.

The Times and *The Sunday Times* (TNL) launched a hard paywall in 2010, immediately becoming a direct-to-consumer business. But one of the business's new and most enduring challenges—customer retention and experience—needed to be addressed. Like most digital businesses in the 21st century, *The Times* needed to create meaningful relationships at scale and at cost with their customers. Most consumers have relationships with brands, but they aren't very meaningful. How could *The Times* meet this challenge with gusto?

It was in this challenge that JAMES was borne. Using partial funding from the Google Digital News Innovation Fund, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* worked with Twipe Digital Publishing, to launch JAMES: a CRM decisioning Artificial Intelligence driven by Machine Learning. JAMES, which stands for "Journey Automated Messaging for higher Engagement through Self-Learning", is the means by which *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* has been able to take decisive steps towards "marketing nirvana": getting to know each of our readers and getting them the right content, in the right format, at the right time.



News UK's visualization of JAMES



One of the 'daily briefing' templates.

The Project:

“JAMES, your digital butler” is an AI technology developed collaboratively by **The Times, The Sunday Times** and **Twipe** with partial financial support from the Google Digital News Initiative.

During a 1-year project, JAMES served over 100,000 subscribers of The Times with individualised newsletters compiled from the content of a daily edition. Several optimisation algorithms were developed and tested using Google BigQuery: time optimisation, content recommendation and format optimisation, which led to the creation of bandit-driven next best action communications. JAMES continues to be used and developed at The Times and will be made available to the wider industry through the Twipe Digital Publishing SaaS platform.

The Results:

As a result of JAMES, we were able to meet the goals of more individualised distribution, change internal culture, and create business impact with customer engagement and retention.

PRODUCT/RETENTION:

49% We saw a 49% reduction in churn for subscribers as part of the JAMES tests. This showed that individualisation provides a much higher return on investment when compared to segmentation—proving that a deep relevance in terms of time, content, and format really makes a difference to both the customer and bottom line—and demands lower operational expenditure, i.e. after a larger initial investment, ongoing costs to run individualised CRM are lower.

>100 & 1B Hundreds of stories were delivered each day and 1 billion data points enabled trillions of permutations of the type of content JAMES promoted. Our individualised approach—supported by Google Cloud, made harnessing the power of these data points more manageable and complemented our edition-based publishing model. Curated content and individualised distribution requires scale, so it won't work for all publishers.

DISTRIBUTION:

70% We learned that AI can effectively distribute content, after Google Analytics told us that 70% of subscribers in the test interacted with JAMES.

49% > 14% When comparing standard content recommendation to JAMES technology, churn was reduced much more with JAMES – 49% decrease with the latter versus 14% decrease with the former.

15% We saw the biggest impact for low/medium subscribers, a group that's normally seen as the most difficult to retain engagement, whilst 15% of highly engaged subscribers opted-out. This demonstrated that loyal readers already have secure habits, and desire less contact.

CULTURE:

90 DAYS TO 10 We saw a reduction in time to market from 90 days to 10 with dedicated teams and resources. This showed that the “test, learn, iterate” model works within a large matrix-style organisation. It led to more effective communication and quicker decision making, which pays off.



Aspiring to a genocracy, encouraging responsibility and providing a clear north star to align to helps to improve motivation; it also helped bring our data scientist-heroes much closer to the commercial side of the business.

Watch how JAMES works [here!](#) | Learn more in the [JAMES Whitepaper](#).