Sports Illustrated AdVon author profiles

IMPLEMENTED 2023 · MEDIA AND PUBLISHING · US · BAND F · PARTLY PROVED
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Futurism reported that Sports Illustrated ran product reviews under invented authors with AI-generated headshots. The publisher said the content came from a contractor, AdVon Commerce, which assured it that humans wrote it. The publisher removed the content and ended the partnership.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

What went wrong: Weak oversight or controls.

AI used: AI-generated headshots on author profiles, per Futurism; whether the articles were AI-written is disputed.

Implemented: 2023. Grade: band F, Failure, Partly proved.

Headline result, as reported: Arena Group removed AdVon content from Sports Illustrated and ended the partnership after Futurism's report, November 2023

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 3 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

The Arena Group (Sports Illustrated). US publisher of Sports Illustrated, Parade, Men's Journal and the finance site TheStreet, per TheWrap and The Week. Canvas block: 8. Governance and risk. Also 3. Customers and proposition, 4. Operations and process.

Business challenge

The challenge. Not reported. Arena described the articles as e-commerce product reviews licensed from an outside company.

How it was addressed. Product reviews supplied by AdVon Commerce ran on certain Arena

Who implemented it

AdVon Commerce (Industry partner): Supplied the licensed product review content, by Arena's account.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

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

Where it was built in: Licensed product reviews from AdVon Commerce ran on certain Arena websites, including Sports Illustrated.

What changed

Before: licensed product reviews published under author profiles that, per Futurism, did not match real people. After: Arena removed the content and ended the AdVon partnership, by its own statement. [1] [2] [3]

Cost of failure

Content removed and the partnership ended, by Arena's account. Financial cost: Not reported. Arena dismissed its chief executive and other executives in December 2023; it did not give the episode as a reason, and a representative said some of the dismissals were unrelated.

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2] [3]

Governance and control

Arena said it continually monitored its partners and was in the middle of a review when the allegations were raised. Futurism said Arena's statement did not address the AI-generated headshots and that its own sources disputed that humans wrote the content.

S2 · Accountable owner · Not reported
Not reported.

A1 · Safe use · Not reported
Not reported.

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
AdVon assured Arena the articles were written and edited by humans, by Arena's statement; Futurism's sources disagree. [1]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
Arena said it continually monitors its partners and was in the middle of a review when the allegations were raised. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Claimed
According to AdVon, as relayed by Arena, its staff use counter-plagiarism and counter-AI software on all content; Arena ended the partnership. [1]

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

– An author's profile photo was for sale on a website selling AI-generated headshots, per Futurism.

– AdVon used pen names for writers, which Arena said it did not condone.

– Futurism argued that Arena's investigation relied on AdVon's assurances.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the articles themselves were written with AI: Arena says not; Futurism's sources say otherwise.

– Whether the December 2023 dismissals were connected to the episode: the company did not say so.

Timeline

Nov 2023 Futurism reports authors with AI-generated headshots on Sports Illustrated; the author pages disappear from the site [1]

Nov 2023 Arena says the content was licensed from AdVon Commerce, is being removed, and the partnership has ended [1]

Dec 2023 Arena dismisses its chief operating officer and president of media; a representative says this is unrelated [2]

Dec 2023 Arena dismisses its chief executive, citing operational efficiency and revenue [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: Partly proved. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band F, content removed and a supplier relationship ended after outside reporting. The extent of AI use is disputed.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The failure sat at the join between a content supplier and a trusted brand: licensed reviews ran under author profiles the publisher had not checked. The publisher relied on the supplier's assurances until a reporter tested them. For a larger organisation, any supplier content published under its brand needs checks on who and what produced it.

1. Verify that bylines on supplier content belong to real people.
2. Write AI use and disclosure into content supply contracts, and audit them.

Evidence

Score 1 of 4. Investigative press reporting (Futurism) and the publisher's statement; the extent of AI use is disputed.

Evaluation method. Investigative journalism and company statement; no independent audit.

Sources disagree. Arena said it was not accurate that the articles were AI-generated, citing AdVon's assurances; Futurism said its sources disagreed and that Arena did not address the AI-generated headshots.

Status. Closed: content removed and the AdVon partnership ended, by Arena's account, November 2023.

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/sports-illustrated-advon-ai-author-profiles

[1] Futurism: Sports Illustrated published articles by fake, AI-generated writers
https://futurism.com/sports-illustrated-ai-generated-writers

[2] TheWrap: Sports Illustrated executives fired after AI fake authors
https://www.thewrap.com/sports-illustrated-executives-fired-ai-fake-authors

[3] The Week: Sports Illustrated publisher fires CEO after allegedly getting caught using AI-generated articles
https://theweek.com/business/sports-illustrated-publisher-fires-ceo-ai-generated-articles

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