

Case Study: Major TV Network

THE CHALLENGE:

Forecasting viewership is critical to revenue flow in the world of cable television, but one of the “Big Three” television networks simply didn’t have the analytics tools it needed to do so accurately or efficiently. Research teams at each of the company’s subsidiary cable networks were responsible for producing viewership forecasts to be used by Sales for long-range planning, as well as for budgeting and prediction of ad inventories. But viewership is unpredictable, and condensing all of each channel’s viewership data into actionable analysis was a lengthy process that often depended more on intuition and domain knowledge than hard data.

“Predicting viewership of new shows is where researchers tended to be optimistic and make mistakes,” says a Senior Program Manager and project leader. “They’d look at a new show and say, ‘This is going to be the next big hit. We’re going to have 500,000 eyeballs on it.’ If Sales takes that information and sells





500,000 eyeballs upfront, but the show tanks and only gets 200,000, we have to repurpose those ads to get another 300,000 views somewhere else. It was becoming a costly problem.”

Seeking a partner who could help them rapidly develop a new analytics platform, the company turned to Stride, attracted by our speciality in Agile methodology and ability to assemble a cross-functional team of product managers, designers, and developers who could progressively identify and deliver business value. “Stride stood out because they put an emphasis on delivery instead of hourly rates,” recalls the Program Manager. “They focused on continuous delivery and rapid prototyping, which is what we really needed.”

THE TECHNOLOGY:

- Node.js
- Express server
- Rethink database
- Angular
- D3
- Rapid in-browser prototyping

THE STRIDE APPROACH:

A cross-functional team of Stride developer consultants, UX specialists, and product management consultants co-located with the internal team to build an analytics platform that produced more accurate viewership forecasts, and did so more quickly and efficiently than ever before. “Stride really stressed the importance of being co-located with us and having everyone in one central place, and I think that paid dividends,” recalls the Program Manager. “It allows for a kind of shared knowledge and encourages cross-team conversations. Everyone had input and a voice. We were learning Agile as we were practicing it.” And guiding them through that practice every step of the way was the Stride team, sharing our knowledge of Agile by literally working side-by-side with the company’s developers to build better software.

Rather than being prescriptive, Stride first thoroughly understood the team’s needs by spending time observing their current workflow, pain points, and workarounds. After establishing a foundation of knowledge based on user empathy, the Stride team

focused on creating a successful workflow between the data science and app development teams by designing and executing a customized Agile process tailored for the company. One of the most important adjustments we championed while building software with their internal team was a renewed emphasis on a user-centered approach to design.

“A lot of people were telling us that we had a mandate to build the product, that we should just build it and stop worrying about what users want. Stride was a huge advocate in our push to develop user empathy.” says the Program Manager. By conducting dozens of user interviews, developers were able to avoid getting locked into one solution, instead accruing a deep backlog of solutions to the wide variety of problems experienced by users with each iteration. As she puts it, “Skepticism of our user-centered approach ended when we started delivering.”

RESULTS:

Stride and the network launched a polished analytics platform with the ability to drill down into granular views, zoom out for holistic views, and adjust baselines in accordance with new information, making it far easier to align ad inventory. [But perhaps even more importantly, the tool has taken a cumbersome forecasting process that used to take six weeks and made it more agile and adaptive, empowering researchers to turn new forecasts around in just one week.](#)

Throughout the project, from start to finish, Stride leveraged the practice of rapid visual prototyping to validate features and functionality before committing to development. This process helped the team launch an accurate, efficient, and user-friendly platform that gave researchers easily customizable displays of viewership data within weeks instead of months.

It was a breakthrough piece of software found nowhere else in the industry — one with the potential to save the company millions in lost revenue.

Launching the new application was a major accomplishment for everyone involved, but the true lasting value of the company's time with Stride is the knowledge and expertise in Agile that they will take with them as they move on to new projects. [“We took a lot away from learning that Lean mindset,”](#) the Program Manager remarks. [“A lot of those values and principles that made that approach successful stay with you because they work.”](#)

[“Stride's recommendations made the Agile process work for us,”](#) she continues. [“It's even changed our approach to how we recruit — we used to seek out new hires based on their technology expertise, but today we look for people who specialize in solving specific problems. It's completely transformed the way we work for the better.”](#)