Gannett LedeAI high school sports recaps

IMPLEMENTED 2023 · MEDIA AND PUBLISHING · US · BAND F · REVERSED
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Gannett local papers published high school sports recaps written by an outside service, LedeAI. After errors and repetitive copy were mocked online in August 2023, Gannett paused the service in all local markets using it.

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 and automation used: Automated sports-report service from an outside vendor, LedeAI; how it generated text is not reported.

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

Headline result, as reported: Gannett paused LedeAI sports recaps in all its local markets using the service after published errors, August 2023

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 2 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Gannett. US newspaper group that owns USA Today and hundreds of local news outlets, per TheWrap. Canvas block: 8. Governance and risk. Also 4. Operations and process, 6. Data and technology.

Business challenge

The challenge. Gannett said that, alongside adding hundreds of reporting jobs, it was experimenting with automation and AI to build tools for its journalists and add content for readers. The specific problem the sports recaps addressed: Not reported.

How it was addressed. Several Gannett papers published high school sports reports written by

Who implemented it

LedeAI (Software vendor): Supplied the automated high school sports reports.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: not established; the sources do not say how the system works. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: LedeAI, LedeAI.

Where it was built in: Recaps published on Gannett local news sites, including the Columbus Dispatch.

What changed

Before: recaps generated by LedeAI and published in several local markets. After: Gannett paused the service in all of them, and the Dispatch updated several stories with a note that they had been corrected for errors in coding, programming or style. [1] [2]

Cost of failure

Corrections to published stories, per CNN. Financial cost: Not reported.

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2]

Governance and control

Gannett said it was continually evaluating vendors and refining processes so that all its news met the highest journalistic standards. Whether editors reviewed recaps before publication: Not reported. LedeAI's chief executive said the company launched an around-the-clock effort to correct the problems.

S2 · Accountable owner · Not reported
Not reported.

A1 · Safe use · Not reported
Not reported.

A2 · Human in the loop · Not reported
Whether editors reviewed recaps before publication is not reported.

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
After the errors went viral, several Dispatch stories were updated with a correction note, per CNN; LedeAI said it worked around the clock to correct the problems. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Claimed
Gannett said it was continually evaluating vendors and refining processes; it paused the vendor's service in all local markets using it. [1] [2]

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

– The recaps were mocked on social media for being repetitive, lacking key details and using odd language, per CNN.

– A Columbus Dispatch story was published with template placeholders in place of the team mascots, per CNN.

– LedeAI's chief executive said the reports included some errors, unwanted repetition and awkward phrasing.

UNPROVEN

– Whether Gannett resumed automated sports recaps after the pause: Not reported in the sources opened.

– Readership of the automated recaps: Not reported.

Timeline

Aug 2023 LedeAI recaps published by the Columbus Dispatch and other Gannett papers go viral for errors and repetition [1]

Aug 2023 Gannett pauses the LedeAI experiment in all local markets using the service [1]

Aug 2023 Gannett spokesperson tells Axios the local AI sports effort is being paused [2]

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 led to a pause in every market using the service.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The service filled a coverage gap with automated copy. It broke at the join between the vendor's output and the newsroom's standards: repetitive or broken stories reached readers before they were corrected. For a larger organisation, a vendor that publishes under your name needs the same checks as staff work.

1. Check vendor-generated content before it is published under your masthead.
2. Start automated publishing in one market and review it before extending it.
3. Keep a fast route to correct or pull automated content.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Independent press reporting (CNN, TheWrap) with statements from Gannett and the vendor.

Evaluation method. Press reporting with company and vendor statements; no audit published.

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/gannett-lede-ai-sports-recaps

[1] WTOP (CNN): Gannett to pause AI experiment after botched high school sports articles
https://wtop.com/business-finance/2023/08/gannett-to-pause-ai-experiment-after-botched-high-school-sports-articles/

[2] TheWrap: Gannett Pauses Use of AI-Written Stories After Brutal Social Media Pushback
https://thewrap.com/gannett-pauses-ai-stories-social-media-pushback

Gannett website: https://www.gannett.com

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