



# Deaf Journalism Europe

**MARKETING PLAN  
SPECIFIC TARGETED TO  
DEAF PEOPLE**



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## Overview

Based on the findings of surveys conducted by the Deaf Journalism Europe project consortium across six participating European countries, it has been established that deaf sign language users have a strong preference for tailored news broadcasts presented by a deaf presenter in their national sign language. However, in many European countries, such news services are not readily available and if available, they are often provided by deaf-led media organisations themselves. The key challenge lies in ensuring the financial sustainability of these services, particularly as many deaf individuals express the expectation that such news content should be made available free of charge. A marketing plan has been developed to assist these organisations in transitioning to a subscription-based model, encouraging them to influence the behaviour of various customer segments. This document has been published digitally on our joint website: [www.deafjournalism.eu](http://www.deafjournalism.eu).

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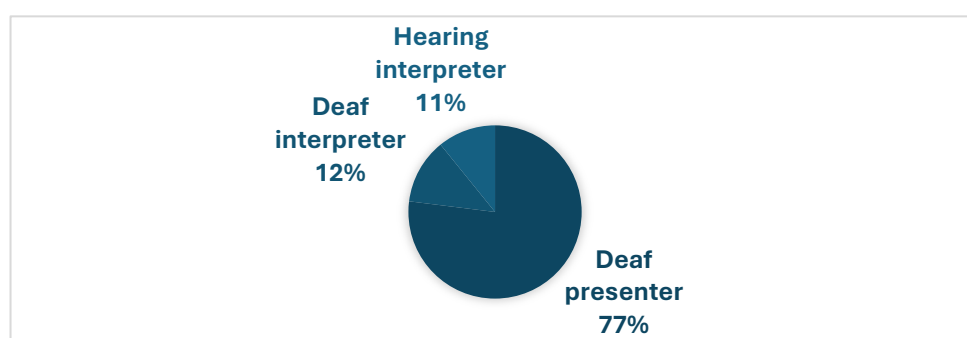
# 1. Introduction

Although specific data is not available for all countries, it is estimated that nearly one million deaf people in Europe use sign language as their first and preferred language, often alongside a spoken language as a second or foreign language<sup>1</sup>. Despite their rights being clearly outlined in various human rights instruments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind individuals (who, in this document, will be collectively referred to as "deaf", regardless of their level of auditory or visual impairment) frequently face obstacles in their daily lives due to societal barriers.

## 1.1. Access to news and information in sign language

Article 21 of the CRPD, titled *"Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information"*, obliges states to ensure that information intended for the general public is made available to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies in a timely manner and at no additional cost. Although efforts are being made by governments and national broadcasters across EU countries to provide news services in their respective national sign languages, these efforts do not always meet the needs of deaf sign language users. Several academic studies (see Deliverable 4.4 of the DJE project) indicate that deaf sign language users often struggle to fully understand mainstream news broadcasts when they are made accessible through a hearing sign language interpreter, as is common practice in most EU countries.

Findings from DJE surveys (see Deliverable 4.1 of the DJE project) further reveal that most respondents prefer news broadcasts presented directly in their national sign language—not interpreted by a sign language interpreter. They favor news presented by a deaf anchor, tailored to their linguistic and informational needs (see figure 1).



*Figure 1 – Preferred type of sign language news presentation*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52016IP0442>

Thanks to the DJE project, four different deaf-led media companies were able to establish such news services in their respective countries as an alternative to interpreted news broadcasts offered by national broadcasters. In two countries (Slovakia and Sweden), these types of news services were already being provided by national broadcasters. In these cases, the DJE project contributed by creating a news platform specifically dedicated to “deaf news”—news content focusing on issues relevant to the national as well as international deaf community—as a supplementary resource.

## 1.2. Financial sustainability of DJE news services

Médiapi is the only partner within the DJE consortium that has sustained its sign language news service in French Sign Language (LSF) through a subscription model since 2018. Through surveys conducted across six countries involved in the DJE project, respondents were asked whether this subscription model could be viable in the other five countries seeking financial sustainability for their sign language news services after the two-year DJE project.

The survey results did not indicate a clear consensus on whether people would be willing to pay for these news services via a paid subscription model (see table 1).

	Yes	No	Maybe	Total
Willingness to pay	154 (19,9%)	298 (38,4%)	323 (41,7%)	877

*Table 1 – Willingness to pay for DJE news offerings*

On the contrary, it became evident that a strong majority of respondents believed that news and information in their national sign language should be made available free of charge, funded by the government or through some form of public taxation system (see table 2).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Access to news and information should not require payment.	45	54	190	181	<b>407</b>	877
Sign language news should be offered for free.	42	47	156	180	<b>452</b>	877
The government should not fund sign language news	<b>430</b>	149	185	47	66	877

*Table 2 – Responses to four statements in DJE surveys*

Although deaf sign language users in the six European countries involved in the DJE project clearly prefer news services delivered directly in their national sign language (rather than via an interpreter), the ultimate decisions regarding sign language news provision are often made by government bodies and public broadcasters. While governmental recommendations have already been formulated in another deliverable (D4.4) of the DJE project, the results of the DJE surveys also highlight a strong preference for sign language news services to be provided by deaf-led media organisations.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Sign language news should not be provided by a deaf-led company	384	123	234	74	62	877

*Table 3 – Responses to a statement in DJE surveys*

### 1.3. Focus of the marketing plan

Contrary to the common perception, sometimes expressed humorously but grounded in partial truth, that 'D.E.A.F.' stands for 'Deaf Expects All Free', deaf-led media organisations fear facing significant challenges in generating revenue through paid subscriptions to cover the production costs of sign language news services, especially given the relatively limited size of the deaf sign language user market within their countries.

With a firm belief that these news services provide an effective response to the right of deaf citizens to accessible information, and supported by insights from survey results, this marketing plan outlines strategies to enhance the visibility of these news offerings and strengthen engagement from the deaf community and other relevant target groups.

The central question of this plan is: **How can we convince audiences to pay for the DJE partners' news services?** At the same time, this marketing plan aims to inspire other deaf-led media organisations that recognise the potential of creating sign language news services—whether as an alternative to interpreted news broadcasts from national broadcasters or as a complementary addition to the existing sign language media landscape, such as 'deaf news'—and to make it sustainable through a subscription model.

## 2. Situation analysis

To ensure the sustainability of news services provided by deaf-led media organisations—without relying on government support, national broadcasters, sponsors, or projects it is essential for a deaf-led media organisation to generate diverse revenue streams to cover the

production costs of these news services. The business plan (Deliverable D4.3) explores various potential sources of income for a deaf-led organisation. This marketing plan, however, focuses on a single revenue stream: the one derived from deaf news consumers.

This section provides an overview of the current situation of a deaf-led media organisation that operates its own news service in a national sign language. It includes a summary of a SWOT analysis, outlining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relevant to a deaf-led media organisation with an independent news service (see figure 2). This is followed by a competition analysis and a target audience analysis, offering key insights into the potential for financial support from both deaf and hearing news consumers.

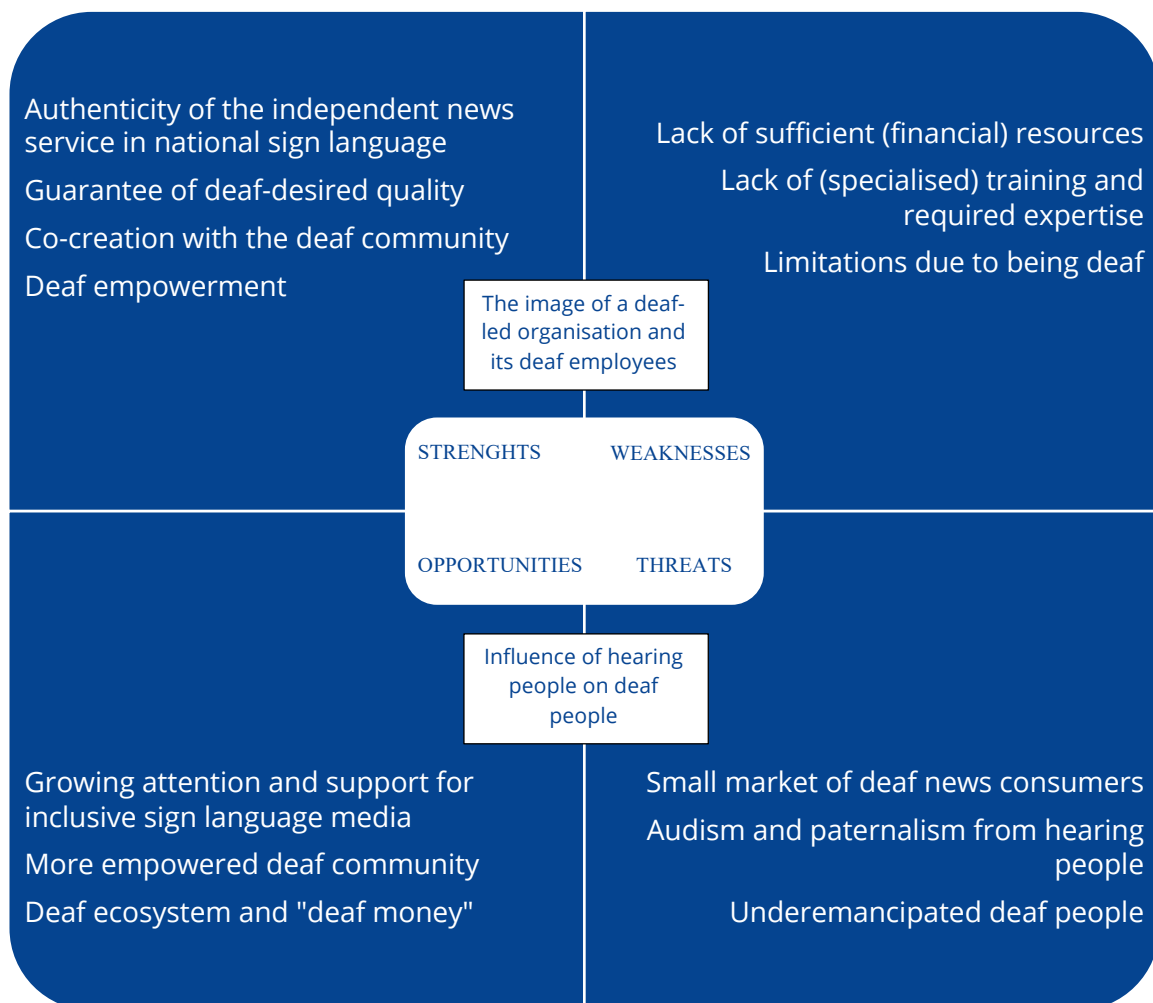


Figure 2 – SWOT analysis

## 2.1. Intern analysis

Although each deaf-led media organisation is unique, with its own strengths and weaknesses, the following section provides an overview of the potential strengths and weaknesses that may be common to all deaf-led organisations (though not limited to these). At the same time, certain aspects may be perceived as both a strength and a weakness, depending on the

context. Therefore, a separate list is provided outlining various internal characteristics of a deaf-led organisation that could be regarded as either a strength or a weakness.

### 2.1.1. Strengths

#### **Authenticity of the independent news service in national sign language**

The news services created through the Deaf Journalism Europe (DJE) project offer a unique alternative to existing news provisions in the respective country. Firstly, these are news broadcasts delivered in the national sign language. While there are numerous news sources available in spoken and written language, news services in the national sign language remain significantly underrepresented. Secondly, these news offerings operate within a deaf framework, meaning that the news is delivered directly in sign language without relying on an in-vision sign language interpreter (the hearing framework). Finally, these news services incorporate a deaf perspective on news topics. For example, when discussing new legislation on the mandatory installation of fire alarm systems in homes, this news service would provide additional information regarding specific accommodations available for deaf people and potential government reimbursements. Furthermore, deaf-related news topics are covered, allowing deaf audiences to connect with the content (e.g., news about the Deaflympics).

#### **Guarantee of deaf-desired quality**

As this news service is dedicated to providing direct accessibility to news and information for deaf consumers, it ensures high-quality news delivery in the national sign language, making the content effectively comprehensible for the deaf audience. This is achieved by engaging deaf presenters, who are members of the linguistic minority group themselves and possess the necessary experience to adapt their sign language presentation to the linguistic and informational needs of the wider community. Deaf presenters have native-level proficiency in sign language and are more likely to adopt new or updated signs. Additionally, there are deaf professionals with the appropriate (deaf) expertise, often trained and/or educated in this field, who know how to finalise the product according to the quality requirements of deaf news consumers. Since deaf-led media organisations often maintain close contact with the deaf community, they also have broader knowledge and insight into the diversity and various subgroups within the deaf community. This includes adapting the layout of their news broadcasts for deaf individuals with visual impairments, ensuring a balanced approach to language use for those with limited language proficiency or cognitive disabilities, and providing fair representation of deaf presenters, including BIPOC<sup>2</sup> deaf individuals.

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<sup>2</sup> Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

## **Co-creation with the deaf community**

As deaf-led organisations primarily consist of deaf professionals, their services are inherently more accessible to the deaf community. This facilitates easier engagement with deaf audiences, allowing for more direct input and feedback. There is often a strong connection between deaf-led organisations and other key stakeholders within the deaf community, such as the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), sign language expert organisations, and other businesses within the Deaf Ecosystem. This strengthens the impact of deaf-led media organisations, ensuring that their news services align with the vision, expectations, and needs of the deaf community. Additionally, it is important to recognise that deaf people often have transnational networks with other deaf communities, enabling them to stay informed about deaf-related developments in other countries and adopt new sign language lexicons (such as signs for proper names from other nations) more quickly.

## **Deaf empowerment**

Since deaf-led media organisations are predominantly run by deaf professionals, there is minimal to no space for audism or linguisticism (the notion that those who can hear or speak are superior to deaf people who use sign language). Because deaf employees in a deaf-led organisation face fewer barriers of discrimination and prejudice in the workplace, their productivity increases, enabling them to contribute to the development of the deaf community by providing a more comprehensive news service in the national sign language. Finally, deaf-led organisations operate outside of a rigid hierarchical system controlled by hearing, non-signing individuals. This reinforces the deaf character of these news services, making them more inclusive for deaf people who receive news in a way that aligns with their linguistic and informational needs.

### **2.1.2. Weaknesses**

#### **Lack of sufficient (financial) resources**

Before co-financing support from the European Commission in the DJE project, most of the news services provided by DJE partners, like in some other European countries, were realised either through volunteer work or were previously non-existent. While efforts are being made to reduce dependency on subsidies, a weakness of a deaf-led organisation producing its own news service lies in the lack of sufficient resources, such as staffing (which sometimes results in the inability to produce news content during weekends, holidays, or when employees are absent due to illness). Moreover, it is impossible for a deaf-led media organisation to compete with larger journalistic organisations (such as national broadcasters) that have significantly more resources to conduct investigative journalism, produce their own visual content (photos and videos), or afford expensive copyrights for other news footage. Often, the journalists of a deaf-led media organisation must rely on translating already published written news articles into sign language and are limited to using 'free', low-cost, or AI-generated visual material.

### **Lack of (specialised) training and required expertise**

Due to the systematic oppression of deaf people and sign languages in society, deaf individuals generally have fewer educational opportunities and often face difficulties in accessing education. In Europe, there are particularly few deaf sign language users who have received training in journalism, translation studies, sign linguistics, (visual) media, and management. This presents a challenge for deaf entrepreneurs, as there is a small pool of suitable deaf candidates who meet the multiple requirements for vacancies. Moreover, there is an additional burden for deaf entrepreneurs in training and mentoring these deaf candidates with significant potential.

### **Limitations due to being deaf**

Finally, it must be acknowledged that, despite the fact that deaf people are capable of doing everything (except "hearing," of course), they still experience a disability due to the lack of accessibility in society. These barriers often mean that deaf individuals must invest more time or effort to complete their work. Some examples include: relying on hearing sign language interpreters, who are often scarce; mental health challenges due to structural societal stigma (e.g., constantly having to explain or fight against misunderstandings from hearing people); difficulties accessing spoken news (e.g., limited access to news via radio while driving); and challenges with written language (when it is the second language for deaf journalists/presenters), among others.

#### **2.1.3. Both**

**The image of a deaf-led organisation and its deaf employees** can be seen as both a strength and a weakness. If the organisation has a strong reputation within the deaf community, possibly through other projects or its engagement with the community, this enhances the credibility of the organisation. For example, when a deaf-led organisation invests significantly in the deaf community, through sponsorships or volunteering, it leads to a larger fanbase within the deaf community. However, a potential pitfall exists where the organisation and its deaf employees are part of a small, close-knit community, where one's reputation can quickly be tarnished due to a personal or professional mistake. For instance, if a deaf journalist is known for having strong political leanings towards the "left," their credibility on political news coverage could be compromised.

## **2.2. Extern analysis**

Below is an overview of potential external influences, both positive and negative, over which a deaf-led media organisation may not always have control. Certain aspects may be perceived as both an opportunity and a threat, depending on the context.

### 2.2.1. Opportunities

#### **Growing attention and support for inclusive sign language media**

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the first international human rights instrument to specifically mention deaf people, their unique identity and culture, and sign language. As a result, there is not only increasing attention to media accessibility, including news and information in sign language, but "inclusion" is also becoming an everyday concept in European society. Numerous (academic) studies have empirically shown that deaf sign language users still face barriers in understanding news broadcasts interpreted by hearing interpreters, which increases support for sign language news services produced by deaf-led media organisations.

#### **More empowered deaf community**

An increasing number of deaf sign language users are becoming aware of their rights as a result of emancipation movements, following decades of suppression. Deaf people are becoming more assertive in advocating for their right not only to receive news and information in their preferred language but also to understand it. More and more deaf individuals wish to pursue education and contribute to improving the status of the deaf community. Deaf people are increasingly demanding that their sign language be represented in a high-quality and accurate manner in the media, ideally by deaf individuals themselves (to respect language ownership). As a result, there is growing demand and support for deaf media and the representation of sign language by deaf people. When these needs are aligned with the vision of organisations such as NAD (National Association of the Deaf) or other stakeholders within the deaf community, it creates additional opportunities for deaf-led media organisations aspiring to produce news services in national sign language.

#### **Deaf ecosystem and "deaf money"**

In recent years, there has been a visible increase in deaf professionals and deaf-led companies and organisations. Deaf people experience more positive products and services from these professionals, companies, and organisations, which leads to increased trust in this "deaf ecosystem," a network of services, businesses, and organisations specifically aimed at or serving the deaf community in social, cultural, educational, and professional contexts. Furthermore, "deaf money" exists in the sense that the deaf community receives various forms of financial support or subsidies from the government (e.g., benefits, grants, etc.) that they may choose to spend on products or services from the deaf ecosystem because these are perceived as more reliable and accessible, both linguistically and culturally, for them.

## 2.2.2. Threats

### Small market of deaf news consumers

In Europe, the deaf communities are particularly small in business terms. Over the years, the target audience for the deaf community, particularly those who use sign language, has been shrinking due to several factors such as a higher influx of deaf children into mainstream education and the use of assistive hearing technologies. When a deaf-led organisation must account for the production costs of its own news service in sign language, there is a concern that the income from the small number of deaf news consumers via subscriptions may not be sufficient to cover these costs. Furthermore, the idea that “D.E.A.F. stands for Deaf Expects All Free” is not always merely humorous in intent, and there is a prevailing belief within the deaf community that news and information in sign language should be provided free of charge.

### Audism and paternalism from hearing people

Although this marketing plan focuses on how deaf individuals can be engaged to financially contribute to the news services of deaf-led media organisations, the broader societal concept of inclusion often has an impact. Due to years of structural provision of regular news broadcasts with (hearing) sign language interpreters by national broadcasters, this unintentionally creates the notion that only this form of news provision is the reliable option. By over-focusing on this accessibility concept, misunderstanding and mistrust often arises both among deaf individuals (or organisations) and hearing people (governments, policymakers, national broadcasters, sponsors, etc.) regarding tailored news services from deaf media organisations. The idea of audism plays a role here: can deaf professionals or organisations deliver quality? Additionally, the idea of paternalism is also relevant: should deaf people not have the same offerings as hearing people? Thus, using sign language interpreters in regular news broadcasts would better align with our inclusive approach?

### Under emancipated deaf people

Although more and more deaf individuals are becoming aware of their rights, there is also a pitfall: deaf people, after years of oppression and stigmatisation, still carry the weight of internalised colonisation. Many deaf individuals are often unaware of the status and value of sign language or do not trust in the quality of deaf professionals or deaf-led organisations. Furthermore, their dependency on hearing people in their daily lives, such as sign language interpreters, can be problematic, as evidenced by the DJE surveys (see deliverable D4.1.). For instance, one deaf respondent reported feeling pressured to support news broadcasts with hearing interpreters, rather than news services with a deaf presenter, out of fear that hearing interpreters would feel demotivated if they were not selected, potentially leading them to abandon the profession in all contexts. This could ultimately deny the deaf respondent access to other areas of life due to a lack of interpreters.

### 2.2.3. Both

The example mentioned above illustrates that hearing people, particularly sign language interpreters, can (often unknowingly or unintentionally) have an influence. In a negative sense, they contribute to the hesitation of deaf individuals to financially support news services from deaf-led organisations. Indeed, hearing sign language interpreters often feel threatened when more deaf people prefer these services, potentially leading to a loss of face or the risk of losing their jobs at national broadcasters. On the other hand, hearing individuals can also be seen as allies, such as the sign language interpreters and interpreter students who greatly benefit from the news broadcasts of deaf-led organisations, as well as family members of deaf people, educational institutions, researchers, and others.

## 2.3. Competitive analysis

In Europe, making regular news broadcasts accessible through hearing sign language interpreters by national broadcasters is the most common form. Although this marketing plan aims to ensure the financial sustainability of deaf-led media organisations' own news services without accounting for this "competition" from national broadcasters, these interpreted news broadcasts could still pose a threat. According to the results of the DJE surveys (see deliverable D4.1), many deaf people are not willing to pay for sign language news services of DJE partners and expect news and information in sign language to be made available for free (by the government). They may be less inclined to pay for news services from deaf-led media organisations if other free options (particularly from national broadcasters) already exist. Although the news services of deaf-led organisations often feature deaf presenters, which strongly distinguishes them from hearing interpreters, it must be taken into account that there is an increasing use of deaf interpreters in the regular news broadcasts of public broadcasters in Europe.

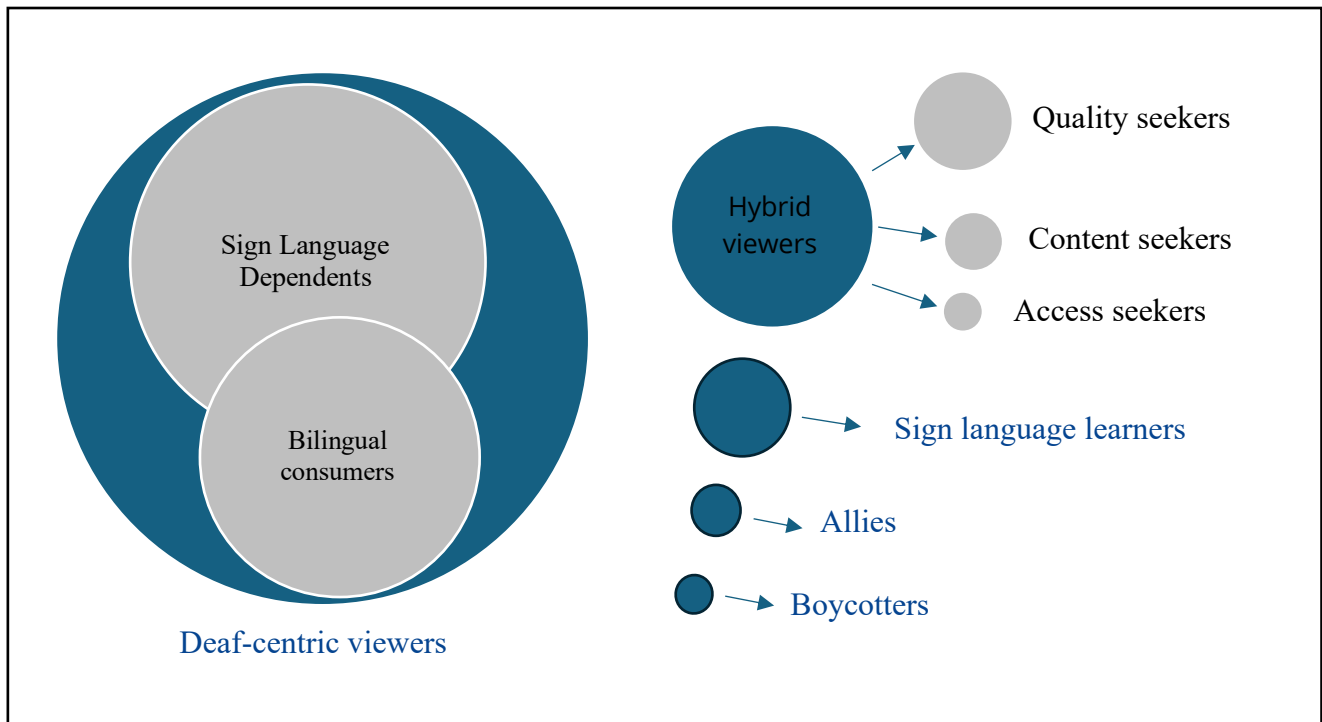
Finally, there are other content creators on social media (influencers, NADs, deaf volunteers, etc.) who also provide news or information in sign language, though they may be fewer in number and not offered on a regular basis. Often, there is a lack of journalistic standards in these sign language videos, or there is an increased risk of 'fake news'. If these are offered for free, deaf news consumers are less inclined to pay for news services from deaf-led organisations.

## 2.4. Target audience analysis

In this section, the total target audience for a news service in national sign language is divided into smaller specific groups (segments) based on shared characteristics. This can help communicate more targeted and effectively to different audiences and optimise marketing strategies.

While a news service in sign language is primarily intended for deaf people whose sign

language is their first language, experience has shown that there are also "secondary" audiences such as family members, sign language learners, educational institutions (such as teachers at deaf schools or interpreter students), sign language interpreters, etc. From the results of DJE surveys (see deliverable D4.1), various types of "news consumers" are identified. Below is a figure overview. The size of the circles indicates how the segments roughly relate to one another in size.



*Figure 3 – Types of news consumers*

### 2.4.1. Deaf-centric viewers

A very large group of viewers consists of those who strongly prefer news content presented directly in sign language, framed from a "deaf framework", and delivered by deaf presenters.

#### 2.4.1.1. Sign language dependents

This group largely comprises deaf individuals who prefer to follow the news in sign language, which is often the only language they fully understand. A significant portion of this group does not follow news broadcasts interpreted by hearing interpreters, making them reliant solely on news services presented by deaf presenters to stay informed about current events.

#### 2.4.1.2. Bilingual consumers

Additionally, there is a considerable group of deaf individuals who follow the news both in written language (via text or subtitles) and in sign language. They master both a national spoken language and a national sign language as their first languages. They enjoy the privilege

of accessing various news sources and particularly seek out news offerings in sign language because they derive personal benefits from it, such as clear presentation in sign language and the convenience of being able to view these videos at their own pace.

### 2.4.2. Hybrid viewers

A smaller number of deaf viewers who prefer sign language as their means of following the news are those who consume a “total offering” in their national sign language. They watch both regular news broadcasts with a sign language interpreter and news services presented directly in sign language by a deaf presenter.

#### 2.4.2.1. Quality seekers

Among this group of deaf viewers, many express a preference for a deaf presenter to consume quality news in sign language, as they find it more comprehensible, and it provides a foundation for better understanding the interpreted news broadcasts.

#### 2.4.2.2. Content seekers

A smaller segment of deaf viewers prefers regular news broadcasts with a deaf interpreter, as they feel that the (visual) content and volume of news offerings presented by a deaf presenter do not fully meet their needs.

#### 2.4.2.3. Access seekers

An even smaller group of deaf viewers prefers news broadcasts with hearing interpreters. They often do this from a position of low empowerment, feeling subservient to the power dynamics of hearing interpreters, upon whom they heavily depend in their daily lives.

### 2.4.3. Sign language learners

A small number of viewers do not have sign language as their first or preferred language, yet benefit from news services in sign language to learn the language. This typically includes hearing viewers, such as interpreters, interpreting students, or teachers working in deaf education, but also encompasses deaf individuals who have become deaf later in life or who are newly introduced to sign language.

### 2.4.4. Allies

These supportive non-viewers believe news services in sign language with a deaf presenter benefits the deaf community (for their relatives who rely solely on sign language for information and communication, or for their deaf children who need deaf role models) and the deaf ecosystem (creating more job opportunities for deaf individuals).

### 2.4.5. Boycotters

This group comprises individuals who do not support the concept of news services presented in sign language by deaf presenters. This may include deaf individuals who feel insufficiently empowered and cling to the belief that they should have access to the same resources as hearing individuals, thereby advocating for regular news broadcasts featuring sign language interpreters. They may also struggle with the notion that other deaf individuals have opportunities for growth, particularly in television work, that they themselves cannot access, or that they are "assisted" by fellow deaf individuals in consuming news. Additionally, this group certainly includes hearing individuals, likely hearing interpreters, who seek to defend the profession and the role of hearing sign language interpreters in comparison to deaf interpreters or presenters, fearing that they may lose their jobs or opportunities to interpret on television.

### 2.4.6. Other non-viewers

Additionally, there is a group of individuals who simply do not watch news services from deaf-led organisations for various reasons, such as a lack of interest (perhaps due to limited engagement with news and current affairs in general), lack of time, or difficulty accessing these services (particularly among older people).

## 3. Objectives

Following the internal and external analysis of deaf-led media organisations providing news services in national sign language and considering the central question of this marketing plan—*"How can we convince audiences to pay for the DJE partners' news services?"*—the following concrete and measurable objectives have been defined. These qualitative goals focus on communication with (potential) customers, engagement, and behavioural change. These SMART-formulated objectives provide direction for the marketing plan and facilitate the assessment of the effectiveness of the proposed actions.

### 3.1. Strengthen communication on key strengths

- **Specific:** Marketing messages should strongly emphasise the unique value of news services provided by a deaf-led organisation, highlighting shared identity, language, and culture with deaf communities, as well as the journalistic expertise of the organisation.
- **Measurable:** Develop and publish a series of marketing messages (social media, videos, blogs) explicitly emphasising these core values.
- **Acceptable:** This aligns with the necessary marketing efforts to convince bilingual consumers, hybrid viewers—particularly quality seekers and content seekers—and non-viewers that news provision by a deaf-led media organisation offers added value

compared to spoken or written news and other existing sign language news services (e.g., public broadcasting services).

- **Realistic:** As a deaf-led media organisation with its own news service already possesses communicative and video production expertise, this objective is easily achievable.
- **Time-bound:** This communication campaign should be implemented within six months.

### 3.2. Increase brand visibility

- **Specific:** Identify which segments of the target audience have yet to be reached and determine the most effective content and publication platforms for engaging them.
- **Measurable:** Increase brand awareness by attracting more customers/followers from previously unreached target groups.
- **Acceptable:** This mainly concerns the "non-viewers" market segment, particularly older individuals with limited or no access to social media and deaf (often younger) individuals who claim not to benefit from (sign language) news services.
- **Realistic:** Given the involvement of a deaf-led organisation and its deaf employees, it is feasible to identify and reach this target group through various platforms (e.g., senior citizen gatherings, youth activities).
- **Time-bound:** The analysis should be completed within three months, and the campaign should show measurable results within one year.

### 3.3. Invest in media literacy and deaf empowerment

- **Specific:** Deaf individuals should be more aware of their right to fully understand news and information in their national sign language and the fact that deaf-led media organisations are ideally positioned to meet this need. Collaborate with National Associations of the Deaf (NADs) and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen advocacy for the recognition and financial support of sign language news services delivered by deaf presenters. Raising awareness and positively influencing attitudes among other stakeholders and decision makers, such as government bodies, public broadcasters, and hearing interpreters, will further this goal.
- **Measurable:** Launch an awareness campaign aimed at changing the perspectives of sceptics and deaf and hearing boycotters through social media (influencers), seminars or conferences, and partnerships with NADs and other stakeholders.
- **Acceptable:** This objective aligns with the need to convince two of the most challenging groups within the deaf community: access seekers and boycotters. It ultimately benefits the deaf community as a whole by ensuring the right to fully comprehend news and information and, consequently, in some cases make informed decisions.

- **Realistic:** Since a deaf-led media organisation is likely to have strong ties with NADs and well-established deaf influencers, collaboration can proceed smoothly.
- **Time-bound:** Campaign rollout within one year, followed by an evaluation after one year to adjust the marketing plan if necessary.

### 3.4. Encourage purchasing behaviour among followers

- **Specific:** As part of the audience remains uncertain about paying for sign language news, marketing efforts should highlight the benefits of a subscription. These include access to high-quality news content in national sign language, supporting the sustainability of deaf-led news services, and contributing to the deaf ecosystem while acknowledging its broader benefits. Building relationships with the deaf community and incorporating their feedback into the operations of the deaf media organisation will reinforce these efforts.
- **Measurable:** Achieve a conversion rate within one year among a percentage of non-paying followers sufficient to cover production costs.
- **Acceptable:** This concerns all viewers, particularly deaf-centric viewers, including the largest market segment, “sign language dependents,” hybrid viewers, and sign language learners. They benefit from sustaining sign language news services through subscriptions.
- **Realistic:** As a deaf-led organisation with an existing news service (whether subsidised or voluntary), already recognised for its quality within the deaf community and with an established follower base, transitioning to a subscription model is feasible.
- **Time-bound:** Initial campaign rollout within three months, with an evaluation after one year to plan or adjust new marketing actions.

### 3.5. Enhance audience, community and allies’ engagement

- **Specific:** By highlighting the role of deaf-led news services in empowering the deaf community, marketing efforts can establish new B2B relationships with businesses and NGOs while fostering loyalty—particularly among both viewers and non-viewers who prioritise supporting deaf-owned enterprises.
- **Measurable:** Develop a PR toolkit and publish several videos in which the deaf-led organisation transparently explains how the deaf community, allies, businesses and NGO’s can contribute to ensuring deaf people’s right to access and understand high-quality news in their preferred language. Bilingual consumers and allies should be encouraged to financially support subscriptions to the news service.
- **Acceptable:** This objective is crucial for transparently communicating that deaf-led media organisations can no longer sustainably provide high-quality news services for free and that financial support (e.g., through subscriptions) is required. This message should not only make viewers aware of this necessity but also encourage allies, businesses and NGO’s to contribute for the benefit of the deaf community.

- **Realistic:** Due to its positive reputation and recognition within the deaf community, a deaf-led media organisation and its deaf employees can communicate this message openly and gain the trust of the deaf community, as they themselves are part of this linguistic minority and are not perceived as exploiting their audience financially.
- **Time-bound:** The campaign will be rolled out within six months, with measurable growth in subscriptions (particularly among allies), as well as an increase in sponsors and new partnerships with businesses and NGOs within one year.

## 4. Marketing strategy

Having established the five main objectives of this marketing plan, aimed at potential customers of a deaf-led news service in the national sign language, it is necessary to formulate a marketing strategy: *"What key message is central, and how will we achieve these marketing objectives?"* This section highlights the unique value proposition of the deaf-led organisation and formulates various strategies that can enhance the visibility of deaf-led news services, foster community support, and establish a sustainable financial model while fulfilling the right of deaf individuals to access high-quality news in their national sign language.

### 4.1. Positioning and Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

The primary competition for deaf-led news services in the national sign language comes from public broadcasters that either provide interpreted news broadcasts (by deaf or hearing interpreters) or offer news content directly in sign language with a deaf news anchor.

To ensure the financial sustainability of deaf-led news services, it is crucial to communicate a compelling Unique Selling Proposition (USP): *"How should customers perceive these products or services from a deaf-led media organisation so that it stands out in the market compared to competitors?"* The value strategies of Treacy and Wiersema can be applied here, outlining three ways a company can differentiate itself from competitors: product leadership (focus on product quality and innovation), customer intimacy (focus on customer relationships and service), and operational excellence (focus on efficient processes and cost reduction).

#### 4.1.1. Product Leadership

The news services of a deaf-led media organisation are independent and free from government influence. They provide a deaf perspective on news, presented by a deaf news anchor with the necessary linguistic skills, ensuring authenticity compared to interpreted news broadcasts delivered by (hearing) interpreters. These news broadcasts are tailored to the linguistic and informational needs of the deaf community, ensuring greater quality and comprehensibility.

As this news service is developed within a deaf framework, it significantly differs from the use of deaf and hearing sign language interpreters in mainstream news broadcasts (hearing framework). This distinction allows deaf individuals to consume news at their own pace and according to their specific informational needs. Additionally, these news services offer greater flexibility in the coverage of deaf-related news topics, which is not always possible within public broadcasting.

#### 4.1.2. Customer Intimacy

Since the employees of a deaf-led media organisation are themselves members of the minority language group, they have deep customer insight and greater engagement in co-creation with the deaf community, reflecting their concerns and interests. Moreover, the news services provided by a deaf-led media organisation enhance accessibility to news and information in sign language, leading to greater empowerment of deaf citizens and economic opportunities for deaf professionals ('deaf ecosystem').

#### 4.1.3. Operational Excellence

Unlike public broadcasters, which often provide limited news services in sign language at specific times (in some countries, only a single evening news broadcast is available with sign language interpretation, meaning that deaf people generally lack access to news in their native language throughout the day), deaf-led media organisations offer greater flexibility. As they are not bound by the hierarchical structures, priorities, and scheduling constraints of public broadcasters, they can publish news videos at any time of the day. This ensures that deaf individuals receive news faster and in a more up-to-date manner in their national sign language.

Public broadcasters often view sign language accessibility as a burden rather than an opportunity. However, due to the personal and emotional involvement of deaf employees in a deaf-led media organisation, there is a greater passion for continuous improvement of news service quality. Additionally, it is more cost-efficient, as research shows that deaf people understand news content in sign language more effectively than interpreted broadcasts, a finding supported by various academic studies.

### 4.2. Growth strategies

The Ansoff Matrix is a strategic model that can help a deaf-led media organisation determine how to grow:

	Existing market	New market
Existing product	Market penetration	Market development
New product	Product development	Diversification

*Table 4 – The Ansoff Matrix*

- **Market Penetration (Existing product – Existing market)**

The goal is to persuade current customers who already follow the news coverage of deaf-led organisations within the same sign language community market to subscribe. This can be achieved through promotions, expanding distribution channels, and improving marketing communication and customer loyalty strategies.

- **Market Development (Existing product – New market)**

The objective is to reach new customer segments for the existing news coverage, such as hard-to-reach target groups (elderly individuals, deaf people in institutions, migrants, etc.) or other businesses and organisations (such as national television broadcasters, schools for the deaf, interpreter training programmes, researchers in sign linguistics, or those working on machine translation between written languages and sign languages).

- **Product Development (New product – Existing market)**

New products or services can be developed for existing customers, such as additional debate programmes, in-depth interviews, investigative journalism articles, and more.

- **Diversification (New product – New market)**

Although related diversification (introducing a new product aligned with the existing offering) in a new market carries significant (financial) risks, it can also create new opportunities. For example, offering videos featuring sign language lexicons on current affairs (e.g., politics) could not only be informative for deaf individuals, enhancing the status of sign language, but also be valuable for interpreters and interpreting students. Other possibilities include educational videos (for children) and translating selected relevant news items into International Sign for international deaf communities.

### 4.3. Pricing strategy

Given the vulnerability and related financial constraints of the target audience and resistance to paid subscriptions, a tiered pricing strategy should be considered:

- **Freemium model:** Offer basic news summaries free of charge, with in-depth analysis, exclusive interviews, and special reports available via subscription.
- **Pay-What-You-Can:** Enable voluntary contributions to encourage community support.
- **Sponsorships and partnerships:** Collaborate with businesses and NGOs (such as National Associations of the Deaf – NADs) to secure funding in exchange for visibility.

## 4.4. Community engagement and advocacy

To strengthen community trust and encourage financial contributions, active engagement strategies should be implemented:

- **Social media campaigns:** Leverage platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and newsletters to engage with the audience through interactive posts, behind-the-scenes content, and live Q&A sessions.
- **Influencer collaborations:** Partner with deaf influencers and role models to highlight the value of deaf-led news services.
- **Educational initiatives:** Organise webinars and workshops on media literacy and the importance of sign language news, targeting both deaf and hearing audiences.
- **Advocacy partnerships:** Work with allies, NADs, and other businesses and organisations (B2B strategy) to support or advocate for funding for deaf news services.

## 4.5. Content Marketing and Brand Awareness

Enhancing visibility through strategic content marketing will help attract and retain audiences:

- **Storytelling approach:** Share compelling stories about how the news service has positively impacted the community.
- **User-generated content:** Encourage audience participation by featuring community stories, opinion pieces, and personal experiences.
- **SEO and accessibility optimisation:** Ensure video and written content are easily discoverable through search engines and accessible to all users.
- **Regular updates:** Keep subscribers engaged with news and video updates, exclusive content, and interactive features.
- **Expanding reach:** Establish connections with target audiences by attending their gatherings and events and exploring ways to facilitate their access to news services.

## 4.6. Subscription and Conversion Tactics

Encouraging users to transition from free content consumers to paying subscribers requires strategic action:

- **Exclusive benefits:** Provide premium content, ad-free experiences, and early access to major news stories.
- **Trial periods and discounts:** Offer limited-time free trials and promotional discounts to encourage sign-ups.
- **Referral programmes:** Incentivise current subscribers to refer friends and family.
- **Transparent financial model:** Clearly communicate how subscriptions contribute to sustaining and enhancing deaf news services.

## 5. Marketing mix

To maintain a consistent strategy, the following is a brief overview of the marketing mix to describe how a product and service from a deaf-led media organisation can be successfully introduced to the market. It includes: what are the characteristics and clear benefits of an independent news service in national sign language (Product), how a fair yet profitable subscription price is determined (Price), through which appropriate platforms and channels it is offered (Place), and how the target audience is actively convinced to pay for the news (Promotion).

### 5.1. Product

According to the results of DJE surveys and various (academic) studies, it appears that deaf sign language users prefer an 'independent' news service directly in sign language (rather than through a deaf or hearing sign language interpreter), hosted by a deaf presenter. This news service, operating within a deaf framework, meets the linguistic and informational needs of deaf sign language users:

- Since the modalities of sign language differ significantly from spoken language, synchronising sign language interpretation with the high speech tempo and linguistic complexity of a regular news broadcast (hearing framework) results in low comprehensibility for deaf news consumers.
- Deaf sign language users feel linguistically and culturally identified with a deaf news anchor who is fluent in sign language at a native level and is also a member of the linguistic minority group.
- An 'independent' news service can offer flexibility in publication frequency, ensuring that deaf sign language users receive accessible news faster and in a format that meets their information needs. Hearing people receive news throughout the day via various channels and settings, whereas news broadcasts featuring a sign language interpreter are often limited to once daily. Deaf sign language users are often dependent on only one or very few news sources in sign language.
- The service can also include news from a deaf perspective and cover deaf-related news, allowing deaf sign language users to identify with the content. Additionally, extra formats can be created, such as debates, educational videos, children's and youth content, etc.

The fact that a deaf-led media organisation independently produces this news service on a daily basis ensures a higher quality of service tailored to deaf sign language users and enhances the reliability of the service within the deaf community.

## 5.2. Price

First, a break-even analysis must be conducted to determine the total revenue required to fully cover the total production costs of a news service over one year. In short, this means achieving neither profit nor loss. Subsequently, the market size must be considered: “How many (potential) subscribers are there?” The potential subscription price can be determined by dividing the total required revenue, potentially including the desired profit, by the estimated number of subscribers.

However, in general, the market of deaf sign language users is relatively small, making it challenging for a deaf-led media organisation to generate sufficient revenue, especially for long-term sustainability or reserve building. A business plan (Deliverable D4.3) will explore additional revenue streams (such as donation opportunities, corporate and organisational sponsorships, etc.) to ensure the subscription price (on a monthly or annual basis) remains reasonable. This pricing structure can be transparently communicated to the deaf community to encourage their financial engagement, ensuring continued access to news in an understandable language and format, while also contributing to the empowerment of the deaf community.

To appeal to a broad target audience, various pricing strategies can be employed:

- **Freemium model:** Free content in the form of short news clips (funded via subsidies, sponsorships, or donations), with full content available to subscribers.
- **Premium model:** No free version, or at most a short trial period, for exclusive content (such as interviews, debates, etc.).
- **Introductory offers:** First month free for new subscribers.
- **Special discounts:** Available for students, job seekers, low-income individuals, family subscriptions, etc.

## 5.3. Place

A deaf-led media organisation distributes its content through various channels to ensure maximum visibility:

- **Social media:** Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube can be used for free content (potentially only via “stories” to ensure a short lifespan).
- **Own platforms:** The website can host full content, additional content, and archives, with account-based access for subscribers (potentially also via YouTube). A mobile app could also be an option, though it would be financially costly.
- **Hard-to-reach target groups,** such as elderly individuals and those in institutions, may require alternative distribution channels (e.g., newsletters or collaborations with institutions).

## 5.4. Promotion

Promotional efforts should focus on increasing financial engagement from the target audience, attracting new subscribers, and strengthening brand loyalty:

- **Social media marketing:** Campaign videos, testimonials, and influencer collaborations.
- **Email marketing:** Newsletters featuring exclusive content and promotions.
- **Advertisements and partnerships:** Collaborations with businesses, stakeholders in the deaf community (e.g., NAD), and other institutions (such as interpreter training programmes, deaf schools, research centres, etc.).
- **Events:** Information stands, seminars/conferences, and workshops aimed at enhancing media literacy and increasing community engagement.

## 6. Implementation plan

This section provides a timeline overview of the various actions required to implement the marketing objectives. It is based on a deaf-led media organisation that already produces its own news service in the national sign language, currently offered free of charge (funded through short-term subsidies, its own financial resources, or voluntary contributions), whether on a daily basis or not. This organisation aims to transition to a subscription model to ensure the long-term sustainability of its news service.

The tables below display the months of the first year in which a deaf-led media organisation transitions to a subscription model. The rows outline various marketing actions (abbreviated as MA) linked to the objectives set out in Section 3. Grey indicates the duration of each action, while blue marks the deadline.

### Objective 1: Strengthen communication on key strengths

- **Marketing Action 1.1:** Produce and publish marketing messages (*social media campaigns*) highlighting the unique benefits of the news service provided by a deaf-led media organisation (*Unique Selling Proposition*).
- **Marketing Action 1.2:** Collect and share testimonials from various target audience segments, showcasing the significance and impact of these news services in their daily lives and within the deaf community (*storytelling approach* and *user-generated content*).
- **Marketing Action 1.3:** Maintain engagement with both subscribers and non-subscribers by regularly publishing updates, including messages and videos from previous marketing actions (*regular updates*).

## Objective 2: Increase brand visibility

- **Marketing Action 2.1:** Conduct research and engage in dialogue with non-viewers and hard-to-reach audiences, as well as other potential target groups such as educational institutions, researchers, businesses, and other organisations (*expanding reach*).
- **Marketing Action 2.2:** Identify solutions to improve (technical) access to these news services and enhance their visibility on the internet and search engines (*SEO and accessibility optimisation*).
- **Marketing Action 2.3:** Launch a campaign to reach these target audiences (*market development*).

## Objective 3: Invest in media literacy and deaf empowerment

- **Marketing Action 3.1:** Develop a vision statement and a PR toolkit. Following this, engage in discussions with various influencers (*influencer collaborations*), relevant stakeholders, businesses, and organisations, establishing partnerships to develop an awareness campaign (*advocacy partnerships*).
- **Marketing Action 3.2:** Organise events as part of the awareness campaign (*educational initiatives*).

## Objective 4: Encourage purchasing behaviour among followers

- **Marketing Action 4.1:** Determine the current market size based on existing viewers and followers and identify the various platforms to reach them for communication about subscriptions (*market penetration*).
- **Marketing Action 4.2:** Determine the market price for a monthly and/or annual subscription (*freemium model*). Explore the possibilities for special discounts.
- **Marketing Action 4.3:** Assess the financial and production capacity for offering exclusive membership benefits (*exclusive benefits*).
- **Marketing Action 4.4:** Develop a video or written statement providing a transparent explanation of the pricing structure (*transparent financial model*).
- **Marketing Action 4.5:** Launch communication efforts around subscription plans and offer incentives for new subscribers (*trial periods and discounts*).

## Objective 5: Enhance audience, community, and allies' engagement

- **Marketing Action 5.1:** Create a campaign video encouraging subscribers and loyal customers to convince others to subscribe in support of the deaf community (*referral programmes*). Consider offering a reward, such as a token of appreciation, an invitation to an event hosted by a deaf-led business, or an exclusive behind-the-scenes visit.

- **Marketing Action 5.2:** Enable donations and extend subscriber benefits to donors. Use marketing communication to explain how their financial support contributes to the empowerment and social status of the deaf community by ensuring access to news and information (*Pay-What-You-Can*).
- **Marketing Action 5.3:** Develop a PR toolkit and seek financial support from businesses and NGOs by offering opportunities to promote their advertisements among subscribers (*sponsorships and partnerships*).

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12
Objective 1: "Strengthen communication on key strengths"												
MA1.1												
MA1.2												
MA1.3												
Objective 2: "Increase brand visibility"												
MA2.1												
MA2.2												
MA2.3												
Objective 3: "Invest in media literacy and deaf empowerment"												
MA3.1												
MA3.2												
Objective 4: "Encourage purchasing behaviour among followers"												
MA4.1												
MA4.2												
MA4.3												
MA4.4												
MA4.5												
Objective 5: "Enhance audience, community and allies' engagement"												
MA5.1												
MA5.2												
MA5.3												

Table 5 – Implementation plan

## 7. Budget

Any deaf-led media organisation implementing the above plan must develop a detailed cost estimate for each marketing activity, depending on which actions they wish to carry out. Although costs can vary significantly based on how the organisation executes each marketing action (e.g., number of campaigns, types of events, costs of collaborations with influencers, etc.), the largest—and often the only—cost is the staffing required to successfully implement the marketing activities. Depending on the scope of the tasks, a full-time equivalent employee

may be needed to execute this marketing plan over the course of a year within a deaf-led organisation, with the necessary materials and expertise in video production and distribution.

Potential revenue sources to cover these marketing costs include subsidies, initial sponsorships, or crowdfunding. It may be worthwhile to launch a form of **reward-based crowdfunding**, such as *“the more subscribers we have, the more our news content grows in both volume and frequency”*, to provide the deaf-led media organisation with the breathing room to gain enough subscribers within the first year to generate sufficient revenue, while simultaneously rewarding early subscribers with new content (possibly offering a lower subscription price in the beginning).

## 8. Evaluation

One year after launching the subscription model, an evaluation will be conducted to assess whether the marketing strategy has been successful: *“Are there enough new and retained subscribers to sustain independent news production?”* Continuous evaluation and adaptation of marketing efforts are essential for maintaining customer loyalty and ensuring long-term sustainability.

- **Performance metrics:** Monitor subscription growth, revenue increase, conversion rates, and other key indicators.
- **Community surveys:** Conduct regular polls and surveys to measure customer satisfaction and understand audience preferences and needs.
- **A/B testing:** Experiment with different messaging, pricing models, and content formats to optimise conversion rates.
- **Periodic evaluation and annual review:** Assess progress against SMART objectives and refine the strategy accordingly. This includes determining the frequency of evaluations and necessary adjustments to improve performance.

Based on growing revenue that already covers the production costs of core news services for a deaf-led media organisation, an assessment can be made to determine whether there is financial and production capacity for **product development** (e.g., debates, investigative journalism articles, in-depth interviews) or **diversification** (new products aligned with existing offerings to reach new markets).

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