CNET AI-assisted finance explainers

IMPLEMENTED 2022–2023 · MEDIA AND PUBLISHING · US · BAND F · REVERSED
VERSION 1.0 · PUBLISHED 16 NOVEMBER 2026 · UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026 · FACTS CHECKED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

CNET published 77 short finance explainers drafted with an in-house AI engine. After errors were found it corrected 41 of them and paused the tool. Its current policy says it does not use generative AI to write content.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

What went wrong: AI output or malfunction; Weak oversight or controls.

AI used: Generative AI drafting engine built in-house by the then parent company; not ChatGPT.

Implemented: 2022–2023. Grade: band F, Failure, Reversed.

Headline result, as reported: CNET corrected 41 of 77 AI-assisted finance stories and paused the AI engine, January 2023

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 5 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

CNET (owned at the time by Red Ventures). US technology news and consumer advice website. In 2023 it was owned by Red Ventures, which also owned Bankrate, The Points Guy and CreditCards.com, per The Verge. CNET's AI policy page now names Ziff Davis as its parent company. Canvas block: 8. Governance and risk. Also 4. Operations and process, 3. Customers and proposition.

Business challenge

The challenge. CNET said AI drafting tools could help media companies create useful stories, deliver more personalised content and give writers and editors more time to test, research and report. The Verge reported that the AI-written articles were designed to rank in Google searches and carry affiliate advertising.

Who implemented it

In-house (In-house): Red Ventures: cNET's then parent company, which built the proprietary model, per The Batch.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T5 Custom / fine-tuned models. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Internally designed AI engine (Red Ventures), RAMP (in-house AI tool).

Where it was built in: Used by the CNET Money team to draft explainers from editors' outlines; editors expanded and edited the drafts before publication.

What changed

Before: AI drafts, edited by staff, published under a team byline with the disclosure behind the byline. After: CNET corrected the stories with editors' notes, paused the tool, and moved the AI disclosure into view with an editor's co-byline. Its AI policy, updated October 2025, says CNET does not use generative AI to write content. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Cost of failure

Corrections to 41 of the 77 stories, per The Verge, some noting that CNET replaced phrases that were not entirely original, per Engadget. Red Ventures temporarily paused AI-generated content across all its websites, per The Verge. Financial cost: Not reported.

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Governance and control

Every AI-assisted story was reviewed and modified by a human editor who shared the byline, by CNET's account. CNET said its plagiarism checker was either not properly used or failed to catch close matches in a handful of stories. Its later AI policy requires human editing, disclosure in a secondary byline and staff training for any AI tool it adopts.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
Each AI-assisted story carried a co-byline for the human editor who reviewed it, by CNET's account; an owner for the programme is not named. [1]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
CNET's AI policy, published June 2023 and updated October 2025, says it does not use generative AI to write content and sets rules for disclosure and staff training. [3]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
Editors outlined, expanded and edited every AI draft, by CNET's account; The Batch reports that numerous errors were published nonetheless. [1] [4]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
After an error was cited, the CNET Money team audited all stories; CNET said its plagiarism checker was not properly used or missed matches in a handful of stories. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
The model was built by the parent company, Red Ventures, per The Batch; no outside vendor is reported. [4]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
No regulator or court action reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Not reported

DID NOT

– A small number of stories needed substantial correction and others had minor issues such as incomplete company names, transposed numbers or vague language, by CNET's account.

– Some corrections note that CNET replaced phrases that were not entirely original, per Engadget.

– The Batch reports that editors were responsible for checking facts in the drafts but published numerous errors and instances of possible plagiarism.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the AI drafts saved editors time: Not reported.

– Traffic or revenue from the AI-assisted stories: Not reported.

Timeline

Nov 2022 CNET Money team starts a test using an internally designed AI engine to draft financial explainers [1]

Jan 2023 After an AI-assisted story is cited for errors, the team audits all stories, corrects them and pauses the tool [1]

Jan 2023 The Verge reports corrections on 41 of 77 stories and a pause of AI-generated content across Red Ventures websites [2]

Jun 2023 CNET publishes its AI policy [3]

Oct 2025 Updated AI policy says CNET does not use generative AI to write content [3]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: F, Failure. Proof: Reversed. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band F, published errors that were corrected, with the tool paused. CNET's later policy rules out generative AI for writing its content.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The design relied on editors catching errors in AI drafts, and CNET's own audit found errors and close matches to other sources that the review had missed. Clear disclosure followed outside reporting. For any organisation publishing at scale, a human review step needs its own checks and measures, or it becomes a formality.

1. Audit a sample of AI-assisted output before publishing at volume.
2. Disclose AI use clearly on the page from the first item.
3. Check that plagiarism and fact checks actually run on every item.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Mixed: the publisher's own audit and statement, with independent reporting by The Verge, Engadget and The Batch.

Evaluation method. Organisation's own audit and corrections, reported by the press; no independent audit.

Sources disagree. The Batch says CNET published 78 generated articles before halting the programme; CNET's own statement and The Verge give 77.

Status. Closed: the AI engine was paused in January 2023. CNET's AI policy, updated October 2025, says it does not use generative AI to write content.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/cnet-ai-written-money-explainers

[1] CNET: CNET Is Testing an AI Engine. Here's What We've Learned, Mistakes and All (January 2023)
https://www.cnet.com/tech/cnet-is-testing-an-ai-engine-heres-what-weve-learned-mistakes-and-all/

[2] The Verge: CNET found errors in more than half of its AI-written stories
https://www.theverge.com/2023/1/25/23571082/cnet-ai-written-stories-errors-corrections-red-ventures

[3] CNET: AI Policy (published June 2023, updated October 2025)
https://www.cnet.com/ai-policy/

[4] The Batch (DeepLearning.AI): CNET pauses its practice of writing news articles with AI
https://www.deeplearning.ai/the-batch/cnet-pauses-its-practice-of-writing-news-articles-with-ai/

[5] Engadget: CNET had to correct most of its AI-written articles
https://www.engadget.com/cnet-corrected-41-of-its-77-ai-written-articles-201519489.html

CNET (owned at the time by Red Ventures) website: https://www.cnet.com

Version 1.0 · Published 16 November 2026 · Updated 16 November 2026 · Facts checked against sources 16 November 2026 · Downloaded 26 November 2026. This PDF may be out of date: the latest version, and a way to report an error or a better source, is at https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/cnet-ai-written-money-explainers

VERSION HISTORY

v1.0 16 November 2026 First published