

The Institute for Nonprofit News Case Study

Client Profile

The Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) is a network of more than 475 independent, nonprofit newsrooms across the United States. Founded in 2009, INN strengthens and supports these organizations in their mission to provide investigative and public service journalism. The organization serves as a hub for nonprofit news innovation, offering resources, training, and tools to help member organizations develop sustainable models for independent news. A key component of INN's work involves supporting the Rural News Network (RNN), which consists of nearly 90 newsrooms focused on serving rural communities often lacking robust local news coverage.

Challenge

INN faced several critical challenges in supporting its network, particularly for rural and small nonprofit newsrooms:

- 1. News Desert Expansion:** Rural communities increasingly lacked access to reliable local news as traditional media outlets disappeared.
- 2. Resource Constraints:** Small newsrooms with annual revenue under \$250,000 couldn't afford cutting-edge technology needed to remain competitive.
- 3. Content Distribution:** Member organizations struggled to effectively reach audiences, particularly in rural areas with limited digital infrastructure.
- 4. Visibility Limitations:** Local election coverage from small newsrooms often lacked broader distribution and impact.
- 5. Audience Engagement:** Newsrooms needed innovative ways to connect with rural communities traditionally under-served by digital platforms.

As a network organization, INN needed to develop solutions that could be implemented across numerous independent newsrooms, each with unique needs and workflows, while ensuring these solutions remained affordable and accessible to even the smallest members.

Solution

INN partnered with Nota, a leader in assistive AI technology, and Microsoft to implement a comprehensive suite of tools and initiatives:

Text RURAL

A personalized SMS news service delivering localized weekly news roundups from RNN members directly to subscribers' phones, designed specifically for rural communities where text messaging remains a reliable communication channel.

On the Ground

An INN-produced newsletter and online portal showcasing local election coverage from member newsrooms, with stories packaged for easy republication by national and regional media outlets.

The Nota Grant

A program providing qualifying INN member newsrooms (with annual revenue under \$250,000) access to Nota's suite of AI tools at a 80% discount in order to remove financial barriers to technology adoption. The grant is provided via a partnership with Microsoft.

Nota's AI technology enabled INN to personalize content, efficiently distribute it, and scale operations, despite limited staff, through a white-label solution that enhanced local brands.

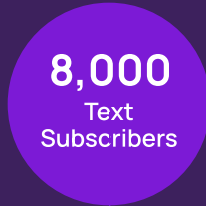
Summary

Through the strategic partnership with Nota and Microsoft, INN is addressing critical challenges facing rural and small nonprofit newsrooms. By combining INN's extensive network with Nota's AI technology, the collaboration provides innovative solutions that enhance content distribution, audience engagement, and operational efficiency while maintaining editorial independence.

The partnership represents a significant step forward in INN's mission to strengthen nonprofit news organizations and ensure communities across America maintain access to quality local journalism. As Josh Brandau, CEO of Nota, states: "Together, we're not just transforming the landscape of local journalism; we're ensuring it flourishes."

Outcomes

While the initiatives are still in their early implementation phases, the INN-Nota partnership is projected to deliver significant results:



1. Increased Engagement

- Projected 8,000 text subscribers receiving personalized local news by end of 2025
- Expanded reach through republication in national/regional outlets, especially for election coverage
- Enhanced content relevance via AI-powered localization



2. Increased Efficiency

- Automated content processes with standardized formatting for streamlined republication
- Reduced technical barriers with accessible tools for all members



3. Better Resource Allocation

- Technology costs reduced by 80% for smallest members
- More efficient staff time use, focusing on journalism rather than distribution



4. Network-wide Impact

- Strengthened rural news ecosystem with greater visibility for small newsrooms