Spotlight News

Campaign Book Fall 2025

SpotlightNews | HVC Happy Valley Comm

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Client Overview

SpotlightNews

Spotlight News is a news app built specifically for students who want to stay informed without dealing with paywalls, clickbait, or algorithms deciding what they should see. It lets users create their own news feed by choosing from trusted publications, so they see what they know is relevant and reliable. The app also makes keeping up with the news easier and more motivating by using features like streaks, stats, and challenges. Spotlight works with schools to give students affordable access to premium sources, which makes quality journalism more accessible on a student budget. At the same time, it supports the journalism industry by giving 70 percent of its revenue back to publishers, helping make sure credible news outlets can continue doing their work.

Primary Research

We surveyed ourselves and visitors at our tabling event to better understand how the app, website, and concept could improve. These were our key takeaways:

1. Login Problems : The login system can be frustrating. It says it will send a confirmation email, but I never receive it, which makes it hard to sign in consistently.

2. Sports Challenges Visibility : The sports challenges should be easier to find—they feel hidden in the app instead of being featured where users can quickly see them.

3. Repetitive Content : It feels like the same five articles appear every time I open the app. There needs to be a refresh option or a better algorithm to show new stories throughout the day.

4. Feature Navigation : Some of the app's main features, including ones being promoted, are difficult to find and not very user-friendly.

5. Contest Engagement: The sports contests could use updates to make them more engaging and interactive.

6. Homepage Layout : The homepage looks a little disorganized. Adding clear sections or tabs (like "Sports," "Fitness," etc.) that link to specific story types would make it easier to browse.

7. Difficulty Finding Challenges: It's still really hard to locate the sports challenges within the app. They should be easier to access from the home screen.

8. Penn State Content : There's a lack of Penn State stories, even though there's a strong connection to the school. Adding more local content would make the app feel more relevant to students.

9. Hashtag Consistency: Only some sections use hashtags, which makes navigation inconsistent. Using them across all columns could improve organization and discovery.

10. Top Story Layout : The top story takes up too much space on the screen. Making it smaller would allow users to see more stories at once.

Primary Research

11. Clearer Contest Information : There should be more details about sports contests, including what's involved, how to participate, and what the prizes are.

12. MyStats Visibility : The MyStats feature should stand out more during setup. It's useful but feels easy to overlook when first downloading the app.

13. Goal Tracking and Notifications : The streaks and goals idea is great but should be highlighted more—maybe by showing progress when the app opens or sending reminders through notifications or email.

14. School Category in Explore : Adding a "School" category in the Explore section would make it easier for students to find and follow their school's publications.

15. Collaboration Features: The app could add more interactive elements like prizes for sharing content or a chat feature so users can connect and discuss topics.

16. Organized Contest Categories: Contests should be grouped by type—like putting all Pick 'Em games or Predictions together—so users can find what they want faster.

17. News Trivia Idea : A weekly news trivia feature, similar to sports trivia, could make the app more fun. It would encourage users to stay informed and compete with friends.

18. MyStats Display : The MyStats section looks a little crowded. A cleaner design would make it easier to read and use.

19. Onboarding Interests : When first downloading the app, it would be helpful to search for and select news outlets during the interest-selection process.

20. Easier Platform Access: It would be nice to jump directly to my chosen platforms instead of scrolling through all the others first.

Primary Research

21. Limited Contests: Right now, there are only two contests—and both are closed. There should be more frequent or ongoing contests to keep users engaged.

22. Lack of Contest Explanations : The contests aren't really explained within the app. Adding short descriptions or "how it works" sections would help new users understand what to do.

The feedback shows that the app can feel frustrating and hard to use at times, especially when it comes to logging in and finding important features. Navigation is not always intuitive, with challenges, contests, and promoted tools feeling hidden rather than easy to access. The homepage also feels cluttered, and seeing the same articles repeatedly makes the experience less engaging.

Features meant to keep users motivated, like MyStats, streaks, and goals, are useful but not highlighted enough to make an impact. Adding clearer organization and more school-specific content would make the app feel more relevant and easier for students to stick with.

Situation Analysis

Before HVC, our client had many connections with Penn State but lacked an audience base. Which is why we identified building brand trust among our target audience as our main goal.

Their Penn State publications include The Daily Collegian, Onward State, StateCollege.com, etc.
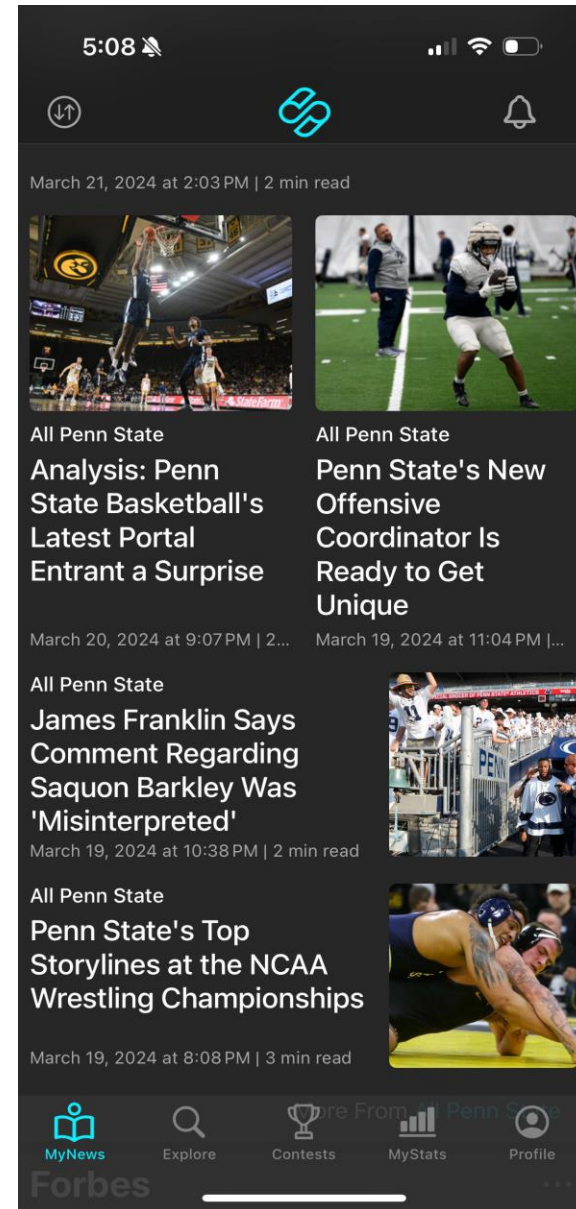
SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- Strong, targeted, and focused website copy
- Consistent brand image across platforms
- Consistent posting on X
- Advertising caters toward college student interests (sports challenges, prizes, etc.)
- Tagged advertisements by student publications
- Interaction with partnered publications online

WEAKNESSES

- Lacking Instagram posts and followers
- Little engagement on Instagram and X (likes, comments, and shares)
- Instagram graphics lack clarity and eye-catching elements
- Unique elements aren't highlighted (streaks, goals, prizes)
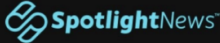
OPPORTUNITIES

- Leverage Instagram content to increase presence among college students
  - Consistent posting
  - Tailored messages (focus on accessibility for college students + unique aspects of app)
- Increase engagement by incorporating hashtags and captions that elicit comments
- Collaborate with student influencers to increase visibility and connection

THREATS

- Other organizations with the same name
  - Spotlight PA, Spotlight News in NY, NJ Spotlight News, Spotlight Delaware
- Student News Source/College News Source app
- News publication apps and websites (NYT, Washington Post, ESPN)

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Target Personas

Barron Angeles
First-Year College Student

SpotlightNews

Age: 18 years	Country United States
Sex: Male	Education: Undergraduate Student
Relationship Status: Single	Occupation: Student

BIOGRAPHY

Barron is a freshman in college majoring in sports business. Energetic and driven, he's passionate about sports, teamwork, and media. He dreams of working in sports broadcasting or management. Outside class, Barron plays intramural flag football, attends campus games, and follows professional sports news and analysis closely. He also enjoys cooking, playing video games, and working out.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Land a broadcasting internship
- Become a professional sports broadcaster
- Gain on-field access at his college football games
- Win his fantasy league

NEWS CONSUMPTION

Barron stays updated through sports media outlets, YouTube highlights, and X (Twitter) updates from athletes and commentators. He follows ESPN, Bleacher Report, and local sports pages for real-time coverage. While sports dominate his interests, he also checks trending news on TikTok and Instagram to stay informed about broader campus and cultural topics.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

PERSONALITY

Creative — Methodical

Sentimental — Thoughtful

Introvert — Extrovert

SKILLS

Video Editing	●●●●○○
Writing	●●●●○○
Sports Analysis	●●●●○○
Social media	●●●●●○

TASTES AND HOBBIES

SPORTS   VIDEO GAMES   EXERCISE   SOCIAL MEDIA   COOKING

Emma Kruse
Third-Year College Student

SpotlightNews

Age: 20 years	Country United States
Sex: Female	Education: Undergraduate Student
Relationship Status: Single	Occupation: Student

BIOGRAPHY

Emma is a 20-year-old college student studying Public Relations. Outgoing and curious, she balances classes, a part-time job, and campus involvement. She loves staying current on social issues, fashion, and pop culture through social media. In her free time, she enjoys coffee dates, concerts, and creating content for Instagram.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Land a PR internship.
- Maintain a strong GPA.
- Grow her social media.
- Build professional connections.

NEWS CONSUMPTION

Emma generally consumes news through social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, favoring short, visual, and influencer-shared content. She often gets headlines from news apps or trending topics, prioritizing stories on social issues, pop culture, and lifestyle over traditional political coverage.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

PERSONALITY

Creative — Methodical

Sentimental — Thoughtful

Introvert — Extrovert

SKILLS

Technology	●●●●●○
Writing	●●●●●○
Graphic Design	●●●●●○
Social media	●●●●●○

TASTES AND HOBBIES

COFFEE   FASHION   TRAVEL   SOCIAL MEDIA   CONCERTS

HVc Happy Valley Comm

Target Personas

Competitor Analysis

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

COMPANY NAME: VOLV

FOUNDED BY: PRIYANKA VAZIRANI

APP PURPOSE

Volvs mission is to give 9-second quick Ai written snippet of the news. They share the same "customising your feed" aspect they main difference is they made the app feel like a "Tiktok" for news, which is really appealing to the college aged, gen-z who want their news fast. This in itself the quick and simple consumption of media is definitely a threat in the gen-z news space. Volv also allows the interaction aspect that I think a lot of Genz strive for.

SOCIAL MEDIA / PUBLIC PERSPECTIVE

- strong following
- consistent posting
  - posts the tagline posts (ex 1)
    - promotes downloads
- ex 1

WHY ARE THEY A COMPETITOR

I chose this app because their main target audience is Gen-Z. The App purpose is a little different, and Spotlight and Volv do not share the same mission but it is definitely a threat due to the sharing of a target audience fro a news app.

WHAT SPOTLIGHT DOES WELL

- Has authentic, verified journalism
- Has that sports competition aspect
- Local and college focus
- transparent sourcing
- NO AI

TAKEAWAYS

Volv wins on ultra-fast consumption, trend matching and handling the extremely small gen-z attention span.
Spotlight's strengths are depth, local/college publications, and trust.

I think there is a good medium with these to help push Spotlights mission of giving truly authentic news, and keeping the new generation informed while also tailoring to that instant gratification aspect of the new generation.

## COMPETITOR ANALYSIS: YAHOO NEWS

Stand Outs: App Perspective

- Categorizes curated feed by trending stories and top headlines, not by time posted
- Can search by article category in app
- Gives AI-powered key takeaways at the end of each article
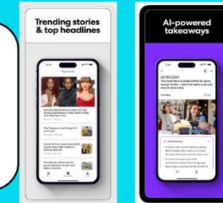
Stand Outs: Social Media Perspective

- Utilizes reel/video format to grab attention
- Large following and consistent posting
- Mixes hard news with soft news on Instagram page
- Posts include question or thought-provoking statement and offers a solution to readers not knowing
  - Ex: "Do you really need to walk 10,000 steps a day?" or "No, the Earth doesn't have two moons right now. Here's what's actually happening.
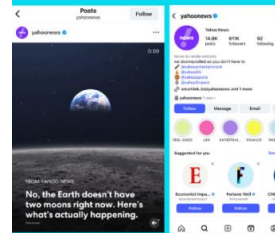
The Competition

- Well-known, longstanding brand
- Same ability to curate based on interest
- Larger social media presence
- More niche, pop-culture centered articles (different but not necessarily better)

How Can Spotlight News Compete?

- Hone in on Gen Z audience
  - Emphasis how traditional news media isn't made for them, but the app is changing that
- Start with consistent posting and diversify post types
  - Consistency creates strong brand image + mix of videos/posts/stories drives engagement
- Focus on importance of being informed
  - Whereas Yahoo and many news outlets have made a shift to be "less serious," Spotlight News can communicate how important it is to stay informed
    - Emphasize confidence derived from reading news, why supporting collegiate newspapers matters, how important the free press is to democracy

Fact Sheet

SpotlightNews

ABOUT THE APP
- FOUNDED BY TAMER MORSEY WHO STUDIED AT JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERISTY
- MADE FOR GEN Z / COLLEGE AGED STUDENTS TO INFLUENCE NEWS LITERACY
- THE APP INCLUDES NEW CHALLENGES AND NFL/COLLEGE SPORTS BRACKETS

FEATURED PUBLICATIONS

1 TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR FEED
CURATE YOUR FEED TO YOUR INTERESTS
50+ PREMIUM PUBLICATIONS / 250+ OTHER PUBLICATIONS

2 NO FEES ONLY NEWS
FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS WITH ACCESS TO PAYWALL PUBLICATIONS

3 GAMES AND CHALLENGES
WEEKLY NFL/COLLEGE FOOTBALL CONTESTS
TRACK YOUR READING AND JOIN CHALLENGES THROUGH YOUR "MY STATS"

REINVENTING NEWS FOR A NEW GENERATION

Creative Executions

Social Media Content

Creative Executions

How can we connect with our audience?

- Students are most likely to discover Spotlight News through platforms they already use daily, especially TikTok and Instagram, where short videos, trends, and relatable student content can make the app feel familiar and relevant
- In person outreach on campus is a major opportunity, whether that is tabling on College Ave, passing out flyers in high traffic areas like the HUB or library, or using QR codes to make downloading the app quick and easy
- Classroom visits stand out as an effective way to reach students, especially in large lectures or journalism and communications classes where staying informed already matters
- Partnering with student clubs and organizations helps Spotlight tap into existing communities rather than trying to build attention from scratch
- Posting interactive content like polls, surveys, and questions gives students a reason to engage while also helping Spotlight understand what type of content they want to see
- Using sports, THON, and campus events as conversation starters makes the app feel more connected to Penn State student life
- Giveaways, free subscriptions, and small incentives increase motivation to download the app and try features like challenges and contests

Creative Executions
Identify and Strategize Audiences

- Journalism and communications students are a core audience since the app directly supports student journalism and staying informed
- First year seminar and entry level classes provide early exposure and help build habits before students lock into their usual news routines
- Student influencers can help normalize the app by showing how it fits into their daily lives rather than presenting it as an ad
- Clubs including PRSSA, business clubs, sports clubs, Greek life, and THON organizations offer direct access to motivated and socially connected students
- THON partnerships create a meaningful incentive by tying app downloads to fundraising and campus impact
- Student run media and platforms like Onward State and Valley Mag help Spotlight feel credible and rooted in the Penn State community
- Campus employees and student workers are another reachable group since they often have downtime where reading articles or doing challenges fits naturally

Overall, focusing on audiences that value information, competition, and campus involvement makes Spotlight News more likely to stick with students long term

Creative Executions

Email Templates (Example below, more in Google Drive)

Subject: Quick Class Presentation on Spotlight News?

Hi Professor [Last Name],

My name is Abby, and I'm an Account Associate in Happy Valley Communications. I'm reaching out on behalf of Spotlight News, a new customizable, bias-free news app. The app removes comment sections and online discourse, letting users focus solely on credible reporting. Students can also choose specific sources, topics, and hashtags to follow—plus participate in sports prediction competitions during football season.

Because the app aligns with the values taught in journalism courses, I was wondering if I could give a brief 5-7 minute presentation to your class. I'm flexible and can come at any time that works for you.

Thank you for considering this!
 [Your Name]
Happy Valley Communications

Creative Executions

Trivia Night Preparation

Pickle's
When: Wednesday nights
Prizes: N/A
Other Info: Great option since it's so popular and attracts large crowds People are more inclined to go out on Wednesday nights compared to Tuesdays Easy and memorable name and strong brand recognition

Zeno's
When: Tuesday 7–9pm
Prizes: Have done themed giveaways for Broadway Trivia in conjunction with State Theatre
Other Info: Not as popular as other bars but has some solid name recognition and a dedicated crowd
Seems to be more popular with locals or older people than the Gen Z population that Spotlight caters towards

A's
When: Tuesday nights
Prizes: ?
Other Info: Their communication was difficult so it may be challenging to work with them when we have a quick turnaround. This place is also not as popular so I would lean towards a different option.

Results

Overall, HVC gave Spotlight News feedback to develop their app, content for social media, new brand awareness among students, and opportunities to connect with their target audience. We secured 40+ signups at our successful tabling event, and provided our client with more research than we had originally projected. We made a good dent in our goal towards 1000 signups, and we're proud to have established the foundation of a fruitful communications partnership with Spotlight News.
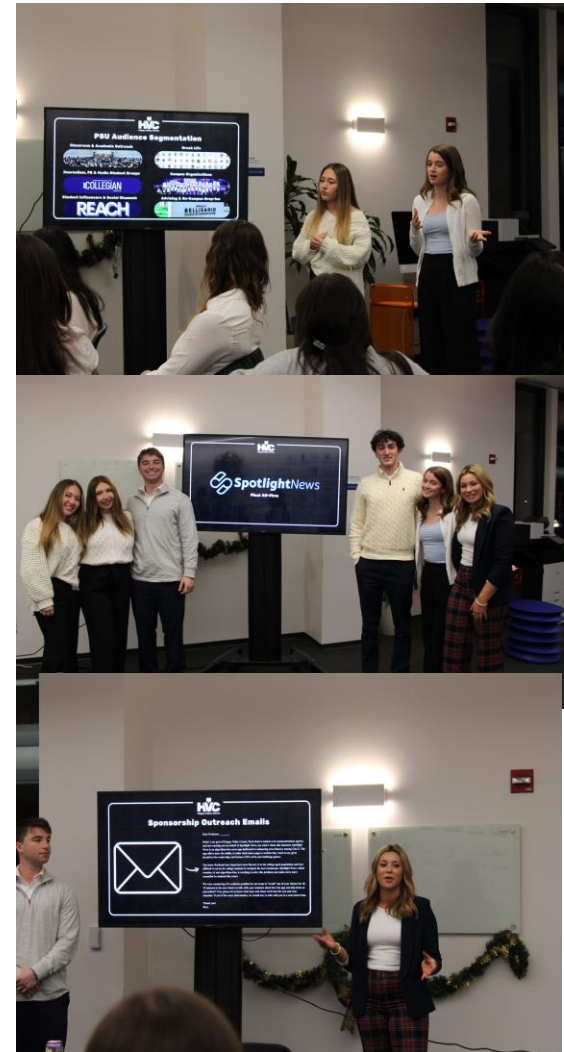
Transition Plan

HVC has provided Spotlight News with content that can be used moving forward, including social media materials and resources developed for a Trivia Night activation. In terms of communication efforts, HVC improved Spotlight News's ability to directly connect with its audience by helping strengthen outreach and engagement strategies. HVC also delivered a comprehensive handover document to ensure continuity and clarity for future use. Overall, HVC achieved the client's goals by conducting primary research on Spotlight News's audience, helping drive user sign-ups, and developing foundational communications tailored specifically to the Penn State community.

Spotlight Client Handover Book.docx