



Echobox

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Publishing Trends Report 2024

With insights from the world's leading publishers, including The Guardian, The Telegraph, Slate, Infobae and South China Morning Post

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Foreword

Antoine Amann

Founder & CEO, Echobox



Ever since Echobox was founded, our goal has been to use the latest innovations in artificial intelligence to offer businesses the most advanced automation on the market.

We're proud to say that over 2,000 businesses around the world rely on Echobox every day. We automate the distribution of over 40 million stories each year on social networks and newsletter emails.

Echobox Social offers pioneering automation for social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn, while **Echobox Email** is our cutting-edge email and newsletter software. We've engineered all Echobox products from the ground up using the most advanced AI. Our principal aim is to save businesses valuable time whilst growing their audiences.

A lot of research takes place at Echobox. We pride ourselves on our strong focus on science-driven innovation. Our technical advisor, Prof. Zoubin Ghahramani, led the Engineering Department at the University of Cambridge. Our CTO, Dr Marc Fletcher, completed his PhD in Quantum Physics, also at the University of Cambridge. Our data science team consists of some of the most talented researchers in our field.

Our white papers aim to share some of our findings with you. We hope you find them useful and we're always happy to hear your feedback.

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Introduction from the CEO

We founded Echobox more than a decade ago with a distinct vision for the publishing industry: that it could thrive by working synergistically with AI technology specifically designed for its needs. Indeed, its future would be tied to how well it adapted to a technological landscape that moved at an incredible pace.

Since that point, social networks have come and gone and new ways of distributing content have become commonplace. Publishers have equipped themselves with staff whose expertise can help them reach the largest possible audience for their content.

But the need for carefully deployed, intelligent AI within the industry has only grown. According to our survey, 73% of respondents believe that AI will be more important to them this year than last. Fully optimizing content for an overwhelming number of social networks is something that requires levels of data analysis beyond human ability. Moreover, as Facebook continues to pivot away from news content and towards video, overstretched social media, audience and editorial teams are being pressed to do more (with new formats, on new platforms) with less.

We're enormously proud to help over 2,000 of the world's leading publishers augment and automate their posting on social media as well as their newsletter creation. And the value of Echobox's AI — built from the ground up for publishers' workflows and implemented bespoke to each individual business — is clear: giving over-stretched teams that most precious of commodities — time.

2023 was a difficult year for publishers. Nevertheless, we remain committed to our vision and ready to help publishers adapt and succeed in the coming years.

Antoine Amann
Echobox CEO and co-founder





Summary

Our Publishing Trends Report was produced in collaboration with over 100 publishers around the globe, from market specific to global publications. Here are our major findings:

- **Declining Facebook traffic** was the biggest challenge in 2023 for 63% of those surveyed. **Increasing this traffic** is a priority for 68%. In total, 72% of respondents have been hit with **drops in Facebook traffic**.
- **More followers and engagement** is a focus for 39%. In line with this, **video creation will become much more important** this year for 61%.
- **Newsletter offerings continue to grow**. 61% of respondents will increase the amount of newsletters they send.
- **AI will be more important this year** for 73% of those surveyed. Generative AI technology is being experimented with by an increasing number of publishers. 69% of respondents reported using either **ChatGPT or DALL-E** over the past year, up from 48% in 2023.



Introduction

2023 was a hugely disruptive year for the publishing industry, as Facebook's decision to deprioritize news content really began to bite.

Our analysis shows that the average publisher not using AI to increase share performance on social media, experienced a **decline in Facebook traffic of 40%**. Such numbers are clearly unsustainable and have had the principle effect of changing how publishers view the platform. While Facebook remains the single most important source of social media referral traffic for publishers (an average of 8% of total traffic in 2023 compared to 0.7% for X and 0.2% for Instagram) it is now, more than ever, seen as first among equals.

Publishers remain focused on increasing referral traffic, but they are also aiming for other targets — engagement and retention in particular — that can help create brand loyalty and enable monetization further down the line.

Video is becoming more and more important to publishers as a means to grow their presence on platforms such as TikTok and **YouTube**, as well as adapt to Facebook and Instagram and draw in advertising revenue.

For retention, direct channels such as email newsletters are still an area of growth, with publishers looking to refine their strategies and increase their offerings in tandem. WhatsApp has also seen an explosion in popularity, as a means to bypass social media algorithms and bring audiences closer with curated content.

Ultimately, as the publishing landscape becomes more and more complex, AI solutions which optimize performance and streamline workflows will become an increasingly central component within the industry. Keeping on top of a multitude of social media platforms with variegated content as well as a growing number of newsletters is a huge challenge.

Solutions like Echobox, specifically designed for publishers and tailored to each client will help enable them to focus their efforts on the kinds of innovation that will stand them in good stead for the future.

Boost your social traffic

Contact us today and find out how Echobox can help you save time and increase social traffic by an average of 36%.

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Methodology

The Publishing Trends Report was produced with the input of over 100 of the world's leading publishers. Respondents included publications from six continents — North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania. They range from some of the largest names in global news media, to smaller industry-specific and regional publications.

Argentina	China	Hong Kong	Mexico	Singapore
Australia	Czech Republic	Hungary	Netherlands	Slovakia
Austria	Denmark	India	Nigeria	Spain
Belgium	Finland	Italy	Norway	Switzerland
Brazil	France	Latvia	Pakistan	UAE
Bulgaria	Germany	Lithuania	Philippines	United Kingdom
Canada	Greece	Luxembourg	Poland	United States
Chile	Guatemala	Mauritius	Portugal	



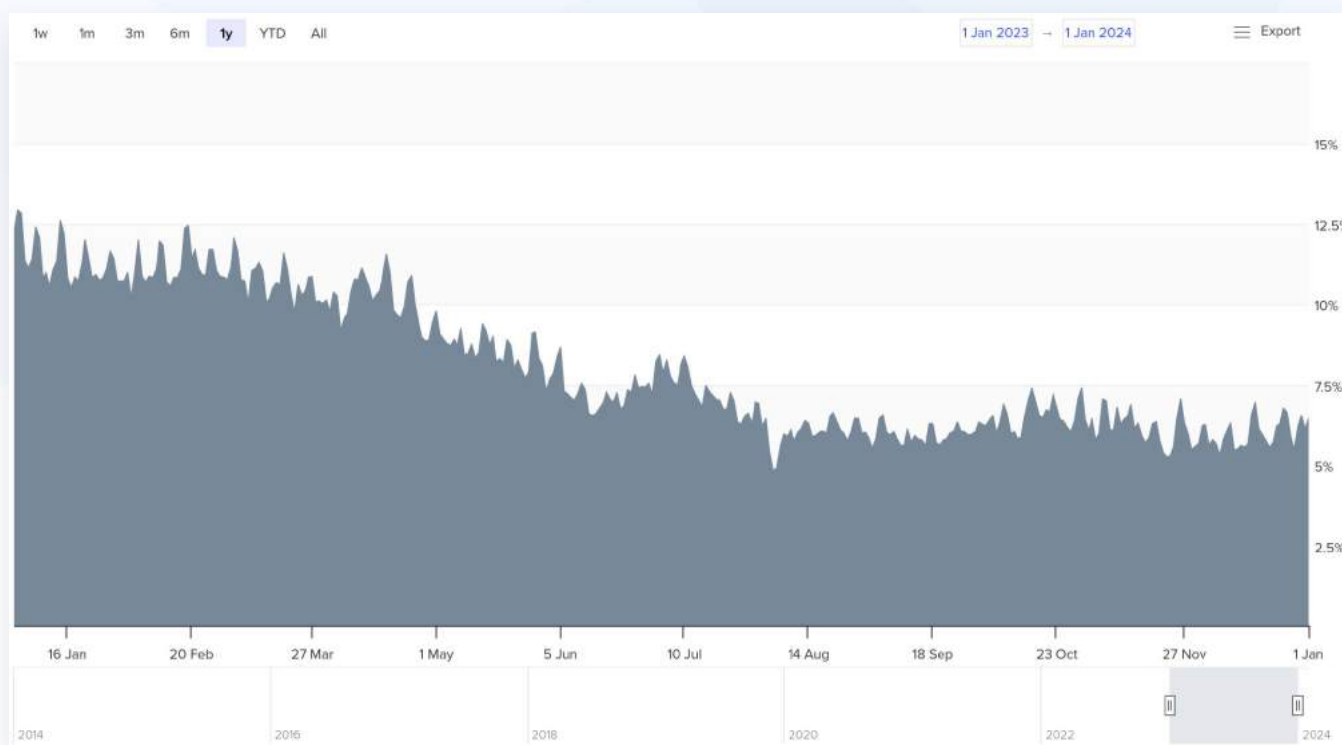
Results

The impact of traffic decline intensifies

The relationship between the publishing industry and social media networks has always tended to be a loveless affair. But 2023 saw that relationship tested to its limits with a **precipitous decline in referral traffic** from Facebook.

Already, in last year's report, we saw signs of this traffic loss. Meta's battle for market share with TikTok led to heavy investment in its own short-form video format, Reels, while the threat of revenue-sharing legislation in multiple jurisdictions led to its decision to deprioritize news content. The true impact of these decisions became apparent around March of last year, as the decline in traffic started to accelerate.

Echobox's **Social Media Index**, an interactive tool that tracks the percentage of referral traffic coming to publishers' websites from social media networks, shows the decline in Facebook traffic clearly — from over 12% of all referral traffic for publishers on January 1st 2023 to around 6% a year later.



Our survey showed the substantial **anxiety about this traffic loss** industry wide. 63% of respondents reported declining traffic as one of their biggest challenges in 2023, up from 47% last year.

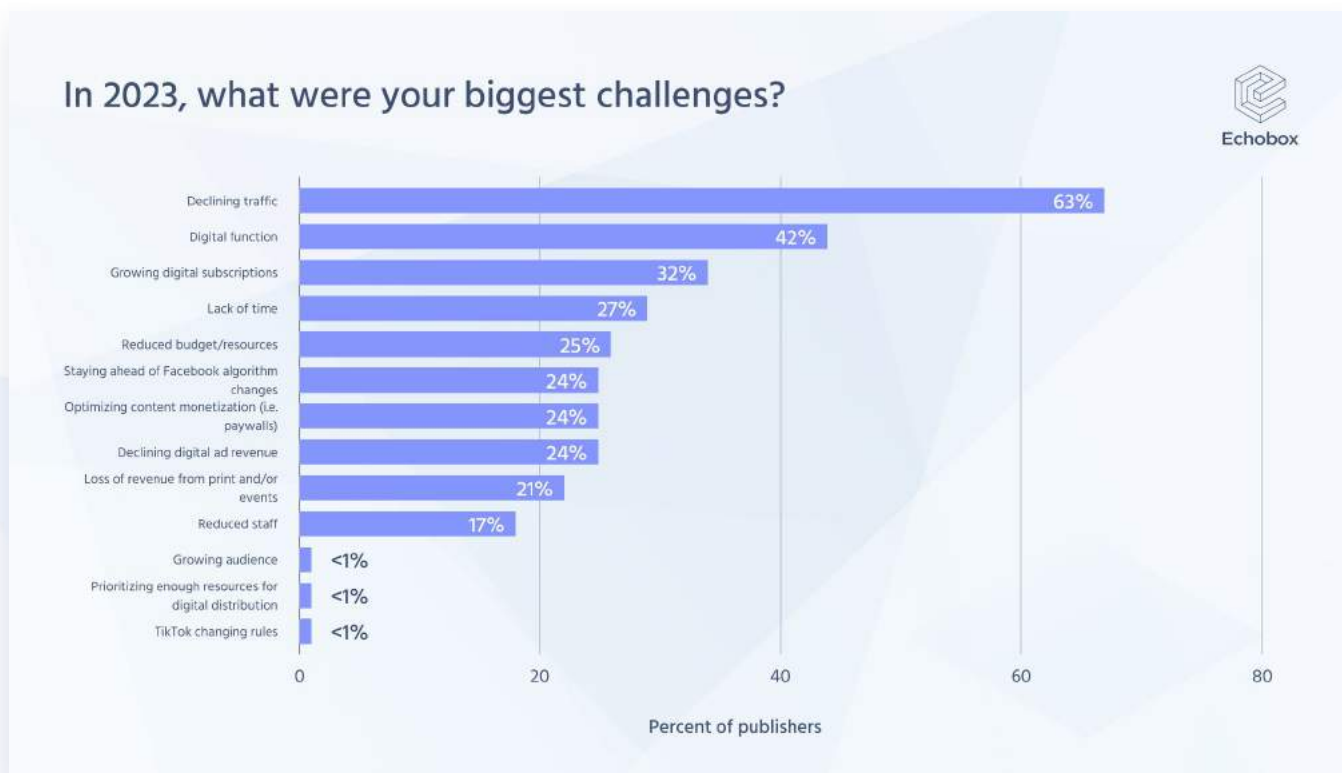


Fig. 1

Moreover, our survey displayed how widespread this decline has been: almost **three-quarters of publishers have experienced traffic loss from Facebook.**

Have you been impacted by declining referral traffic from Facebook in 2023?

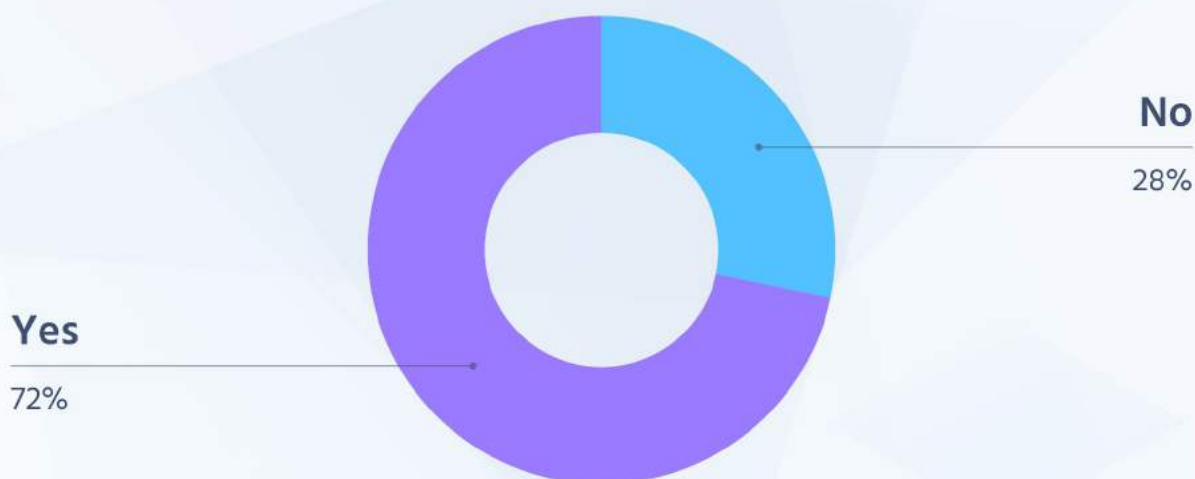


Fig. 2

How are publishers dealing with traffic loss?

Publishers are experimenting with different strategies to address the decline in Facebook traffic. Here are some of the strategies reported in our survey:

- **Posting to new platforms** was an answer mentioned by 19% of respondents, although the broad range of answers received indicate that there is not yet consensus on which services prove most effective. Instagram, Reddit, Flipboard, Threads, Bluesky and Google Discover were all mentioned.
- Testing **different post formats and sharing strategies** was another response by 10%. Varying the percentage of link shares, placing links in the comments and increasing the number of image posts were all reported. Our own studies have found that sharing an image post with a link in the comments can have a significant impact on engagement — in some cases even doubling it.
- **Newsletters and subscriptions** were also a major focus for 4% of publishers looking for a more direct replacement for audiences lost to traffic declines. This was reflected in our findings about the continued growth of newsletters (see below).
- 3% of publishers have switched focus to **video content** as they adapt to Facebook on its own terms as well as optimize for Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

Declining Facebook traffic is also having knock on effects in other areas. Respondents citing **reduced staff** as a major issue in 2023 increased nearly sixfold from 3% in last year's report to 17% this year. Likewise, **declining digital ad revenue** and **reduced budget/resources** were both cited by 13% of respondents last year. This year, those figures have risen to 24% and 25% respectively.

It is no surprise, therefore, that **increasing traffic is a preoccupation** for the coming year for two-thirds of publishers.

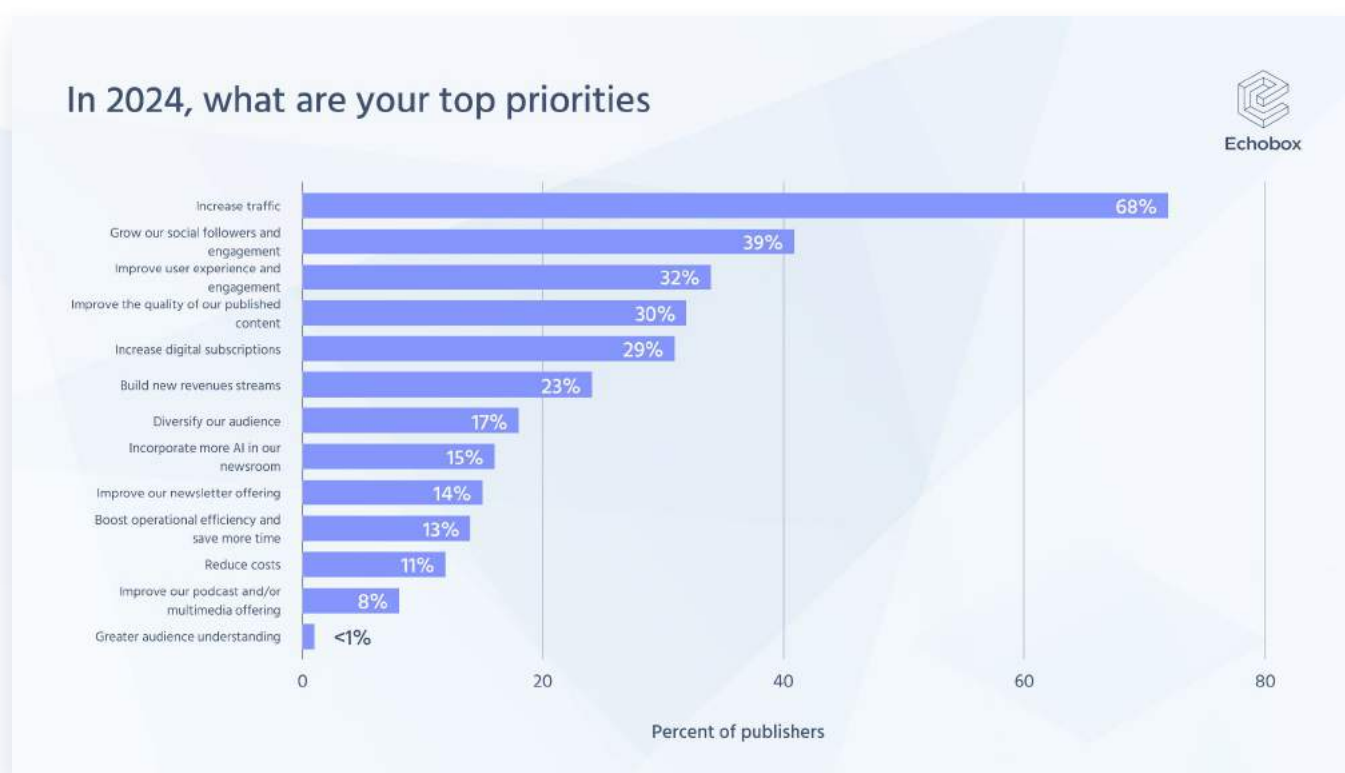


Fig. 3

Looking below the headline figure, a few things stand out. Unsurprisingly, **building new revenue streams** saw a significant uptick in responses — from 13% last year to 23% this, while **improving newsletter offerings** has increased from 6% to 14%.

Taken together, these results show the level of uncertainty within the industry as the contours of an industry-wide strategy to counteract traffic loss begins to coalesce.

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Meta's decision to sideline news publishers, as well as the continued influence of TikTok has had a seismic impact on the publishing industry and ruptured the status quo ante. However, our survey also indicates the impressive speed at which publishers are innovating.

Echobox can reduce traffic loss from Facebook

On average, publishers not using Echobox experienced a decline in Facebook traffic more than four-times greater than those who do. Get in touch today to find out more.

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Video and the age of engagement

The effects of Meta's pivot to video was already evident last year. This year, however, **video content has seen an explosion of interest**. The number of respondents indicating that video will be more important in the coming year has grown from half in 2023 to almost two-thirds now.

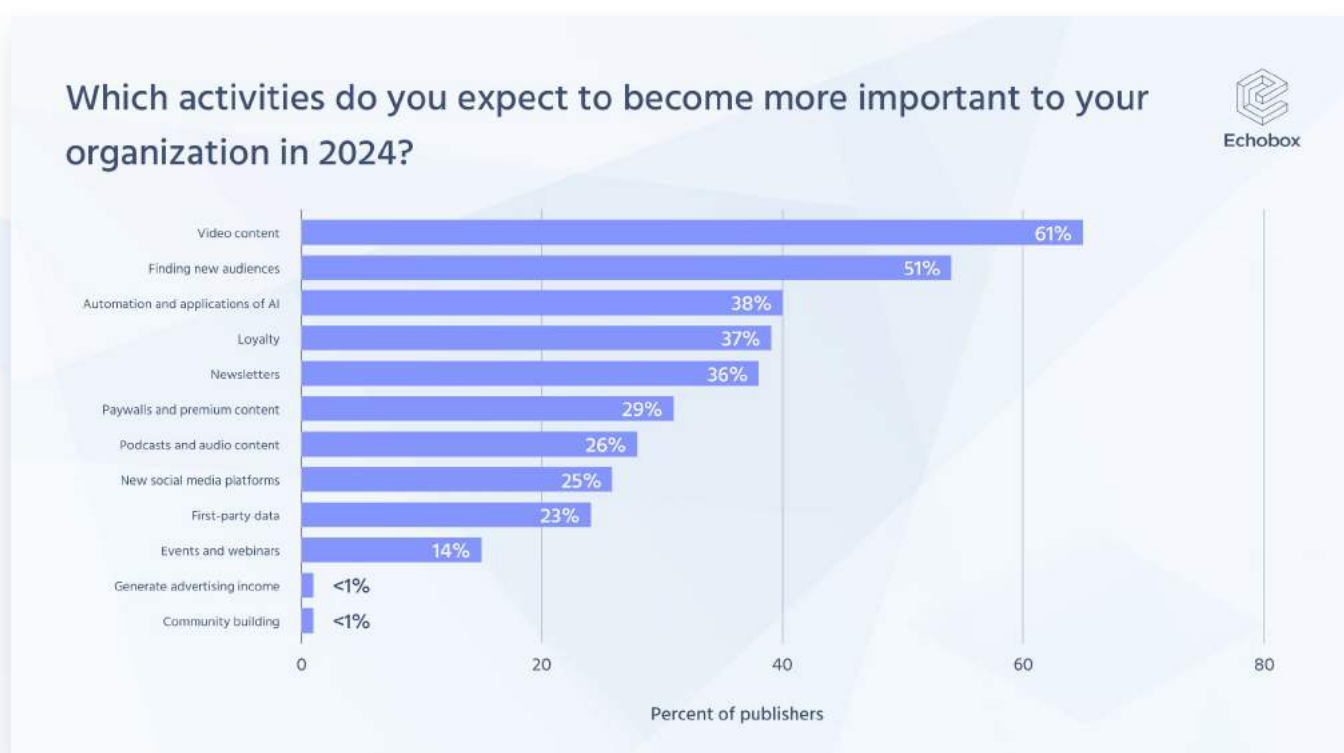


Fig. 4

We know from our own research that **video posts can produce significantly higher engagement rates than link posts**. When we looked at **video view rates on Facebook** at the end of 2022, we found them to be a full 10 percentage points higher than CTR on link posts. More recently, we have done an analysis of **different post types on Instagram**, which found that in absolute terms video produces more impressions, comments and likes than text posts.

The challenge is in converting this engagement into a source of revenue.

Advertising on video is an obvious means of revenue generation, with many platforms investing in functionalities that can help content creators monetize their content — and therefore stimulate supply.



The pressure is on, therefore, for publishers to produce **more high-quality video content** and capitalize on **increased ad spending**. Looking at Fig. 3 above, this perhaps helps to explain the relatively large number of respondents who are hoping to **improve the quality of their published content** this year.

Paywalls also appear to be of enduring interest with 29% of respondents, a figure virtually unchanged from last year. Likewise, as we will see below, newsletters are another important activity for 36% of those surveyed – 10 percentage points higher than last year.

28% increase in click rate over Mailchimp

On average, publishers switching to Echobox Email from Mailchimp see a 40% increase in open rate and a 28% increase in click rate.

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This focus on engagement is also borne out when we look at the social platforms that publishers will prioritize.

Which of the following social media platforms, if any, will be MORE important to your organization this year compared to 2023?

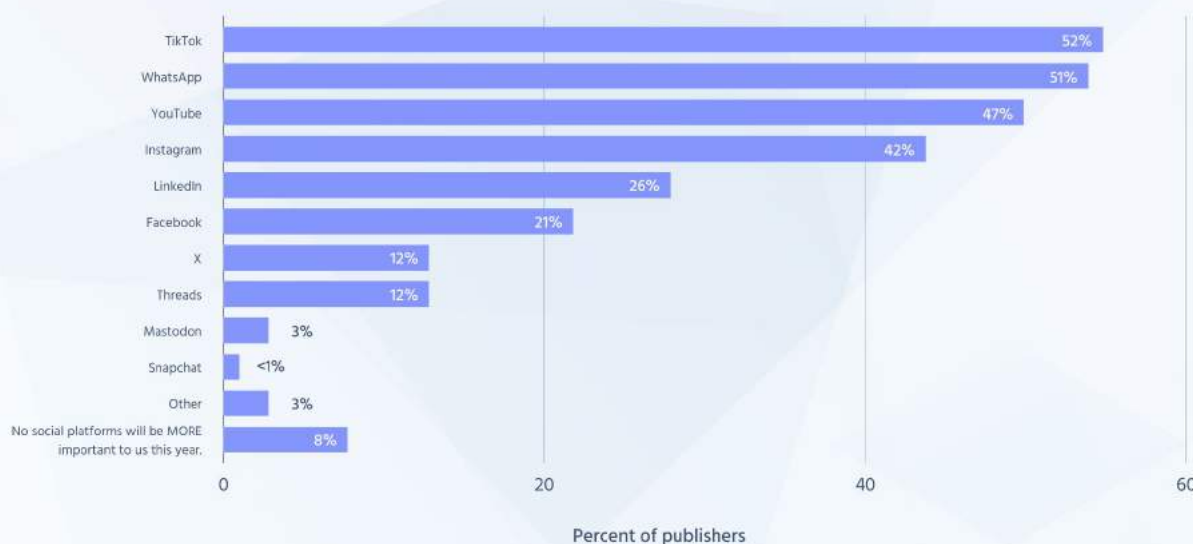


Fig. 5



Video-first platforms such as **TikTok**, **Instagram** and **YouTube** are a key area of focus according to those surveyed, chiming with our respondents' stated aim of **growing social followers and engagement** as per Fig. 3. YouTube, in particular, has seen a surge in interest from publishers compared to last year — 47%, up from 38%. At the same time, fewer respondents felt that “legacy” platforms such as Facebook and X would be more important to them this year.

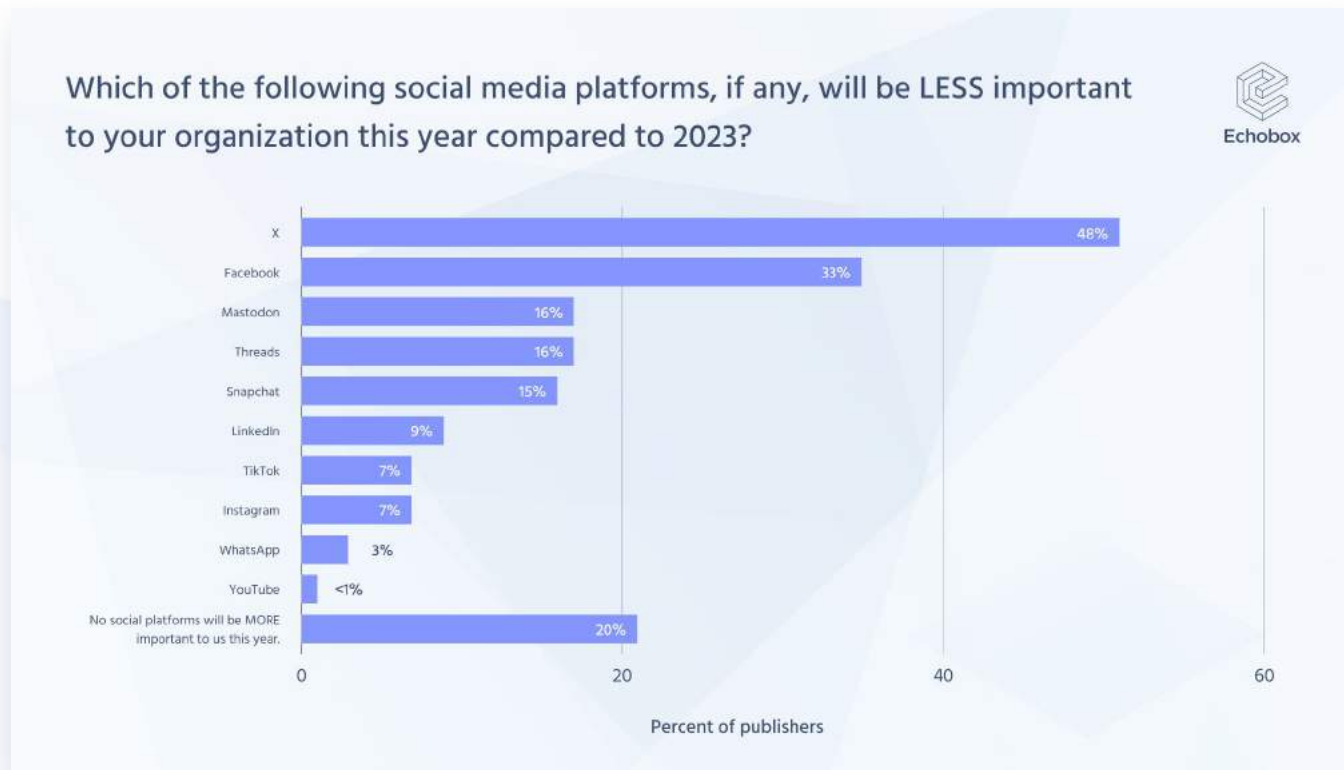


Fig. 6

X in particular has seen a significant decline in interest among publishers, with nearly half of all respondents indicating that the platform would be less important to them this year. Interestingly, services that positioned themselves to capitalize on X's well known problems such as Mastodon and Threads have not seen enough enduring traction and publishers are reducing their focus on them, obviously not seeing them as currently strong enough to be worth their while.

Set different metrics as goals in Echobox

Some publishers switching their target metric from traffic to engagement have seen it double as Echobox adapts its sharing strategy to maximize performance.

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Owned channels are important this year

Circumventing social media algorithms, more refined curation and greater control of reader journeys mean owned channels such as email are a continued area of investment for publishers.

Email newsletters will continue to be an area of expansion for the publishers surveyed.

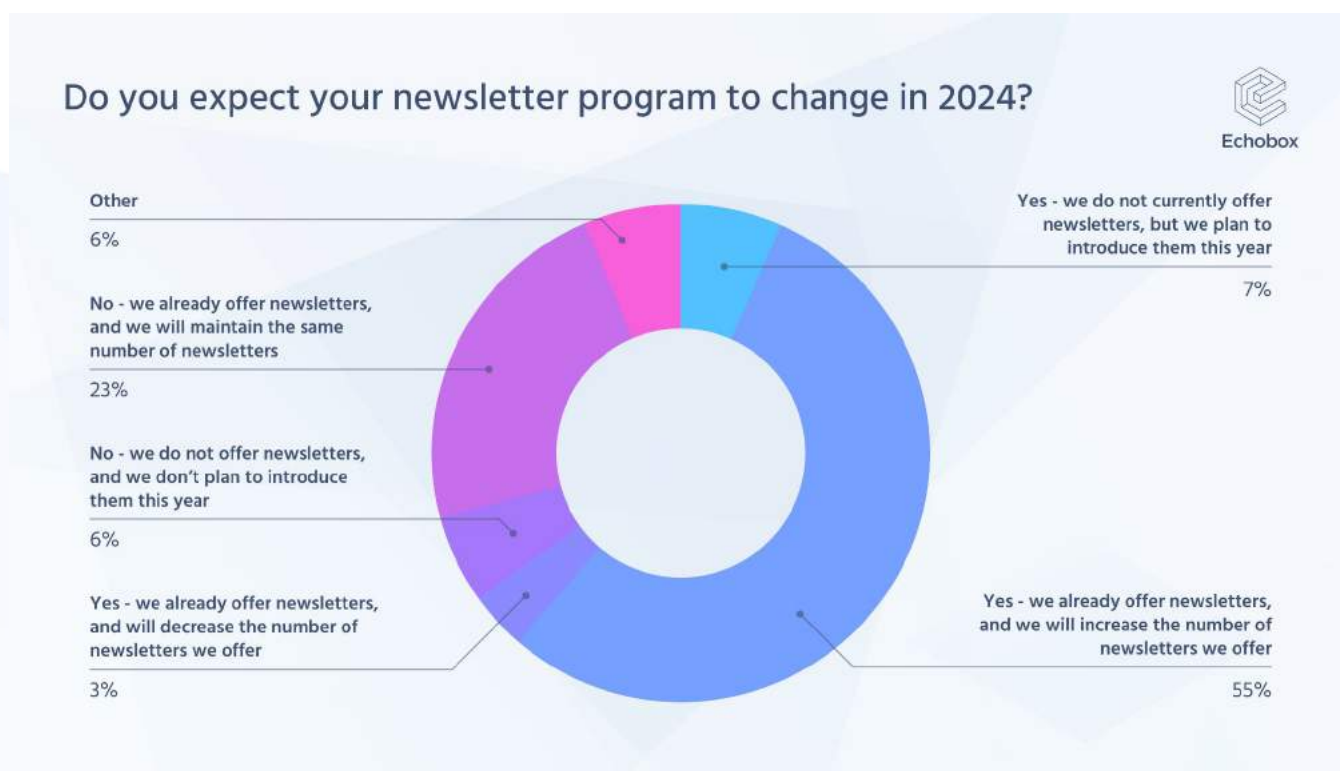


Fig. 7

In total, 62% of our respondents indicated that they would **increase the number of newsletters that they sent out** — an increase of around four percentage points on last year. Looking at the data in more detail, we see that the number of respondents who already offer newsletters and will increase their number is 11 percentage points higher this year than last — 55% as opposed to 44% — indicating that publishers believe that there is still a lot more to be done with newsletters.

Interestingly, it seems that the prime focus of owned channels like newsletters is retention and monetization rather than any concern about third-party data. Almost three-quarters of publishers surveyed reported that they are either **prepared for the imminent demise of third-party cookies**, or do not anticipate any significant effects.

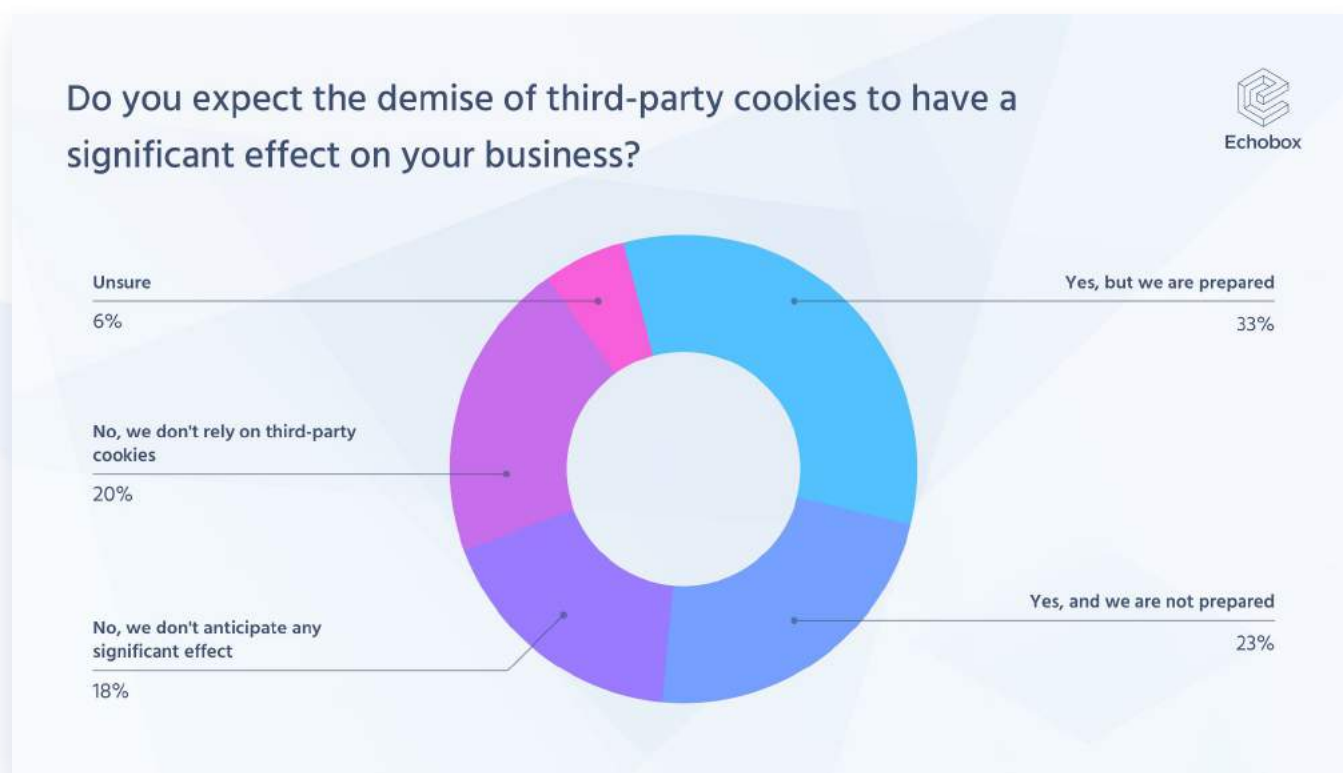


Fig. 8

In contrast, as can be seen in Fig. 4, over a third of publishers believe that **fostering loyalty** among their readers will be more important.

The major story for social media in 2024, according to our survey, is the **emergence of WhatsApp** as a means of content distribution. Half of all of the publishers surveyed indicated that it would be more important to them this year than last.

WhatsApp's Communities and its new Channel feature allows publishers to send content directly to recipients, and have already gained a substantial number of users.

There remains a significant degree of variation in WhatsApp usage for news. According to the latest [Reuters Digital News Report](#), for instance, WhatsApp is the most popular digital

news source in Brazil, used for news by 43% of those surveyed. In Europe, this figure is far lower – 27% in Spain, 15% in France, 14% in Germany and just 9% in the UK. Despite this, publishers have been investing in the platform globally. Even in countries without the widespread adoption of WhatsApp for news, publishers are doing well, with **Reach** in the UK a good example.

AI continues to make headway

A clear majority of our respondents believed **AI would be more important** for them this year, with 57% indicating that it would be important or very important.

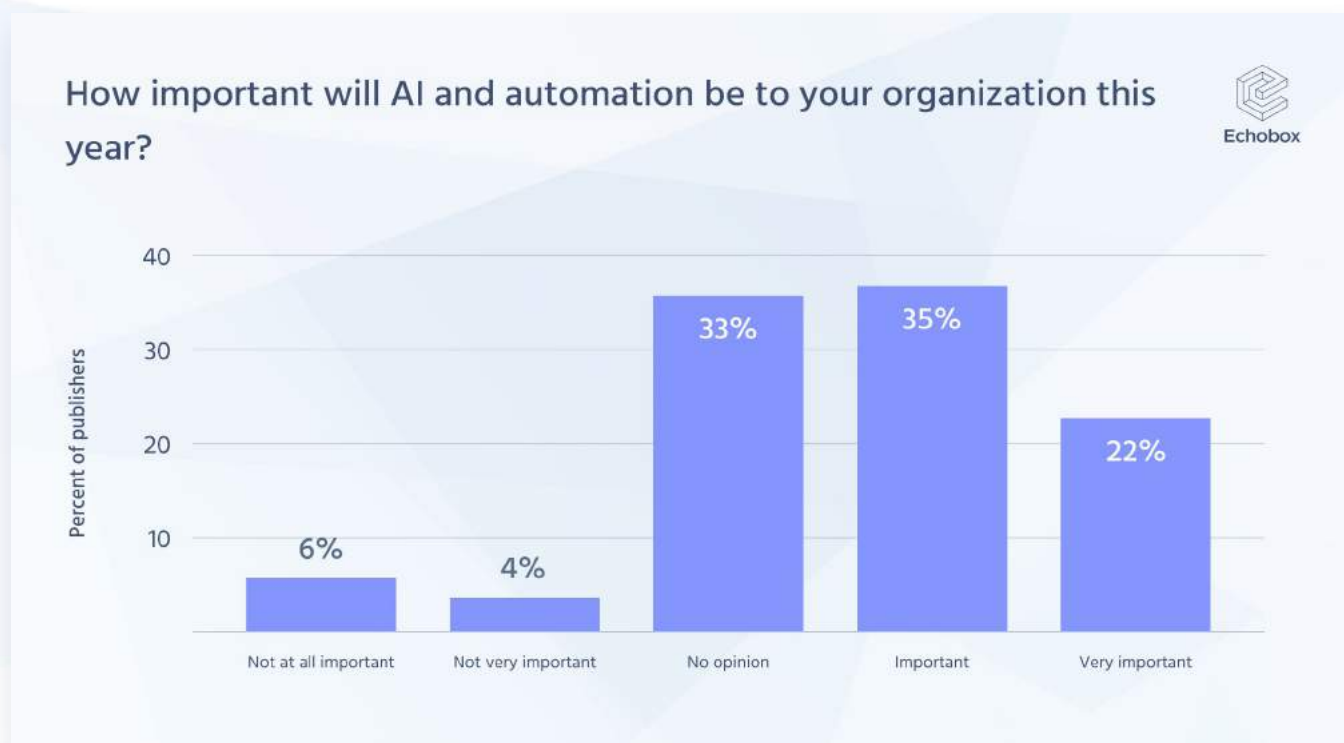


Fig. 9

Asked how this compared with last year, the response was overwhelming: **73% of respondents believed AI would be more important to them this year than last.**



Have you experimented with generative AI programs like GPT-4 or DALL-E over the past year?

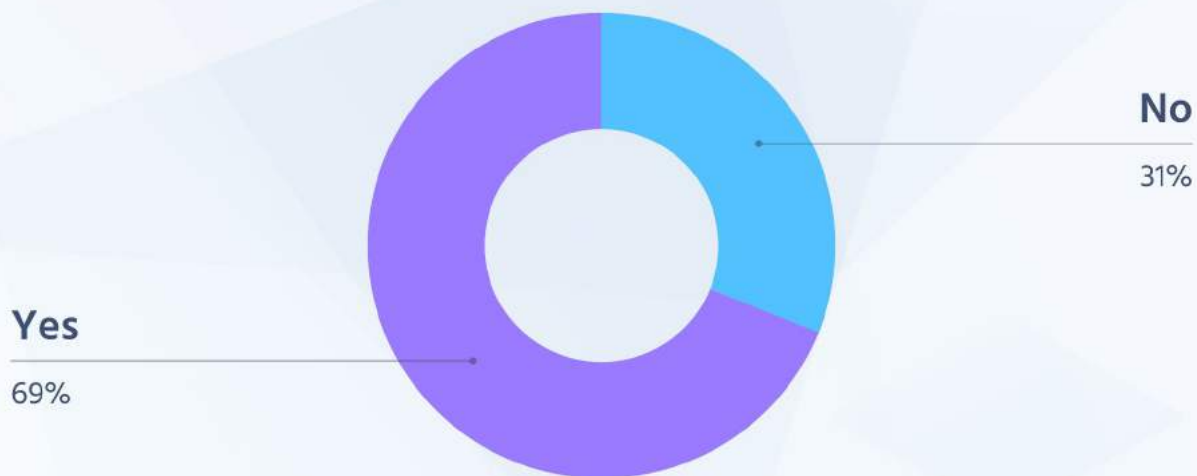


Fig. 10

This will come as little surprise as publishers continue to experiment with innovative AI products and incorporate them into their workflow. Over two-thirds of respondents said that they have experimented with generative AI programmes such as GPT-4 or DALL-E over the past year.



Regarding your response to the last question, how does this compare to last year?

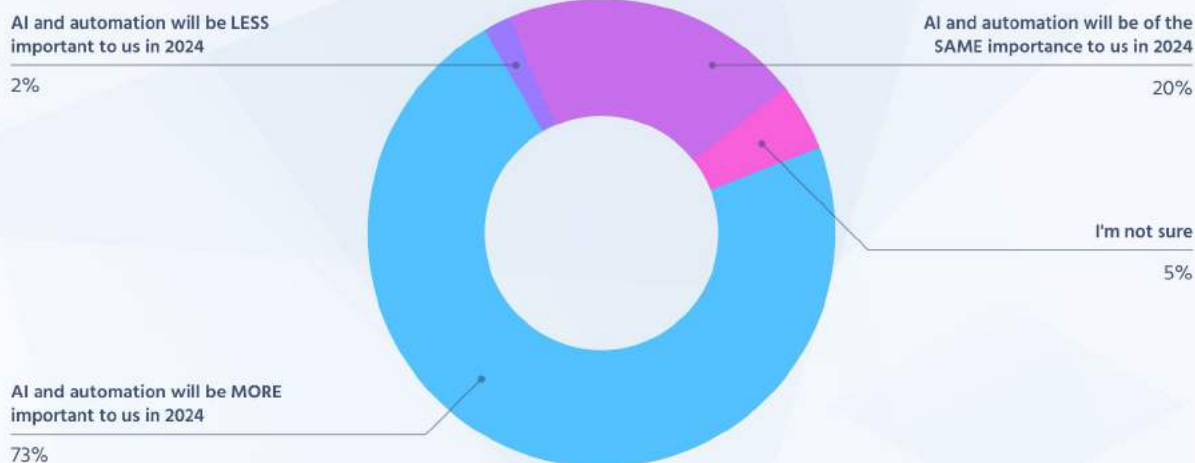


Fig. 11

Nevertheless, according to our respondents, such generative AI technologies are still a distance from becoming fully integrated in the industry. When we asked those surveyed to go into a little more detail about the uses to which they put these programs, the responses were varied and high level, showing that for many they remain useful time savers rather than fundamental components within their work.

How are publishers using generative AI?

- For 9%, generative AI has been deployed in more conceptual areas such as **working up content ideas**, where the programs' ability to summarize large amounts of information succinctly has proven valuable.
- 8% of respondents its use is mainly for relatively minor tasks such as **generating captions, summaries or images for articles**.
- Automating articles primarily for **SEO purposes** was another use case for 2% of respondents.
- Some 1% were even employing GPT-4 to **automate some core content creation** entirely.



Publishers are having to deal with declining Facebook traffic, straitened finances across the industry, and a proliferation of social platforms that publishers are expected to keep on top of. Being able to employ AI to augment or automate elements of content distribution will mean that AI continues to become embedded in the newsroom, enabling publishers to do more with less.

Echobox uses AI technology to reverse engineer social media algorithms and create bespoke sharing strategies accordingly. Not only this, but our ChatGPT integration enables publishers to generate an optimal share message or email subject line at the click of a button.



Conclusion

Our report highlighted that **replacing traffic lost from Facebook remains publishers' main focus**. How this might be achieved, however, is still uncertain. Clearly, the variety of platforms which publishers are aiming to develop a presence on indicates that publishers are spreading their nets wide to understand what works and what doesn't.

A high proportion of our respondents indicated that they would still be **prioritizing traffic generating activities** at the same time as attempting to **boost engagement**. Publishers clearly feel that this is not a zero sum game — that broadening their focus to different platforms and different goals is the most valuable use of their resources, and that investment in one does not mean underinvestment in the other.

The key to success for publishers will be careful strategic thinking around their business priorities as well as their ability to remain agile, changing their approach as the situation dictates.

This means avoiding overreliance on any one platform and understanding the ever-shifting rules of best practice on each social media platform as their algorithms evolve.

Echobox's AI technology can easily take care of posting, using data specific to your audience as well as the industry's as a whole to reverse engineer social media algorithms and increase performance on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn and X.

Focus on the real value-adding activities. Contact us and find out more about what Echobox can do for you, today.

What can Echobox do for you?

Over 2,000 leading media brands use Echobox to power their content distribution.

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THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION OF 2023 SOCIAL MEDIA BENCHMARKS

WHITE PAPER



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SHOULD YOU POST ON FACEBOOK DURING THE NIGHT AND WEEKENDS?

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About Echobox

Echobox is a fast-growing, research-focused technology company. We build innovative technology driven by artificial intelligence that helps online businesses excel in their digital strategies.

Thousands of businesses around the world automate and optimize the distribution of their content and reach billions of people with Echobox each year.

The Echobox team consists of leading academics in the fields of machine learning and data science, as well as a forward-thinking commercial team dedicated to their clients.

Built from the ground up with advanced AI, Echobox's innovative solutions help businesses increase traffic and engagement while saving valuable time.

Echobox Social's pioneering technology is uniquely responsive to any changes made to social media algorithms, constantly monitoring the performance of posts to track and account for variations in optimal timing, audience behaviors, your content streams and more, ensuring that each and every share you make has the best chance of reaching the greatest number of people.

Iterating on the groundbreaking advances made by Echobox Social, **Echobox Email** automatically generates perfect emails and newsletters that are personalized, fully optimized and tested in just seconds. Maximize your click rates while saving precious time with the power of automation.

Join over 2,000 leading businesses on Echobox - request a demo

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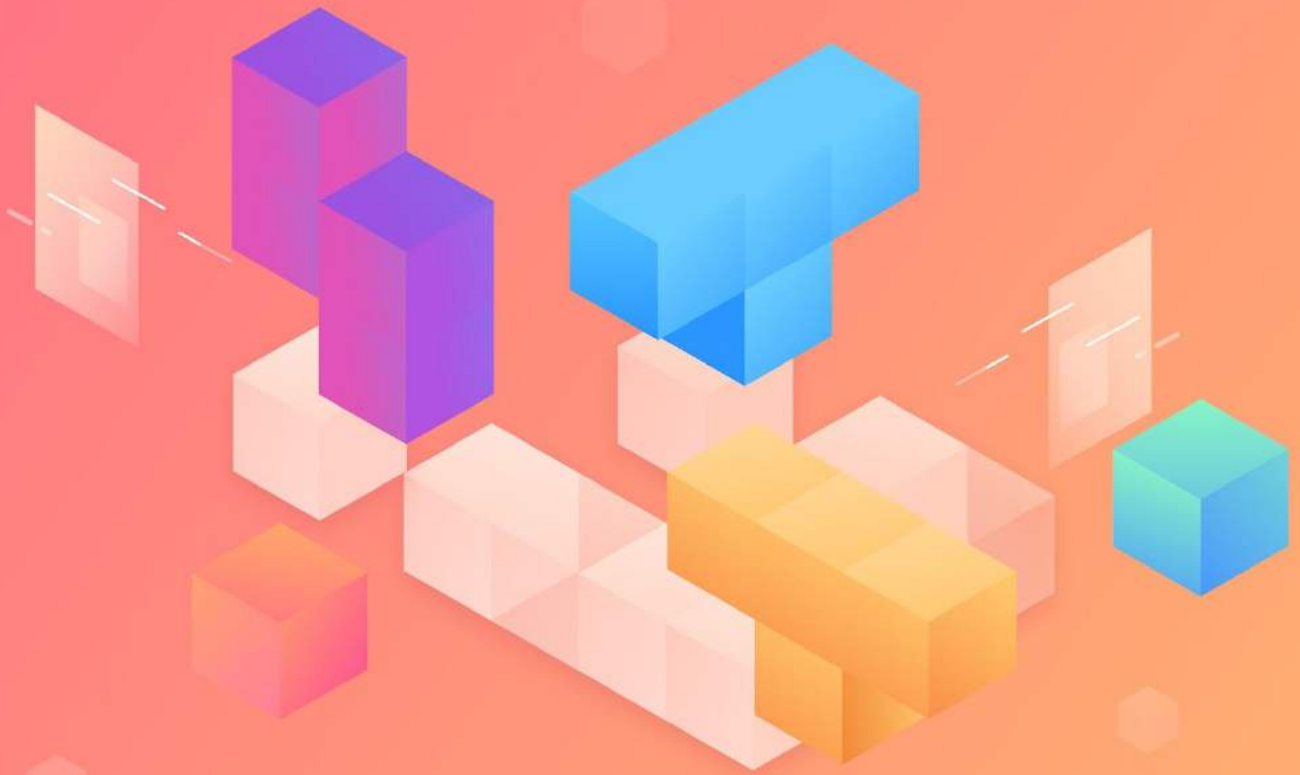
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