THE TIMES
bigbite
VIP

A digital-first transformation

When it comes to breaking news, every second counts. Discover how we transformed digital publishing for one of the UK's largest publishers, resulting in record-time content creation.

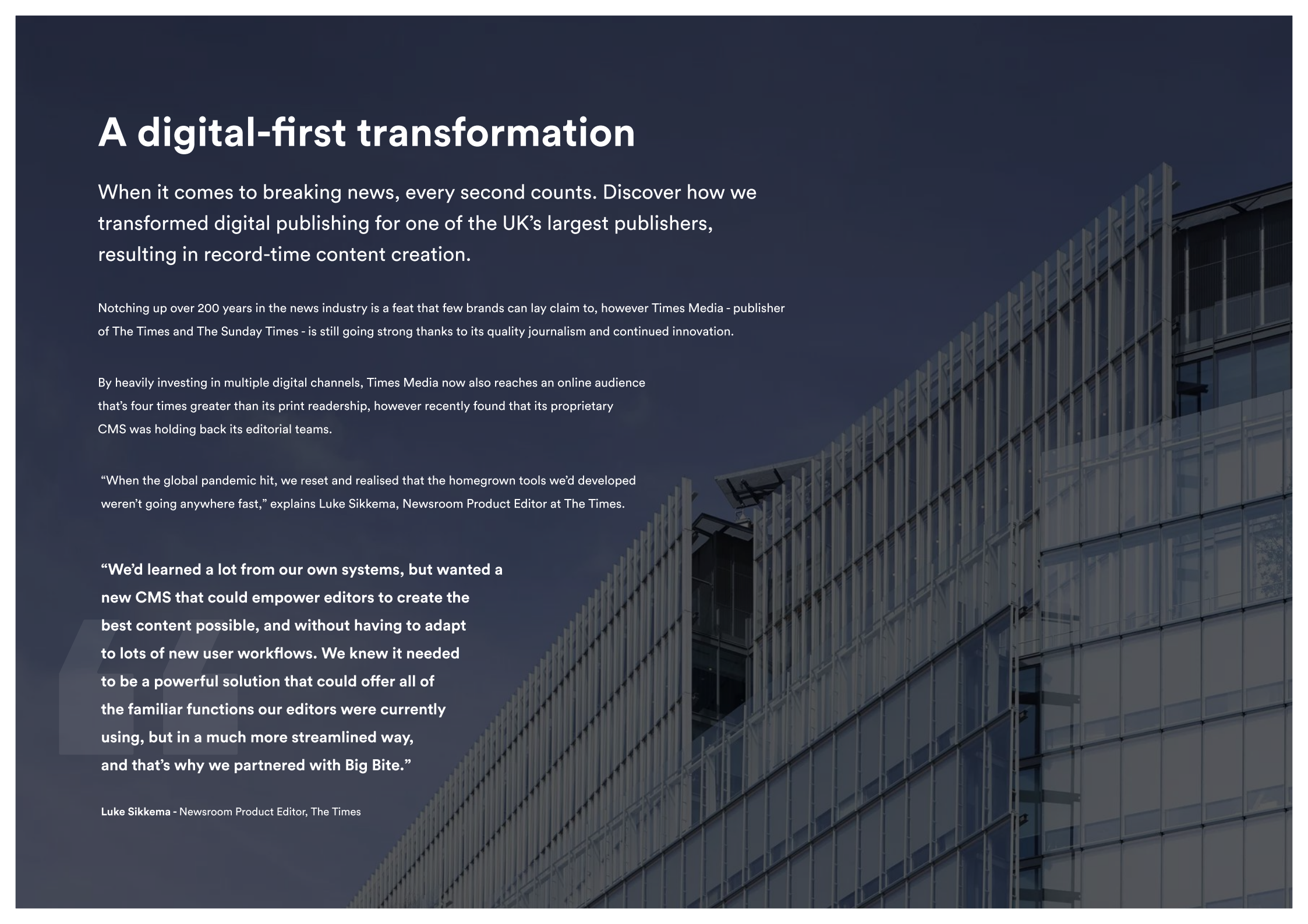
Notching up over 200 years in the news industry is a feat that few brands can lay claim to, however Times Media - publisher of The Times and The Sunday Times - is still going strong thanks to its quality journalism and continued innovation.

By heavily investing in multiple digital channels, Times Media now also reaches an online audience that's four times greater than its print readership, however recently found that its proprietary CMS was holding back its editorial teams.

"When the global pandemic hit, we reset and realised that the homegrown tools we'd developed weren't going anywhere fast," explains Luke Sikkema, Newsroom Product Editor at The Times.

"We'd learned a lot from our own systems, but wanted a new CMS that could empower editors to create the best content possible, and without having to adapt to lots of new user workflows. We knew it needed to be a powerful solution that could offer all of the familiar functions our editors were currently using, but in a much more streamlined way, and that's why we partnered with Big Bite."

Luke Sikkema - Newsroom Product Editor, The Times

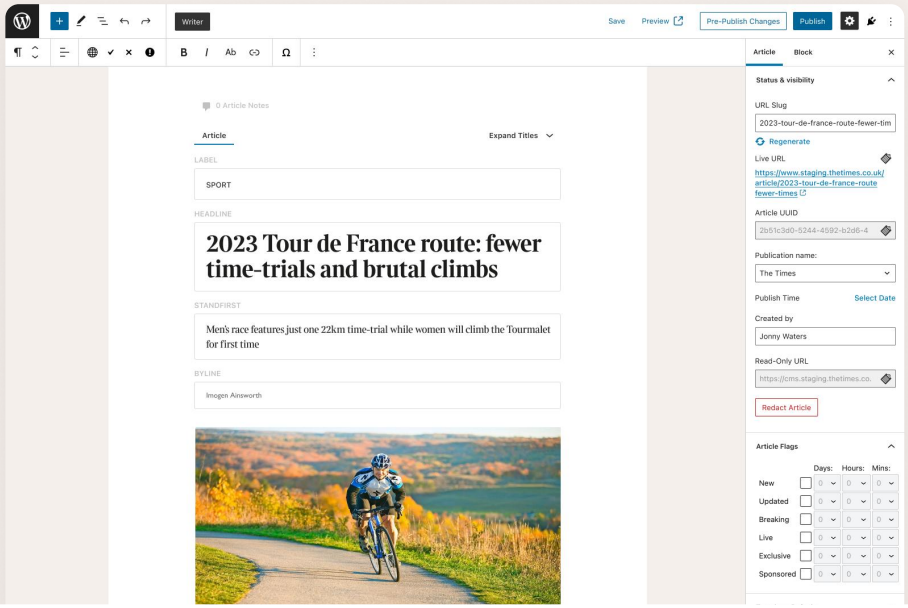


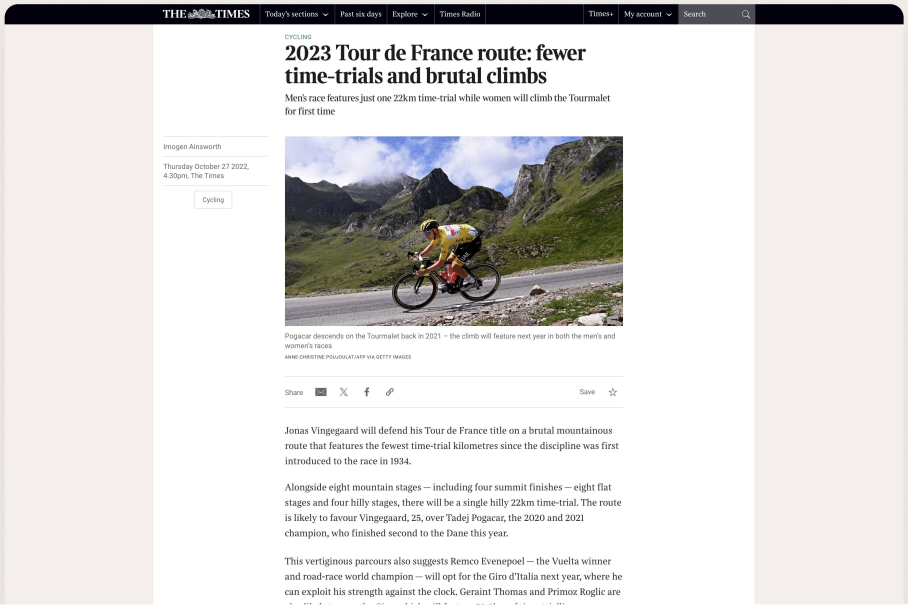
Leveraging the WordPress editorial experience

As a subsidiary of News UK, owned by News Corp, Times Media made the decision to migrate to WordPress, which many of its publishing stablemates - including the New York Post and Wall Street Journal - have relied on since 2019. On top of the numerous advantages offered by an open source platform, the move also grants teams at The Times and The Sunday Times access to NewsPress - a custom suite of WordPress publishing tools, templates and content creation blocks built specifically for News Corp titles.

> **“WordPress is used throughout News UK, but end-to-end, so new CMS, new website, new apps, the whole shebang, however we wanted to take a different approach and focus on utilising the platform for its block editor interface. That meant the challenge was to rebuild the backend, simplify the tech estate, make sure there was no service interruption for readership, and crucially keep driving subscriptions.”**
>
> **Luke Sikkema -** Newsroom Product Editor, The Times

Working in close collaboration with Times Media, our team fulfilled these requirements via the development of a headless WordPress CMS - hosted by WordPress VIP - enabling its newsrooms to produce news and features more intuitively. Crucially, we’ve also integrated the new publishing system with key resources such as Content Hub for Publishers (CHP) - Times Media’s vast digital catalogue of media and images, enabling editors to easily drag and drop files into articles.





As our WordPress partner, Big Bite has been instrumental in helping Times Media to drive change, inspire journalists and ultimately deliver a better experience to our readers.

LUKE SIKKEMA
NEWSROOM PRODUCT EDITOR, THE TIMES

34%

FASTER TIME TO PUBLISH

30 mins

AVERAGE USER ONBOARDING TIME

62%

FEWER CLICKS TO CREATE CONTENT

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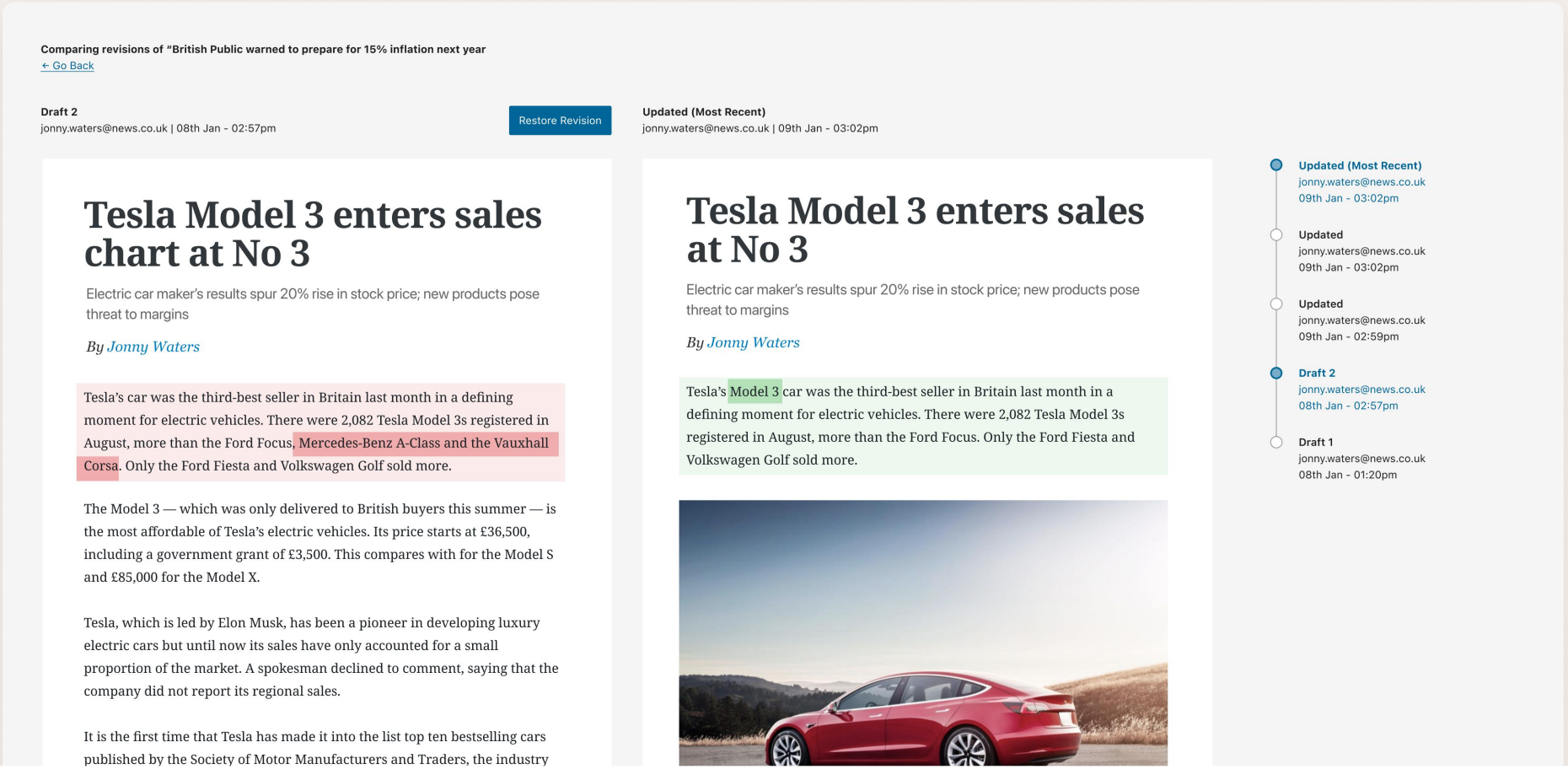
FEATURES

Revisions

Our enhanced Revisions panel is a significant upgrade to the core revisions feature in WordPress, improving functionality and transforming the overall user experience. Using the functionality, editors and journalists can view the current version of an article - including all of its dynamic elements such as images, styles and meta-data - side-by-side with previous versions of the same article.

Changes between versions are clearly highlighted, enabling editors to quickly identify design variations and copy amendments.

The panel also includes an intuitive timeline feature, enabling editors to easily scroll through the entire history of an article to see how it's evolved throughout each saved or published draft.



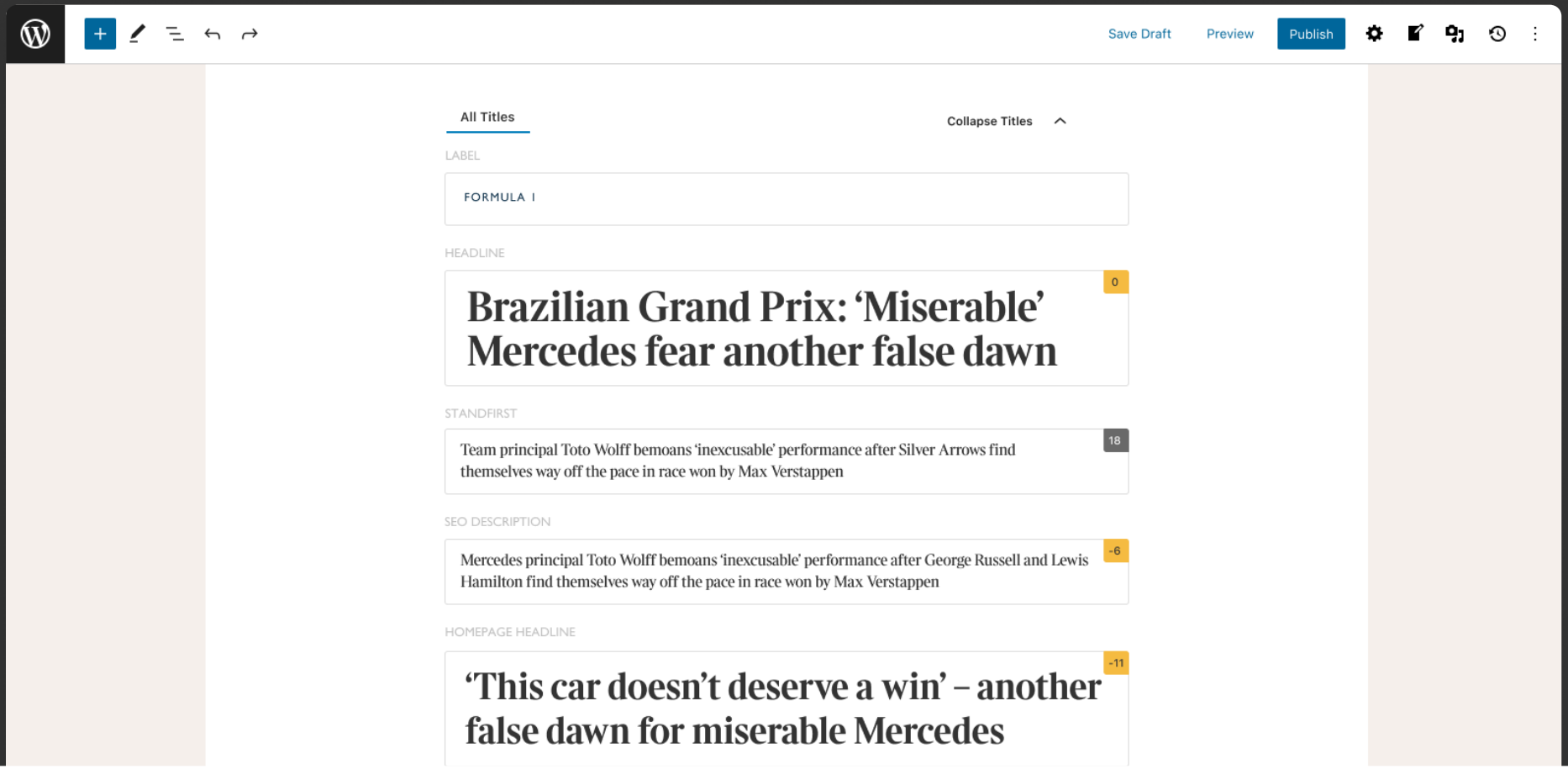
FEATURES

Multi Title

The WordPress platform's core title field only allows one headline to be added per article, so to expand on this and give The Times's editorial teams much greater control and flexibility, we developed the Multi-Title block.

Using this custom functionality, editors and journalists can now create multiple titles in various predefined formats for every news story or feature, covering homepage headlines, SEO titles, article labels, as well as standfirsts. Each title field has a custom word count based on The Times's editorial guidelines to ensure consistency across all of its site pages, and users can choose to hide or view all fields via a collapsible layout option.

To boost the publication's visibility within search engine results pages, the block also enables hidden metadata - such as SEO descriptions - to be easily added to each article.



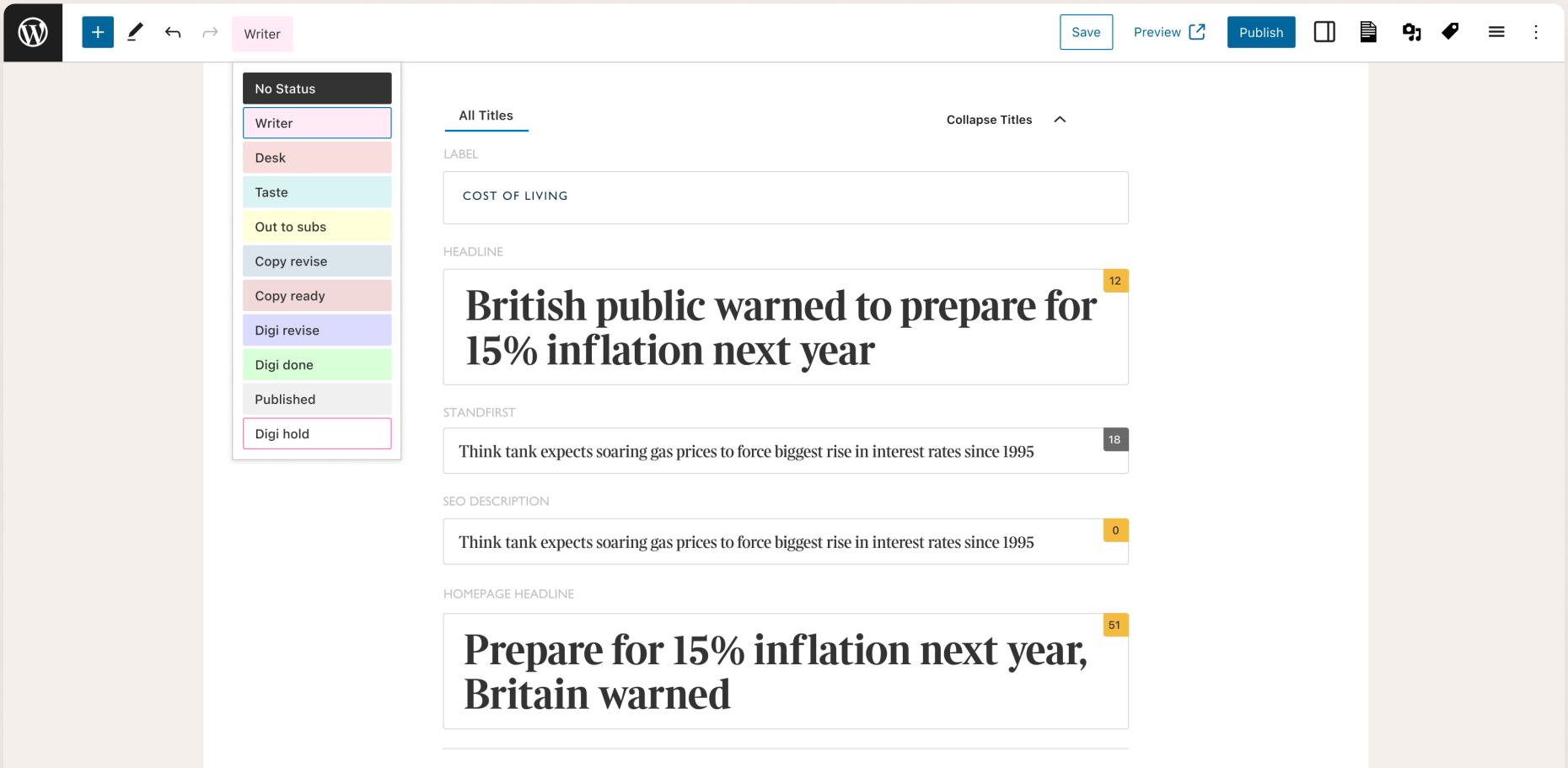
FEATURES

Desk-Net

To streamline production, The Times utilises Desk-Net - powerful content calendar software that enables its editorial teams to coordinate content across all of its publishing platforms, manage writing assignments, and oversee stories from initial planning right through to go live.

By building a custom API integration between Desk-Net and WordPress, we've ensured that any stories created via the content tool are seamlessly and instantly replicated as a post within WordPress, complete with titles, metadata and taxonomies.

Within the WordPress CMS, a custom status bar is also displayed across every post, which users can update to indicate the current editorial stage of each story. This status data is also synchronised in real-time with Desk-Net, allowing all newsroom members to easily and accurately track each news story as it progresses through the editorial process.



FEATURES

Picture populator

The Times's WordPress CMS is a fully headless solution, which means each article can be published across multiple areas of its website, as well as the newspaper's other digital platforms such as The Times app and newsletters. As a result, the accompanying images for each article must be available in various sizes and ratios suitable for differing layouts and channels, which led us to develop a custom image tool - Picture Populator.

With this functionality, the newspaper's photo desk can import images from its centralised digital asset management system to its WordPress CMS, and then manage, arrange, categorise, and apply images to any article as required.

Importantly, the tool also enables editors to adjust the crop, positioning and zoom size of images to best suit predefined formats, such as thumbnails and hero images, removing the need for external imaging software.

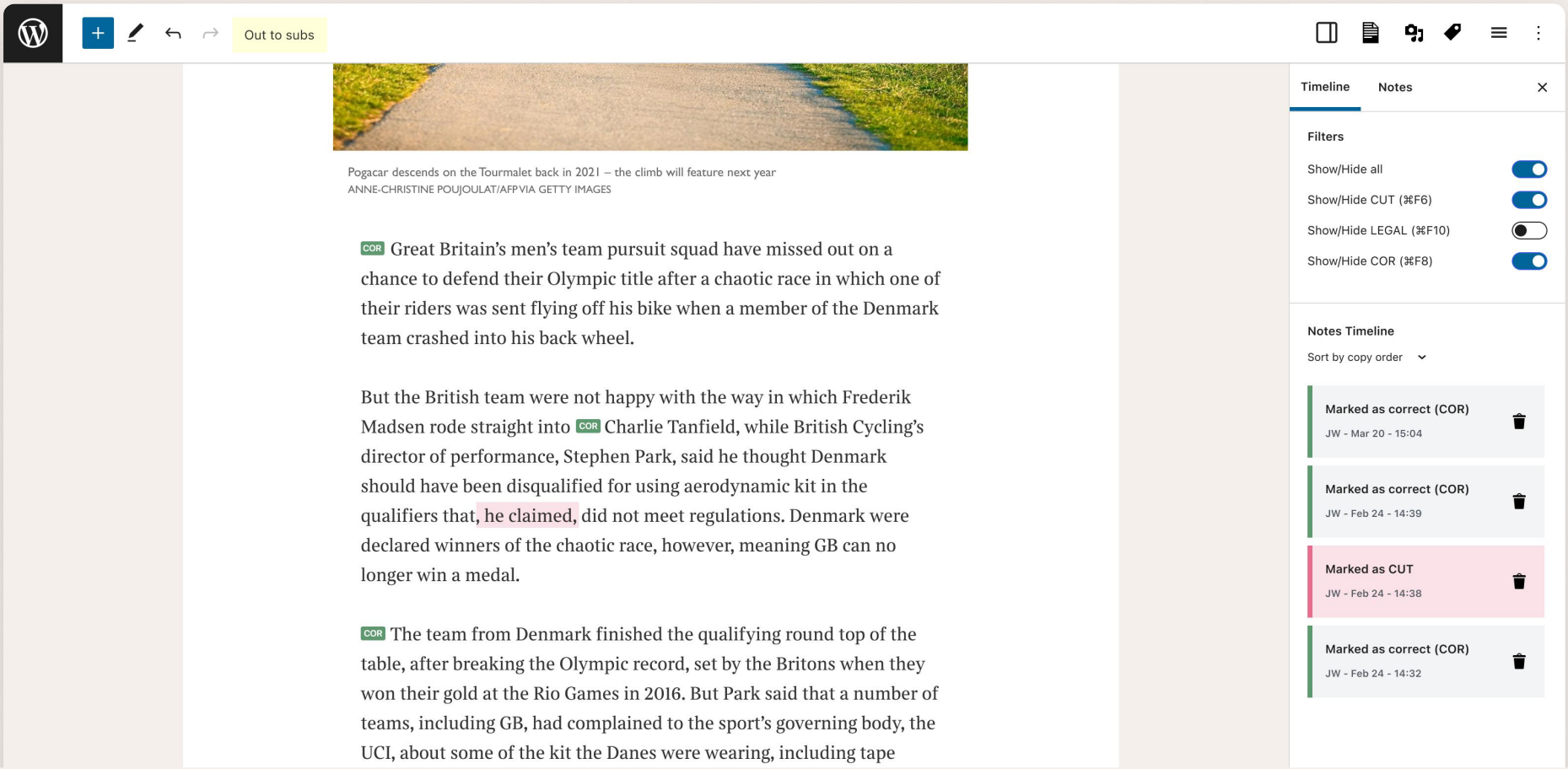
FEATURES

Editorial notes

To strengthen collaboration and streamline the editing process, we developed the Editorial Notes plugin specifically for newsrooms, enabling writers and editors at The Times to add, edit, reply to or delete comments against articles directly within the newspaper's WordPress CMS.

For full visibility, the functionality also provides a timeline of all comments and conversations saved against each article, offering an at-a-glance record of any notes, suggested amendments, and discussion points that have been raised.

Additionally, comments can be filtered by type such as legal, corporate, etc. As well as enabling users to comment on specific words, sentences or paragraphs, this time-saving feature also makes it possible to submit global notes against an article, providing overall comment or feedback.



WordPress has been easy to master with only the briefest training. It helps us to cut out wasteful clicks and see stories taking shape as we work on them - a huge improvement on our previous CMS. Simply put, we can now publish better stories, faster.

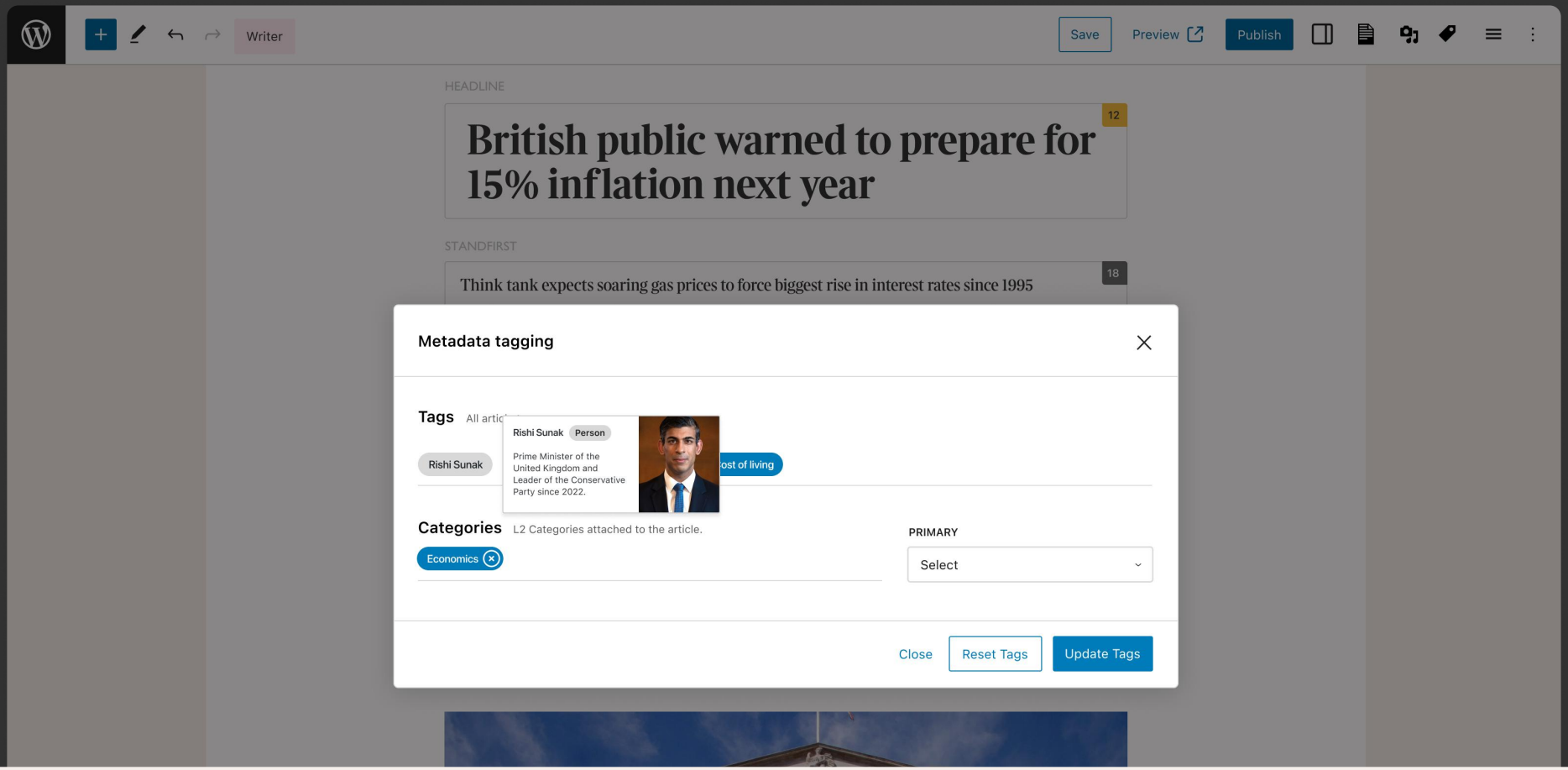
SIMON WELLS
HEAD OF NEWS PRODUCTION, THE TIMES

FEATURES

Metadata tagging

Collaborating closely with a data science agency, we built an advanced metadata tagging tool into the WordPress editor. This tool recommends relevant metadata by analyzing the edited article content. Upon loading, the plugin scans key on-page information, including the headline, standfirst, and story copy, offering suggestions for tags and categories that align with the post's content.

The user interface enables editors to modify, approve, or introduce new tags through manual intervention. This approach not only empowers editors with control but also improves the underlying data model by improving the feedback loop, continually enhancing the automated tagging tool for future use.



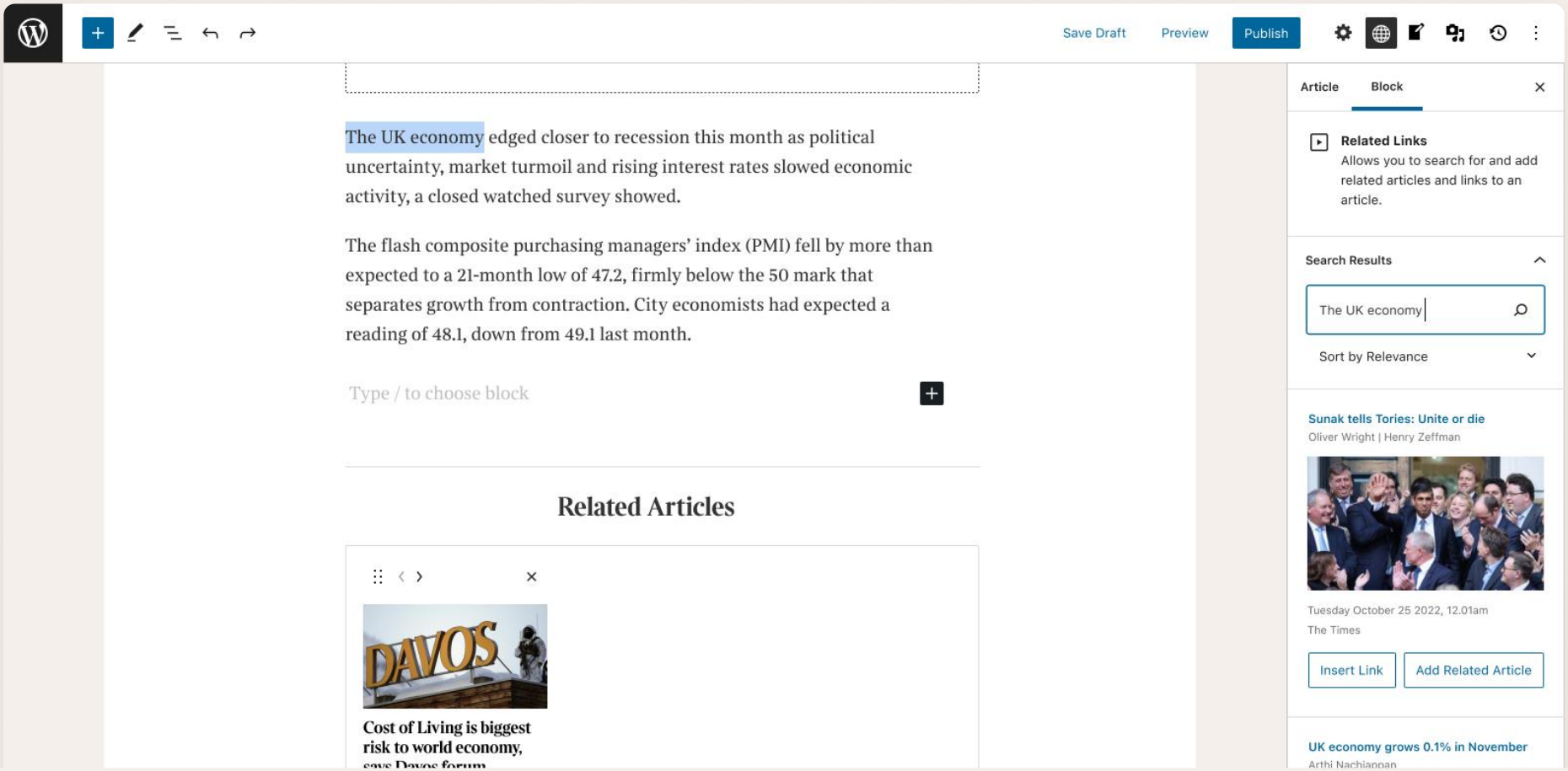
FEATURES

Link Suggestions

As part of the editorial workflow, adding in-story links and related content is a manual task carried out through the WordPress editor. To improve efficiency in this process, we developed a plugin designed to speed up the process of adding relevant internal links to other stories on The Times website, driven by a specified search term.

Located within the editor sidebar, this plugin allows editors to input a keyword, which fetches results from **thetimes.co.uk** and provides filtering options by date and relevancy. Once the relevant story is identified, the editor has the flexibility to either add the related post at the end of the story or embed a link into highlighted copy within the editor.

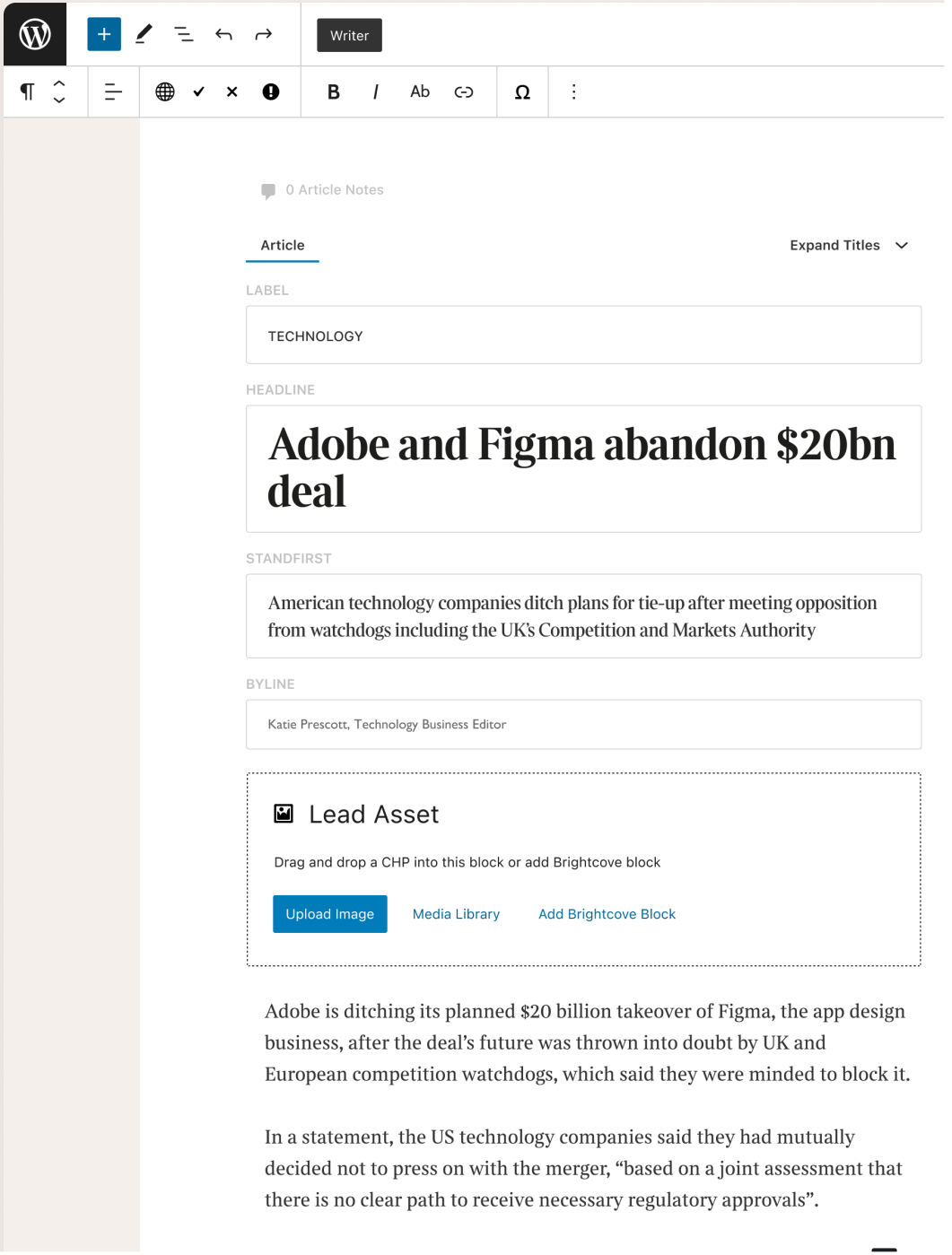
Both workflows are handled within the same area, streamlining the process of adding links in any form to a post.



Delivering transformative results

Since rolling out the new WordPress CMS in 2023 to an internal team of 70 staff as well as around 40 freelancers, the streamlined system has delivered immediate results. On any given day, up to 55 writers and editors utilise the tool, collaborating seamlessly across various departments to produce and publish online articles faster than ever before. This achievement holds significant advantages for the publication, as it generates a huge volume of content on a daily basis.

Additionally, the implementation of the CMS has significantly reduced onboarding times for new writers and editors - from days to a matter of minutes - while also simplifying its tech estate and editorial workflows. By embracing a more efficient infrastructure, Times Media has not only optimised current operations, but is now also positioned to explore additional avenues for automation, setting the stage for the integration of next-gen technologies such as AI. This forward-thinking approach underscores the publication's commitment to staying at the forefront of innovation in the ever-evolving and increasingly competitive landscape of media production.



Revolutionising how you create, collaborate and publish.

Big Bite transforms online publishing for global newsrooms and content creators through the delivery of scalable digital solutions and products, exclusively built on WordPress. We specialise in working with multi-faceted enterprise organisations that have lots of contributors, lots of content, and lots of challenges.

We help them achieve their goals through scalable digital solutions and plugins exclusively built on the WordPress platform. This enables newsrooms, editorial teams and marketing departments to leverage the power of the world's number one CMS, along with custom-built tools, templates and publishing ecosystems that we develop to deliver a quicker, leaner and on-brand experience.

Since setting up Big Bite in 2011, we've championed the advantages that WordPress offers large-scale publishers. As a result, we're now one of the most experienced agencies in the world, and the only agency in the UK to be accredited as a WordPress VIP Gold Partner.

www.bigbite.net | **hello@bigbite.net**

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Thank you

If you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch using the contact details below.

www.bigbite.net | **hello@bigbite.net**

WordPress VIP

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