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# Strategies for optimizing headlines in real time

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## AGENDA

Today we'll be discussing:

- Which linguistic traits work and don't work in homepage headlines
- Why optimizing your headlines is important
- Where to test headlines
- Tips for getting the most out of your tests



# The data behind successful headlines



## DOES LANGUAGE MATTER?

# In headlines, certain words **really** matter

In an analysis of about 100,000 headline tests and more than 235,000 individual headlines, we examined linguistic traits of successful and unsuccessful headlines

### Help

- Demonstrative pronouns  
“these”, “this”
- Negative superlatives  
“worst”
- Interrogatives  
“what”, “when”
- Determinants  
“the”, “an”
- Numbers
- Adjectives
- Quotations
- Positive superlatives  
“best”

### No Effect

- Names
- Proper nouns
- Notably long headlines

### Hurt

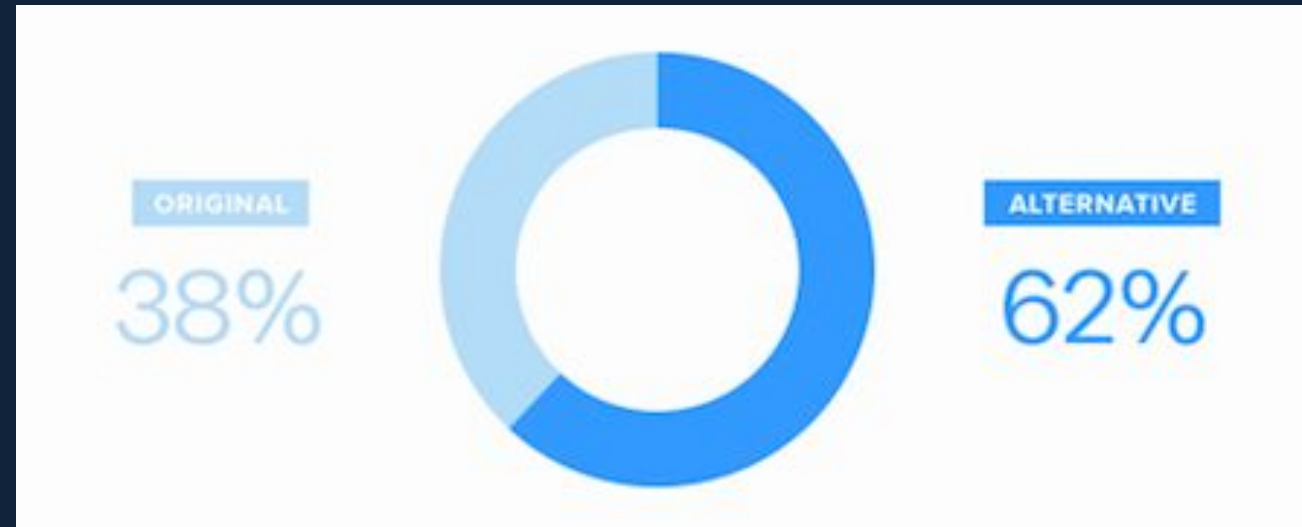
- Notably short headlines
- Question marks
- Time references  
“tomorrow”, “Saturday”



## WHY TEST?

When testing headlines, the alternative will outperform the original

**62%**  
of the time



## WHY TEST?

And, on average, those new headlines see:

78% lift in traffic

71% increase in quality clicks\*



# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF YOUR HEADLINES

The screenshot displays a news website interface with a headline test overlay. The navigation bar at the top includes categories: Binnenland, Buitenland, Economie, Cultuur, Sport, Opinie, Wetenschap, Tech & Media, and Meer. The main article is titled "May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer" under the sub-header "Brexit-speech". The headline test overlay shows three options: A (the current headline), B (a slightly reworded version), and C (a placeholder "Add a headline"). The "Headline Test" tab is active, and the "Performance" tab is also visible. The sidebar on the right features an advertisement for "Inspireren als leider in 5" with 396 views and 140 clicks, and a "Meer nieuws" section with several news items including "13 doden door Maria op Puerto Rico, dam begeeft het".

Binnenland Buitenland Economie Cultuur Sport Opinie Wetenschap Tech & Media Meer

Vandaag

Advertentie

Inspireren als leider in 5 396 140  
Quality 31%

In de hectiek van de dag bestuursmedewerkers vaak alleen nog uitwisseling van instructies en volgende 5 stappen zetten je op pad.

Mobile  Desktop  Tablet

Headline Test Results  
Real-Time Dashboard

Meer nieuws

21:26 13 doden door Maria op Puerto Rico, dam begeeft het

EK VOLLEYBAL  
20:26 Volleybaldames beginnen EK met zege op België

TOESPRAAK  
15:30 May wil na Brexit overgangperiode van twee jaar

LUCHTKWALITEIT  
15:30 Staat in hoger beroep in zaak luchtvervuiling

MISLUKTE AANSLAG  
15:25 Verdachte Londen aangeklaagd voor poging tot moord

Stationswinkels

NS ziet af van verkoop AH to go en Julia's op stations

NS wil zich concentreren op zijn kerntaken en zette daarom zijn stationswinkels in de etalage. Maar nu worden AH to go en Julia's toch niet verkocht - tot eenheid van de vakbond en het personeel.

May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer

Premier May deed enkele toezeggingen aan de EU over Brexit, maar concrete blauwdruk had ze niet.

Article Overview

Performance **Headline Test**

A May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer

B May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer

C Add a headline

Start



# Best practices for effective tests





# Find your best opportunity

- Test in high-traffic areas
- Optimize your underperformers
- Spend extra time on your high-value content

The screenshot displays a real-time optimization dashboard for a news website. The main content area shows a live news page with an 'Article Overview' and 'Headline Test' overlay. The headline test shows three options: A (current headline), B (a modified headline), and C (add a headline). The dashboard also displays performance metrics like 396 impressions, 140 clicks, and 31% quality score. A sidebar on the right shows a list of news items with timestamps and titles.

**Navigation:** Binnenland, Buitenland, Economie, Cultuur, Sport, Opinie, Wetenschap, Tech & Media, Meer

**Vandaag**

**Brexit-speech**  
**May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer**  
Premier May deed enkele toezeggingen aan de EU over Brexit, maar concrete blauwdruk had ze niet.

**Stationswinkels**  
**NS ziet af van verkoop AH to go en Julia's op stations**  
NS wil zich concentreren op zijn kerntaken en zette daarom zijn stationswinkels in de etalage. Maar nu worden AH to go en Julia's toch niet verkocht - tot eenheid van de vakbond en het personeel.

**13 doden door Maria op Puerto Rico, dam begeeft het**

**Meer nieuws**

21:26 **13 doden door Maria op Puerto Rico, dam begeeft het**

20:26 **EK VOLLEYBAL**  
**Volleybaldames beginnen EK met zege op België**

15:30 **TOESPRAAK**  
**May wil na Brexit overgangperiode van twee jaar**

15:30 **LUCHTKWALITEIT**  
**Staat in hoger beroep in zaak luchtvervuiling**

15:25 **MISLUKTE AANSLAG**  
**Verdachte Londen aangeklaagd voor poging tot moord**

**Article Overview**

Performance | **Headline Test**

A May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer

B May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer

C Add a headline

Start

4

Advertentie

Inspireren als leider in 5

396

140

Quality 31%

Mobile

Desktop

Tablet

Headline Test Results

Real-Time Dashboard

# Test with confidence

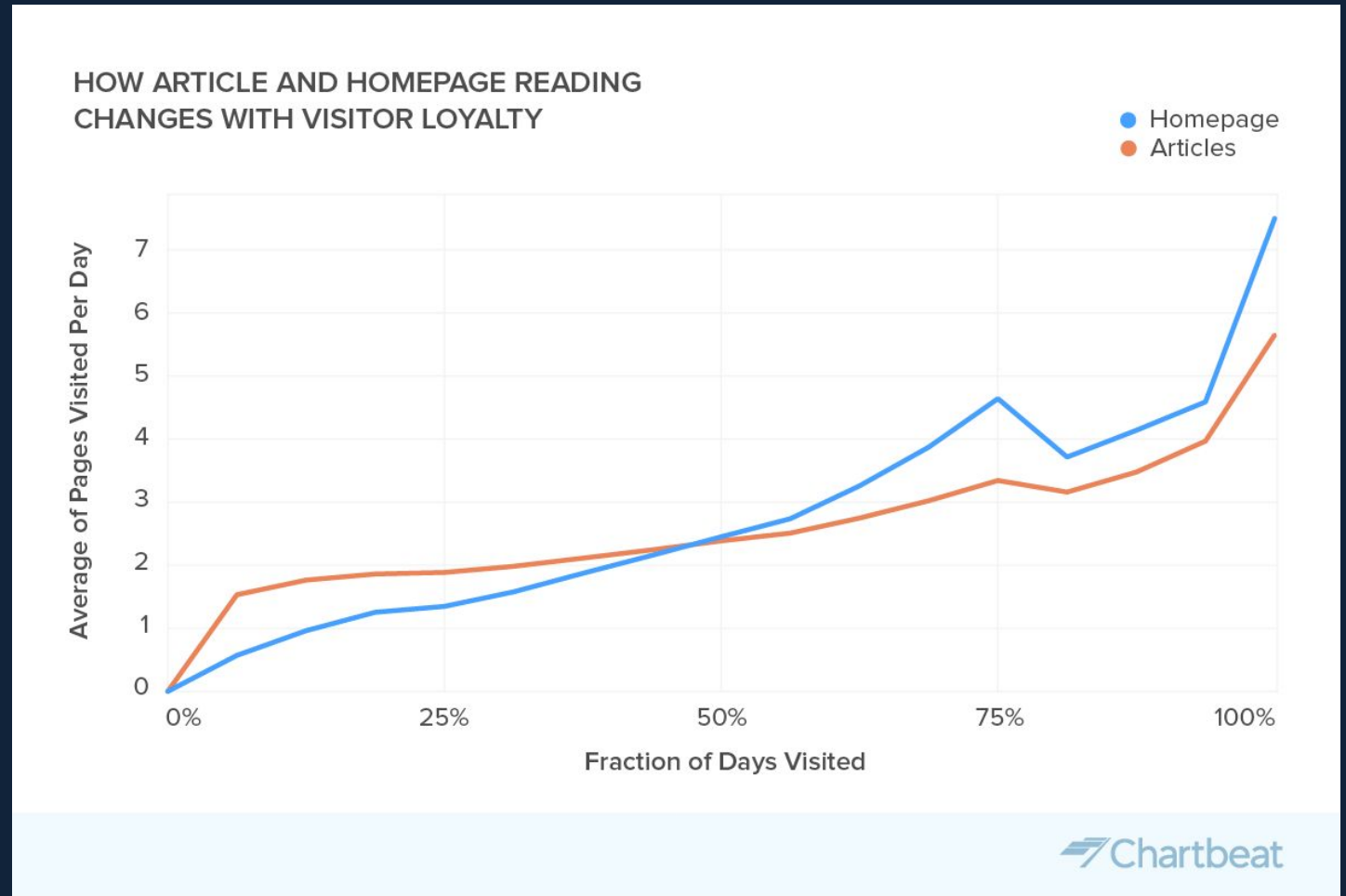
- Always be testing
- Know which audience you're testing:  
Don't stop tests prematurely
- Don't get discouraged by ties
- Keep track of what works

The screenshot shows a news website interface with a navigation bar at the top containing categories like 'Binnenland', 'Buitenland', 'Economie', 'Cultuur', 'Sport', 'Opinie', 'Wetenschap', 'Tech & Media', and 'Meer'. The main content area is titled 'Vandaag' and features two primary articles. The first article, under the sub-heading 'Brexit-speech', has the headline 'May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer'. Below the headline is a text snippet: 'Premier May deed enkele toezeggingen aan de EU over Brexit, maar concrete blauwdruk had ze niet.' The second article, under the sub-heading 'Stationswinkels', has the headline 'NS ziet af van verkoop AH to go en Julia's op stations' and a text snippet: 'NS wil zich concentreren op zijn kerntaken en zette daarom zijn stationswinkels in de etalage. Maar nu worden AH to go en Julia's toch niet verkocht - tot eenheid van de vakbond en het personeel.' A third article is partially visible: '13 doden door Maria op Puerto Rico, dam begeeft het'. An 'Article Overview' modal window is overlaid on the first article, showing a 'Performance' tab and a 'Headline Test' tab. Under 'Headline Test', three options are listed: 'A May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer', 'B May wil 'creatieve' Brexit, zegt ze tien keer', and 'C Add a headline'. A 'Start' button is at the bottom right of the modal. On the right side of the website, there is an advertisement for 'baak' and a 'Meer nieuws' section with a list of news items including '13 doden door Maria op Puerto Rico, dam begeeft het', 'Volleybaldames beginnen EK op België', 'May wil na Brexit overgangspers van twee jaar', 'Staat in hoger beroep in zaak luchtvervuiling', and 'Verdachte Londen aangeklaagd poging tot moord'.

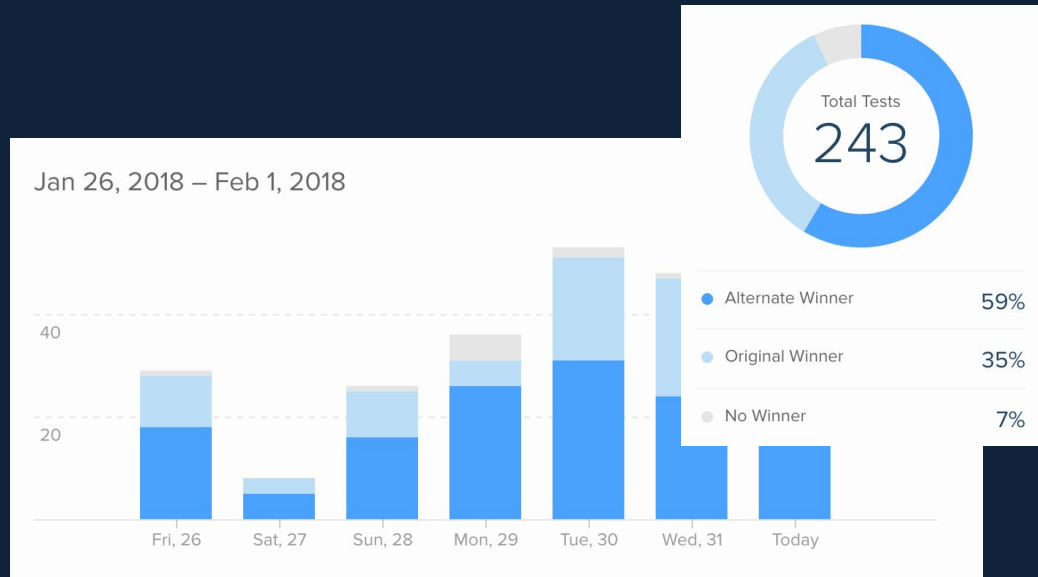
## WHO IS ON YOUR HOMEPAGE?

# Habitual users build homepage habits

- As readers become more loyal, they use front pages more actively
- Visitors who come more than every other day visit more front pages than articles



# TURN REAL-TIME INTO LONG-TERM STRATEGY



October 8-14, 2017

Average CTR increase: 21.4%

The difference in average CTR for all winning headlines compared to expected performance without testing

Want to analyze your results? See data export options.

**EXPORT TEST RESULTS**

Export your test results in one of these formats:

**Tests.csv**  
A summary of every test you've run. [Download](#)

**Headlines.csv**  
A breakdown of how every headline variant performed. [Download](#)

**Average CTR Increase: 40%**

The average improvement in CTR of all winning headlines compared to expected performance without testing

Export all of your headline test data. See [export options](#).



# Deseret News

In 2017, testing was still an under-the-radar area of interest, with just a handful of headlines tested on live stories per day.

Newsroom leaders needed to make people *want* to test every headline, thus optimizing homepage engagement and growing an audience of loyal readers. To make testing compelling, they made it fun — through a game that engaged the entire organization.

“ It’s simple. We’ve operationalized testing headlines and made it part of our jobs.  
- Aaron Shill, Content Director at Deseret News



THE RESULT?

45%

AVG CTR INCREASE



# **Key takeaways & more resources**



## SUMMARY

### Key takeaways:

- Experiment with different headline formats and language
- Use the Heads Up Display to find your best testing opportunities
- Test often, and with more than two variants
- Track your test results over time
- Make testing a part your team's workflow



## Where to get more info:

- Email us at [support@chartbeat.com](mailto:support@chartbeat.com)
- [Guide to Headline Testing](#)
- [Deseret News Case Study](#)
- [Headline Test to Success](#)

Stay up to date with Chartbeat's research on our blog: [blog.chartbeat.com](http://blog.chartbeat.com)



The screenshot shows the Chartbeat website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Chartbeat logo on the left and links for PRODUCT, ABOUT, BLOG, CONTACT, and a SIGN IN button on the right. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for ALL, PRODUCT, RESEARCH, CULTURE, CUSTOMER, PRESS, and EVENT, along with a SUBSCRIBE button and a search icon. The main content area features a large article titled "Global audience growth through engagement: What we saw in the fourth quarter of 2019" by NICK LILOUDIS. To the right of the article is a bar chart showing audience growth percentages for various regions. Below the article are three featured content cards: two labeled "CUSTOMER" and one labeled "CUSTOMER STORY".

| Region          | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------|
| CENTRAL ASIA    | 31%        |
| CHINA           | 26%        |
| AFRICA          | 23%        |
| SOUTHEAST ASIA  | 23%        |
| LATIN AMERICA   | 22%        |
| SOUTHERN EUROPE | 22%        |
| MIDDLE EAST     | 20%        |
| NORTH AMERICA   | 18%        |

**CUSTOMER**  
Challenging the status quo: Neue Zürcher Zeitung's reader engagement story  
by CHARTBEAT STAFF

**CUSTOMER**  
Using data to achieve interdepartmental goals more effectively: A Q&A with Eduardo Aguilar, Audience Manager for El Universal  
by ENRIQUE VALDEZ

**CUSTOMER STORY**  
How The Marshall Project Uses Data to Support Its Mission  
The Marshall Project leverages Chartbeat to get the real-time data it needs to inform its content strategy and drive greater impact. Click here to see their story.  
[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)



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# Thank you.

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