piano | MEDIAHUIS

Inside Mediahuis' 12-month sprint to supercharged advertising ROI

How the right team and tools — including Piano — helped the publisher revisit their ad strategy through a data-centered approach

Leading European media company Mediahuis — behind over 40 of the biggest news, classified and career websites in Belgium and the Netherlands — wanted to create an advertising experience that could match Facebook and Google's level of granularity while offering a level of service and flexibility the giants never could.

They began with a few advantages. To start, in an area with 6.4 million residents, 4.4 million of them — almost 70 percent — are registered Mediahuis readers. This large local audience logs 320 million pageviews per month on the network's sites, a brand-safe environment trusted by readers and advertisers alike. But Mediahuis lacked the data literacy and platform technology it needed to integrate siloed data from each publication. They called on Piano to help them bridge that gap.

"Our digital strategy is reader-centric, with a focus on selling subscriptions," says Mediahuis strategy director Geert Desager. "That doesn't mean no advertising — it means the advertising needs to be more personalized, more relevant. That's where Piano and their approach to data come in."

Putting data to work

Like most publishers, Mediahuis had reams of data culled from millions of reader interactions with its sites each month. To create a unified, segmentable audience, they would first need to integrate all data onto a single platform. They would also need artificial intelligence and machine learning to organize, enrich and analyze that data in an efficient manner. Only then would they be able to achieve the results their advertising clients wanted.

Even with a large in-house team, a publisher might be able to build a unified data platform in 18 months. But Mediahuis wanted to be up and running within a year. Piano's out-of-the box DMP offered Mediahuis not only the quick start it wanted but the flexibility it needed to create the outstanding campaigns that would draw advertisers and raise revenues.

Creating niche segments
With Piano's DMP in place, Mediahuis recruited Desager to chart a course to higher revenue, and tasked a team of data scientists to make the journey. Together, they paved the way for a slate of new advertising products and bespoke services that could truly set them apart from their global — and local — competitors.

Those data scientists began using Piano to analyze Mediahuis' troves of first-party data, in order to create a number of category-specific and bespoke segments. The DMP allowed Mediahuis to target readers based on previously unavailable criteria, such as sociodemographics, intent and interest. But advertisers soon wanted more.
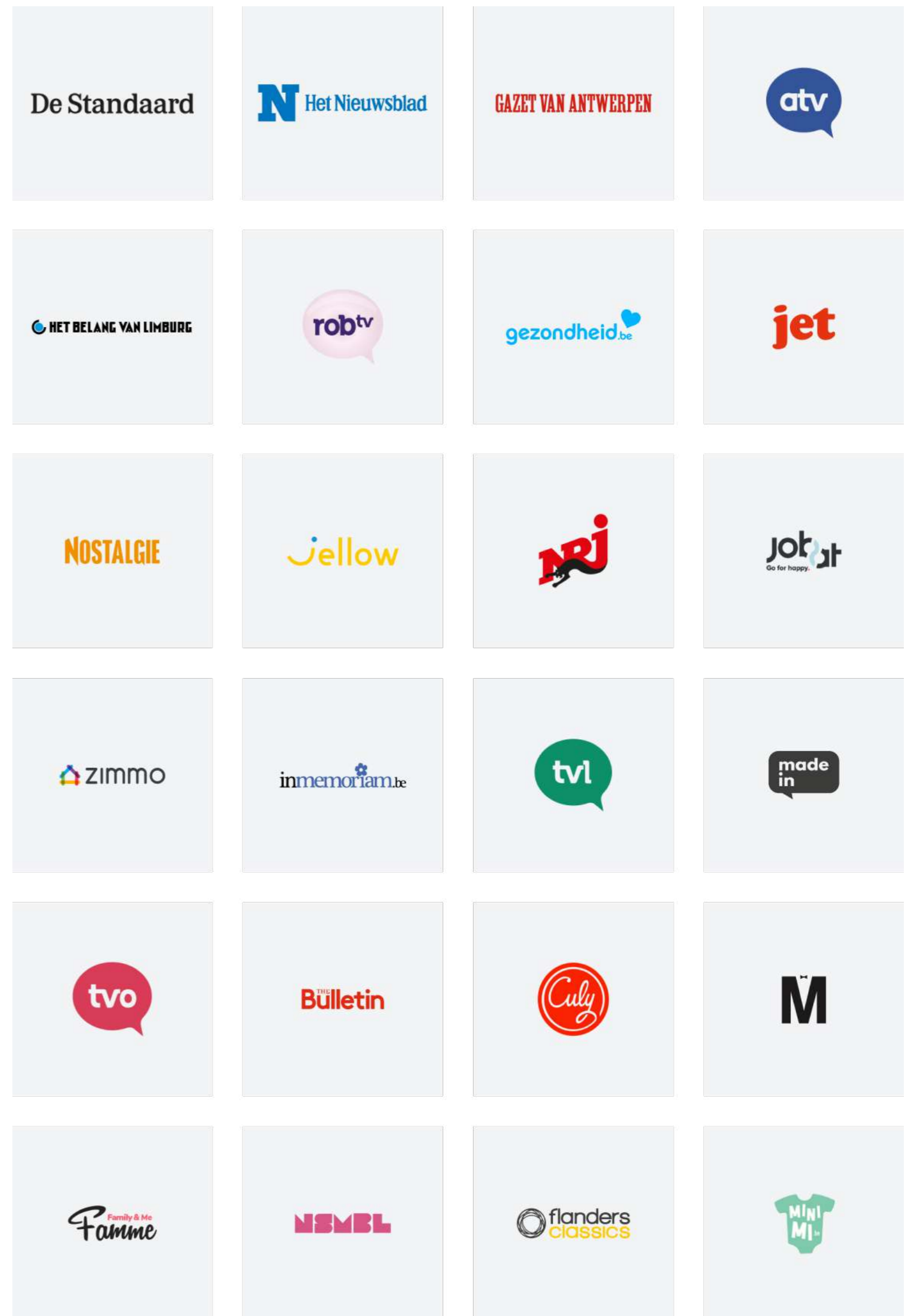
"Just having a segment of men and women in certain age brackets isn't enough anymore," says Desager. "Brands want it to be more specific, they want something more niche." By using Piano DMP, Mediahuis could offer clients something global ad platforms never could — campaigns that combine data from Mediahuis and advertising clients to drive specific business goals.

Bringing accountability to branded content

One of Belgium's largest insurance companies, for instance, came to Mediahuis for a native advertising campaign it hoped would drive conversions. But branded content is a famously upper- to middle-funnel tactic that doesn't traditionally drive conversions. To meet the client's business goals, the team got creative.

To start, Mediahuis dropped a pixel on their client's site, then saw who responded to banner ads that drove to their branded content. Once that data was cross-referenced with its own first-party data, Mediahuis was able to identify readers interested in the company's car insurance.

"Using Piano, we were able to link our data with our advertisers' and say, 'These are the readers we need to target, and this is what they read, which means this is the branded content they might be interested in,'" Desager says.

Mediahuis then used the combined datasets to retarget the native ad viewers, serving more relevant messaging alongside the content likely customers were inclined to consume. As a result, conversion rates skyrocketed. About a quarter of the people who read the native content went to the insurance company, resulting in a traffic increase of 16 percent for the duration of the campaign. Once onsite, about 60 percent of the readers converted.
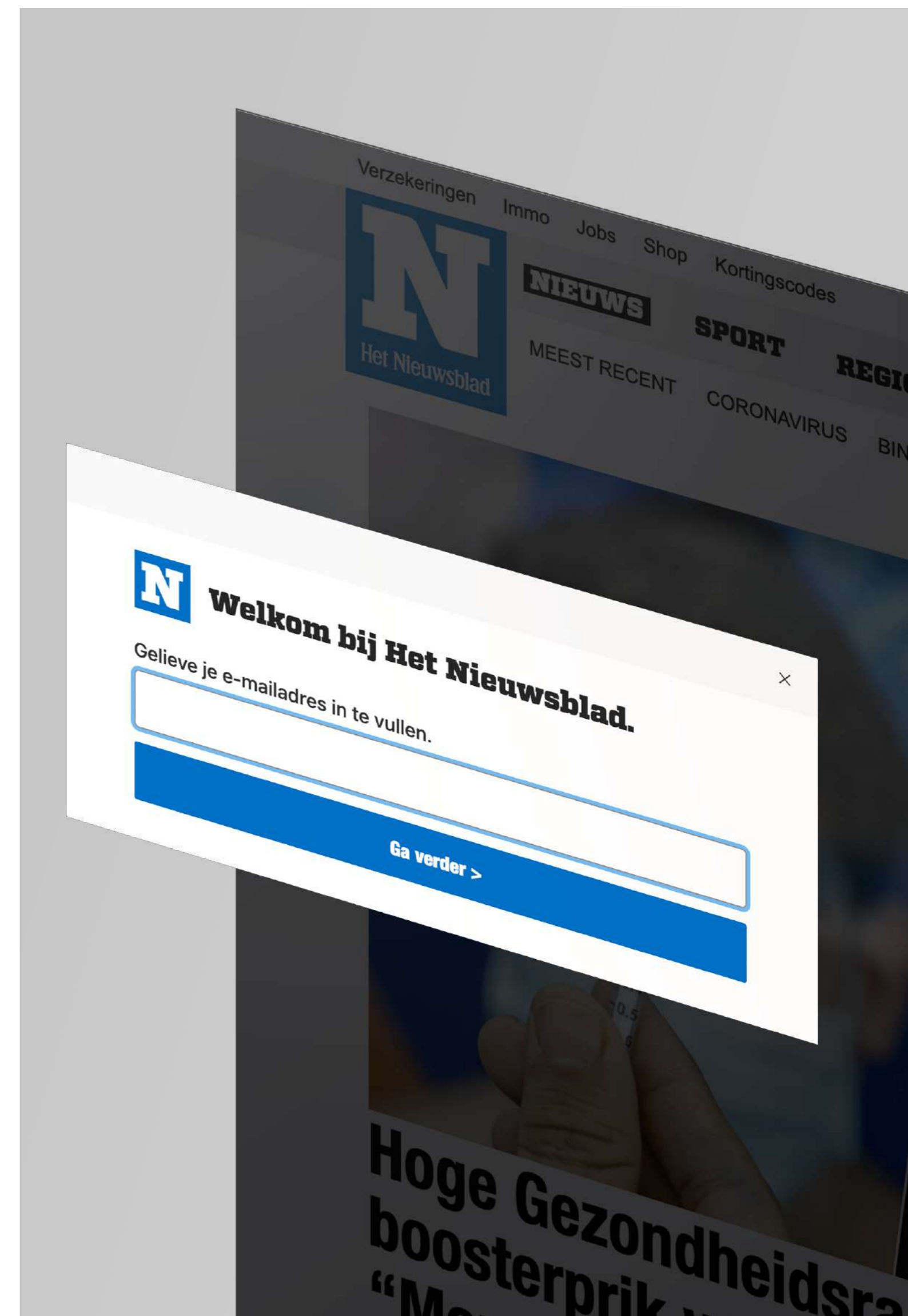
Already, Mediahuis' new offering of Piano-powered ad products and campaigns makes up 27 percent of their advertising sales. These targeted campaigns deliver clickthrough rates that are 26 percent higher on average than non-targeted campaigns.

What's more, Piano's API made implementing this audiencematching offering painless and easy. "Without Piano, we would have had to manually import all of the data," Desager says. "But Piano made it easy because their API calls upload everything automatically, which means we always work with the newest data."

Trusted and effective

Mediahuis' investment in data has paid huge dividends. "Our advertisers have always appreciated the close relationship we have with our readers," Desager says. "With the help of Piano, we've built targeting and reporting capabilities that rival Google and Facebook. It's so advanced, advertisers are surprised it only took us a year to build it."

Advertisers also trust Mediahuis more than global platforms because the publisher handles their data more transparently and ethically. "We don't use our advertisers' data for our own or a third party's benefit," Desager says. "That's a crucial difference. When you put, for example, a Facebook pixel on your site, Facebook uses that data not only for you but also for their own goals. With Piano, we can assure our clients that their data is used only for their campaigns. We don't repurpose it for anyone else. That creates a lot of trust."

25% CTR on re-targeted native advertising

60% of native advertising readers converted on advertiser's site

26% higher CTR than comparable non-targeted campaigns

Mediahuis discovers its "true value"

Mediahuis now runs multiple, custom-audience campaigns simultaneously, each day, across its network of sites. "We currently have more than 30 live pixels running on our sites for various brand campaigns. It's going pretty well, there's a high demand," Desager says.

And by using Piano to create nuanced audience segments, the publisher has discovered its specialty as a mid-funnel ad seller. "Piano has helped us better understand our true value to advertisers and build ad products that meet their specific business needs," Desager says. "Thanks to Piano we have the flexibility we need to create outstanding campaigns that drive revenue for our advertisers and ourselves."

Moving forward, Mediahuis plans to use Piano to move downfunnel by creating performance products that compete with the giant platforms and drive its own e-commerce business.

"The focus on short-term results is still very, very heavy, and incredibly important to advertisers," Desager says. "It won't be easy, but with Piano as a partner, we're confident that we'll succeed."
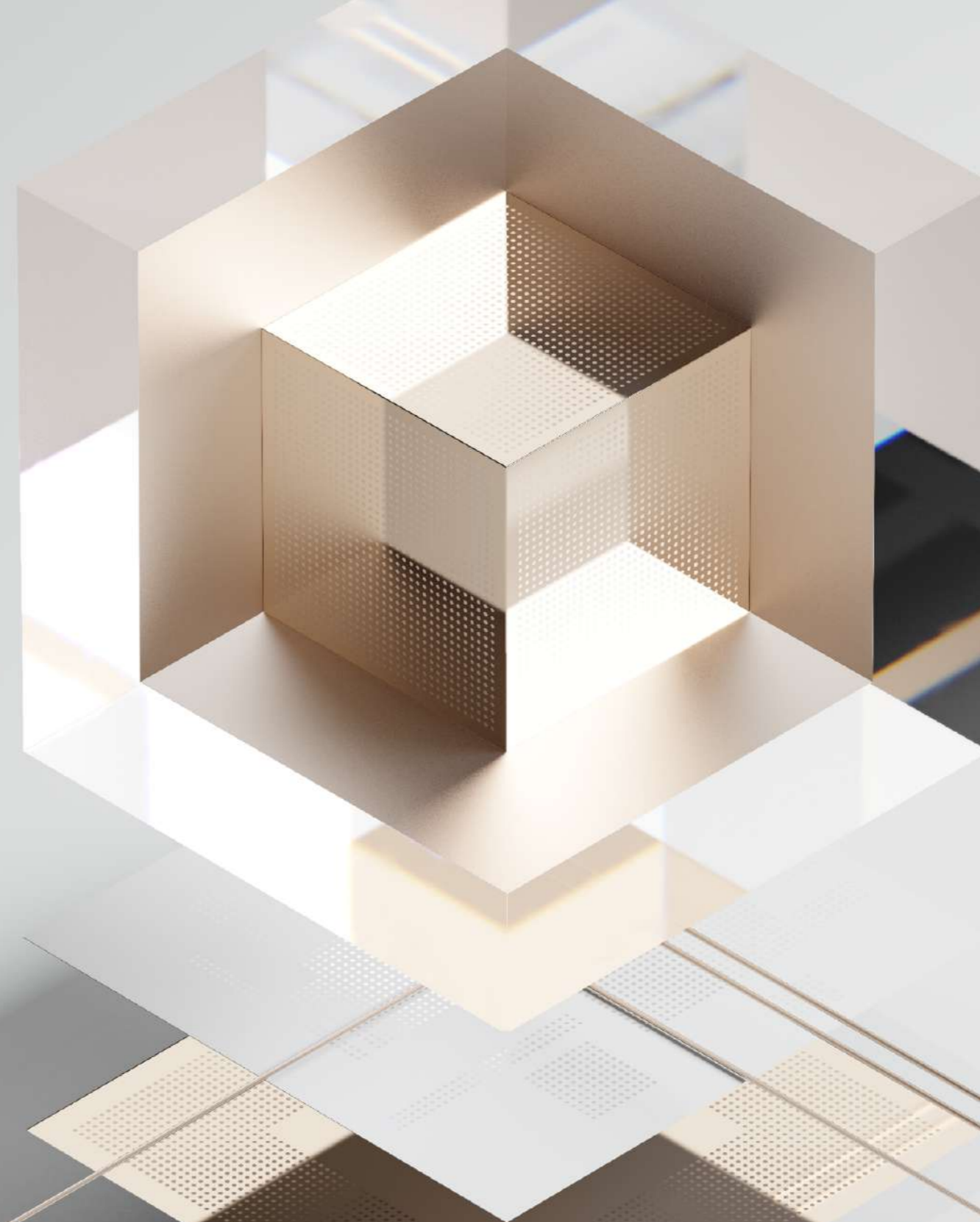
ABOUT PIANO

Piano helps organizations understand and influence customer behavior by putting the power of insights and logic into the hands of their employees. The Piano Analytics and Activation Platform measures thousands of customer data points and acquires first-party data to more deeply engage users and then serve relevant content and experiences based on their unique behaviors and profiles. Using this powerful end-to-end platform, Piano's clients have achieved more scale, engagement and revenue by expanding the lifecycle and value of every digital interaction.

Learn more by reaching out to hello@piano.io