

# Oklahoma-based digital news platform relies on artificial intelligence to deliver community-based journalism

An independent news organization based in Oklahoma is using artificial intelligence to create a digital news platform where journalists own a percentage of the company.

The news outlet, [Verified News Network](#), was founded in 2018 by Brittany Harlow, a former television news anchor with experience in radio journalism.

Harlow and her husband, now the chief executive of VNN, [built a digital news platform](#) that [challenges traditional methods of funding local news](#) by giving its contributors a stake (up to 5 percent.) It then relies on human and smart modifiers to filter and verify news.

“Women in particular do not own a lot of news media,” Harlow said. “It’s mostly owned by older white men, and that is something that I feel really reflects in mainstream news, like that is the viewpoint that people are seeing, that’s what’s perpetuated, but in reality there’s a whole lot of other viewpoints.”

The site has three owners after bringing in Rahkiya “Rocky” Brown from New York and Rachael Schuit from Michigan last year.

Through the vesting model, journalists invest into the company through sweat equity and monthly or yearly dues, in return for a percentage of the company and the reward of serving communities.

As owners, journalists Harlow, Schuit and Brown are responsible for producing local stories that empower them as independent journalists and empower their communities whose stories might not otherwise receive coverage.

VNN wants “people to take back control of what kind of news they want to receive, instead of a profit-driven entity making the decisions for you,” which is why their emphasis is local news coverage. While Rocky covers stories about her community in upstate New York and Rachel covers Michigan, the platform looks forward to growth and expanding coverage to all 50 states.

Stories like Schuit’s or Rocky’s, “[Local musician celebrating year’s end with new mixtape](#),” cover in-depth stories about their communities that wouldn’t otherwise air on news outlets owned by media companies that are heavily influenced by sensationalism. Harlow says that the most successful stories offer community perspectives and believes they are the “most popular stories because we are telling them in ways that no one else is telling them and giving voices to people who have been stereotyped and mistreated by authority.”

The pandemic has influenced the way people are consuming media and producing it. There is a demand for easy and accessible information, [The Pew Research Center](#) reports that, “more than eight-in-ten U.S. adults (86%) say they get news from a smartphone, computer or tablet.”

Schuit said that Covid made her think about her future and the kind of lifestyle she wanted and realized she “wanted to be a part of something new, something that is just getting started, I wanted that experience,” resulting in her partnership with VNN.

For Schuit, “it means a lot to be part of an organization that’s committed to doing good journalism and really is committed to putting journalism in the sphere where people are

at, and that's online," she says, "that's really where people are going, they're spending their time scrolling on their phones, it's a futuristic mentality."

The journalists remain committed to upholding the foundation of public service by providing good local stories, opportunities for journalists and verified news.

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