

Case study: Santa Cruz Local

This two-year-old organization on the California coast sought to raise its profile in the community by attracting new readers and newsletter subscribers.

Its experiments produced growth in both areas:

- **Newsletter subscriptions:** The team goal was to double the number of its most engaged subscribers (four and five star users on MailChimp), from a starting point of 3,420. By the end of the program, that number had grown to 4,056.
- **Search visitors:** The participants aimed to increase the number of new local readers who found the site on search every month by 25%, from 5,000 to 6,250. The site averaged 6,585 new readers in July and August. The team found that evergreen resource pages drive search traffic.

But the Santa Cruz Local team made an interesting pivot. As they sought to explore how their small team could achieve such big goals, they realized they needed a way to quantify — and protect — the mental health and workload of their staff.

So in addition to their external growth goals, Santa Cruz Local developed a set of metrics and workflow to better track staff wellness and resilience and to prevent burnout. These “internal metrics” allowed Santa Cruz Local to diagnose the blocks to their team’s operational resilience and to build processes to better serve their team.

Kara Meyberg Guzman, CEO and co-founder of Santa Cruz Local, said strategic planning and team building blossomed internally alongside growth in readership.

“We are more operationally resilient. We know how to work as a team toward a shared goal. We know how to build staff capacity to allow room for experiments. We know how to share workloads and better identify (and) avoid staff burnout,” Meyburg Guzman said. **“We also now have a bit of a reserve to allow more experiments. We are better able to plan our next steps rather than just focusing on surviving the quarter.”**

“The most impactful stuff I felt like I did with the Santa Cruz team was working to defeat burnout,” said Lab Coach Brian Boyer. “They were already process nerds, and so they quickly embraced new teamwork practices like responsibility matrices, kanban boards, structured meetings and retrospectives.”

What’s next? The organization will seek to further deepen relationships with its current audience by setting goals and tracking recurring revenue from membership and highly engaged readers. It will also refine its publishing process to reflect new learning about search engine optimization.