

Volynska Gazeta: Building a blueprint for independent media in Ukraine

In a world where information flows freely and independent media serves as a cornerstone of democracy, Ukraine faces unique challenges. The need for unbiased reporting, free speech, and access to reliable information is vital in a nation striving for peace, inclusivity, and accountable institutions. Volynska Gazeta and the ViLNi program have embarked on a transformative journey to address these challenges and redefine the landscape of independent media in Ukraine.

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“Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.” - John Milton

Free speech is the staple of our modern democracies. It gives everyone the power to speak up, to tell their truth, to liberate themselves from those in power and to share with the world their point of view.

But today, freedom of speech is threatened by powerful people and institutions.

With more and more billionaire controlling the media, censorship, and totalitarian ideas and regimes gaining power all around the world, our fundamental right to speak up is now in danger.

But thanks to independent agents and newspaper, we can see a glimpse of hope in a world gradually covering itself with obscurantism. It's in this idea in mind that Volynska Gazeta, a Ukrainian independent media, positions itself as an agent of truth.

A Legacy of Truth: Volynska Gazeta

Founded in 2005 by Volodymyr Danyliuk, Volynska Gazeta began as a traditional regional newspaper, a source of local news and stories in the city of Lutsk, Ukraine. Volodymyr Danyliuk has always been a staunch advocate of truth, integrity, and community service. He has always believed in the power of the press to provide a voice to the people and to uphold the values of a free and informed society.

His dedication to these principles took a new turn when he joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine, risking his life for the country's freedom and security. His selfless service on the front lines inspired his daughter, Tetiana, to continue his mission on another front – the fight for freedom of information and free speech.

In a rapidly changing media landscape, traditional newspapers like Volynska Gazeta faced the challenge of adapting to digitalisation and evolving audience expectations. It became evident that to carry forward the legacy of Volynska Gazeta and promote free speech, a fresh vision was necessary. Thus, in 2022, the ViLNi project was born.

The ViLNi project, led by Tetiana, seeks to harness the power of digital media and innovative storytelling to continue the newspaper's tradition of providing reliable news and serving the community.

“I was motivated by my father’s dedication to Ukraine and its freedom. So, I decided to continue

his work with the Volynska Gazeta by promoting new vision and free speech”, said Tetiana.

Volynska Gazeta: A Vision for Independent Media

The ViLNi project, pronounced as "vill-nee", and translated as “Free”, represents a ground-breaking initiative to transform a traditional newspaper into a modern, independent media outlet committed to democracy, truth, free speech, the rule of law, and human rights. At its core, ViLNi seeks to create a blueprint for the new kind of independent media that Ukraine needs.

Volynska Gazeta's content strategy draws inspiration from the widely acclaimed "*Humans of New York*" style of storytelling. By sharing the stories of ordinary Ukrainians and highlighting their experiences, hopes, and aspirations, Volynska Gazeta aims to infuse humanity into the discourse surrounding the ongoing conflict. This approach transcends the mere reporting of statistics and offers a deeper, more empathetic understanding of the human impact of the war.

Additionally, Volynska Gazeta embraces principles of solutions journalism, focusing not only on problems but also on the innovative solutions that Ukrainians are pioneering.

To ensure the relevance and effectiveness of their reporting, Volynska Gazeta explores partnerships with AI data companies to uncover informational patterns and respond dynamically to the evolving needs of their audience.

A Multifaceted Business Model

Traditional revenue streams, such as subscriptions and ads, have been the backbone of media funding. Therefore, Volynska is developing a multi-layered business model that includes crowdsourcing, memberships, sponsorship agreements, native ads, and more.

This innovative approach diversifies income sources, reducing dependency on a single revenue stream and enhancing Volynska Gazeta's resilience to external pressures. By securing independent funding and expanding their digital presence, the newspaper is paving the way for the future of independent media in Ukraine.

Challenges and solutions

Volynska Gazeta's approach addresses several critical challenges faced by independent media in Ukraine:

- **Censorship and Under-Financing:** Many Ukrainian media outlets are either state-owned or controlled by wealthy individuals, limiting their independence. Volynska Gazeta's solution lies in establishing independent financial sources and implementing an innovative, multi-layered business model.
- **Gap in Reporting:** There is a significant gap in reporting about Ukraine within the country and internationally. Volynska Gazeta's "Humans of New York" style storytelling bridges this gap by sharing the stories of regular Ukrainians, not just political leaders.
- **Gloom and Doom Reporting:** Constant reporting of casualties and destruction can desensitize and discourage audiences. Volynska Gazeta's positive, solutions-oriented reporting offers a ray of hope and encourages optimism about Ukraine's future.
- **International Misconceptions:** To combat misconceptions about Ukraine, Volynska Gazeta publishes content in both English and

Ukrainian and involves more English-speaking individuals in reporting, including students. This is going to be a separate project which Volynska Gazeta will execute in collaboration with other Western outlets.

Partnerships for Progress

Volynska Gazeta's mission is bolstered by collaborations with organizations such as the *European Youth4Media Network*, The *National Union of Journalists of Ukraine*, *Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University*, and *Phineo Startups*.

These partnerships provide valuable support, resources, and expertise to further Volynska Gazeta's goals.

The ViLNi project represents a beacon of hope for independent media in Ukraine. By redefining content strategies, diversifying revenue sources, and nurturing the next generation of journalists, Volynska Gazeta is laying the foundation for a new era of journalism committed to democracy, truth, and free speech. With its ambitious goals and innovative approach, Volynska Gazeta is not just a blueprint; it is a driving force for positive change in Ukraine's media landscape.

Currently, Volynska Gazeta is also looking for content collaborations, technical and financial partners, and specialists in SEO, SMM. If you're interested, write to volgazeta@gmail.com for more details.