

Commitment Issues

Rebuilding Journalism's Culture of Sharing

NPA Summit 2025

Scott Klein, Newstack
Ben Welsh, Reuters



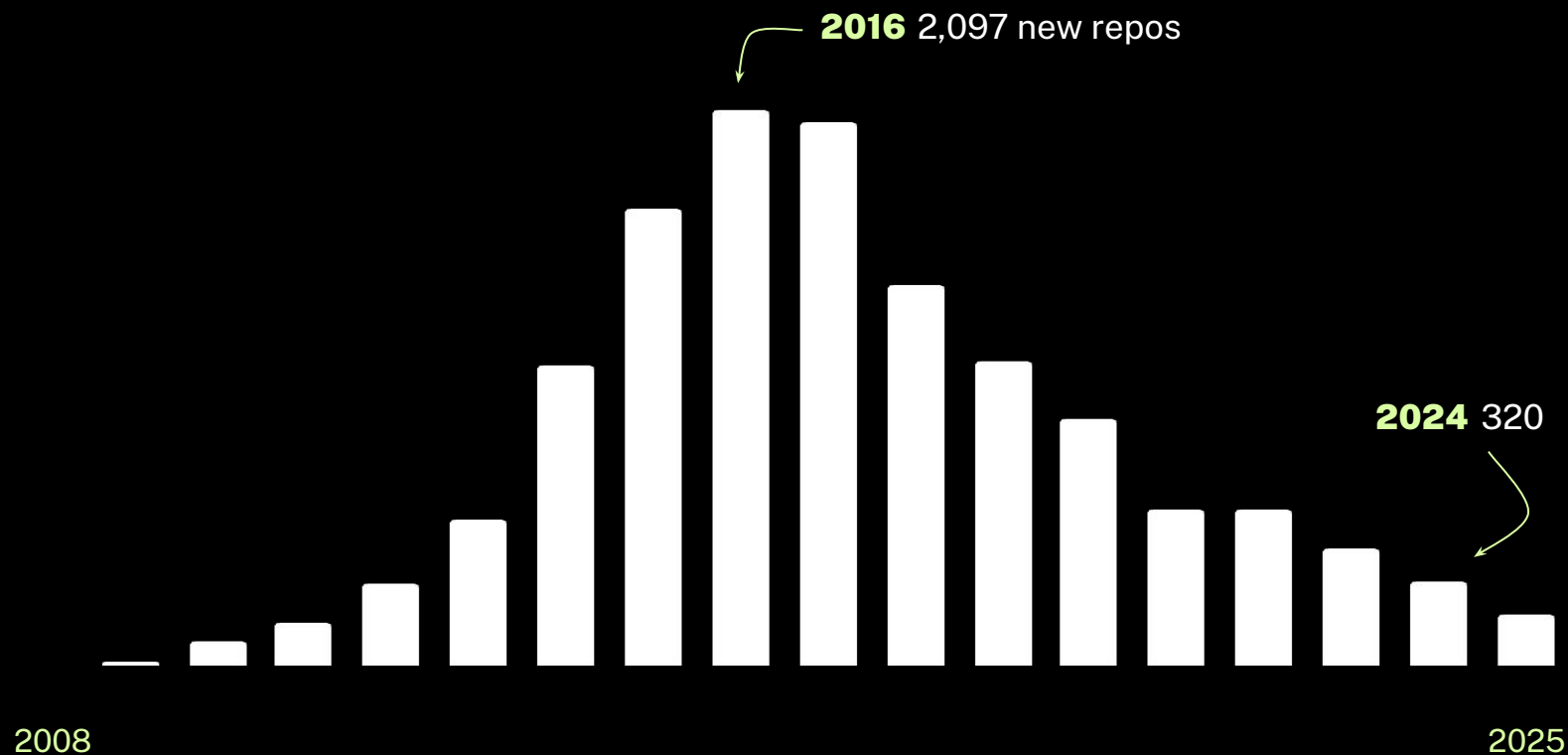
bit.ly/news-repos

Show of hands...

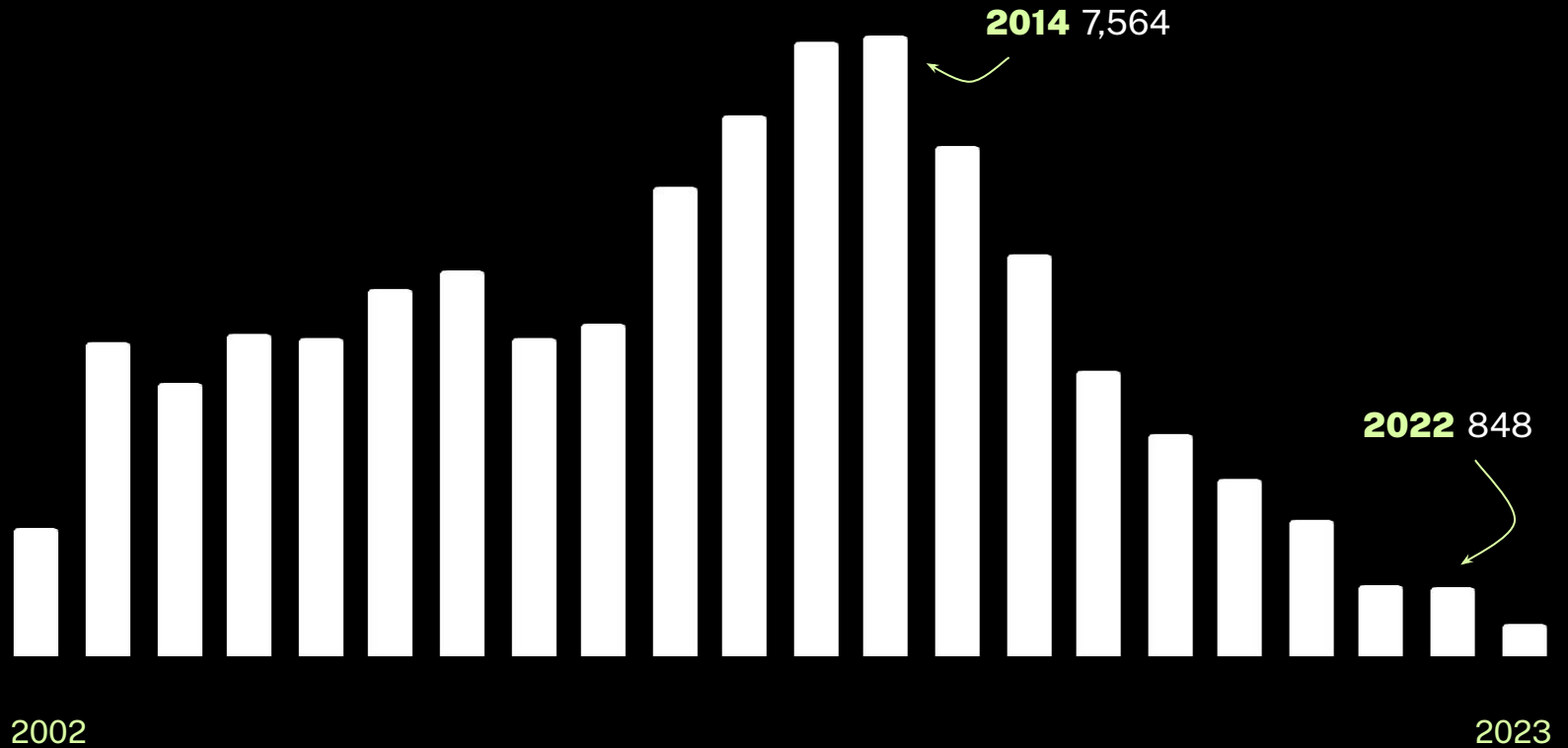
We ran the numbers.

It's not just you.

And it's *worse* than you think.



Open-source repos down 85%



NICAR-L posts down 89%

Of the 85 most active orgs...

75

...opened fewer repos in 2024.

38

...opened *zero repos* in 2024.

Why should you care?

Innovations matters.

Django

2003, Lawrence Journal-World

Svelte

2016, The Guardian

Backbone

2010, DocumentCloud

Mapshaper

2013, New York Times

Varnish

2006, Verdens Gang

D3

2011, New York Times

Pym.js

2012, NPR

SecureDrop

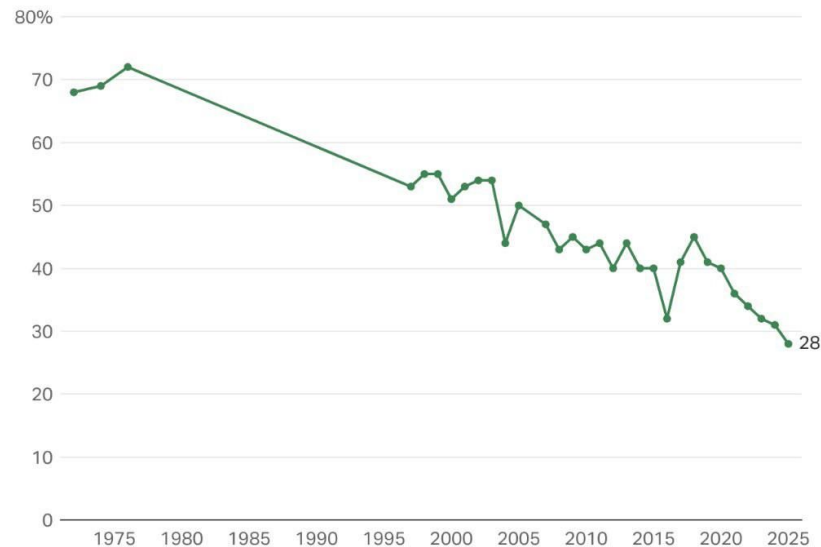
FPF, 2013

Transparency counts.

1. Media Trust Falls Again

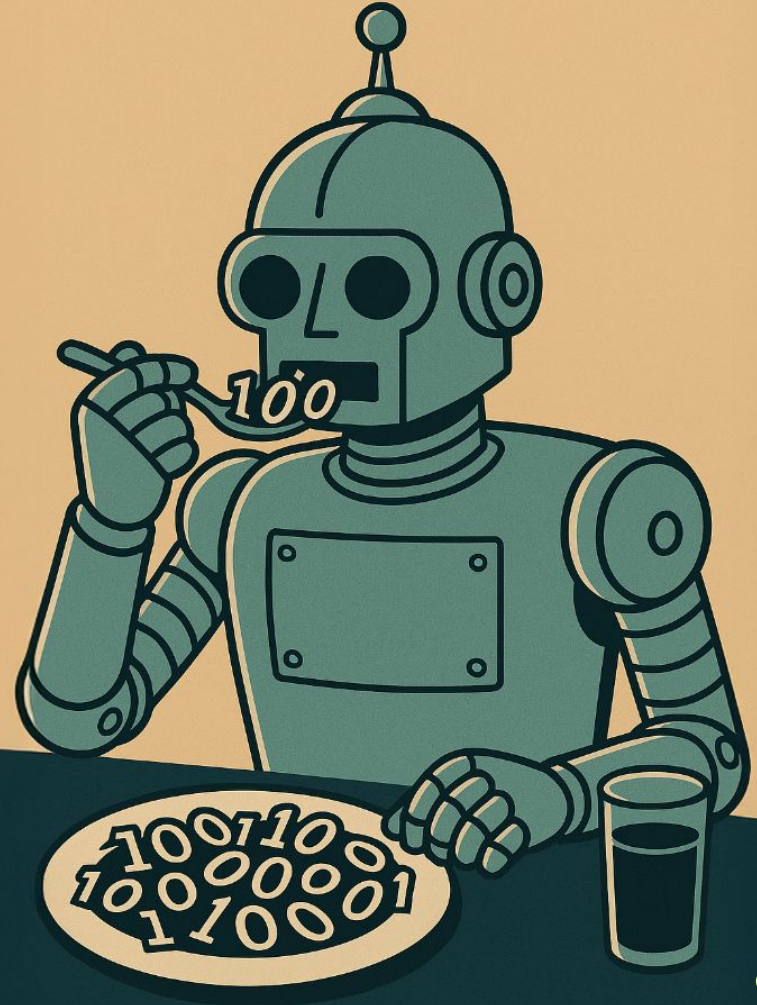
In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media — such as newspapers, TV and radio — when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly — a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?

— % Great deal/Fair amount



GALLUP®

Collaboration is critical.



Why did this happen?

*Economic, Technological,
Institutional*

1. Economic

*It's (not just) the economy,
stupid.*

Some teams were cut down or shut down.

	New repos 2013-17	2024
Mic News	124	0
Sunlight Labs	117	0
Buzzfeed News	75	0
Quartz	44	0
Vox Media	47	0

Some survivors are slowing down.

	Average 2014-23	2024
Financial Times	100.6	3
The Guardian	173.4	47
ABC News (Aus.)	18.8	4
NPR	17.6	3
The New York Times	15.9	0

Some are picking up pace.

News Org	Average 2014-23	2024
PRX	8.0	20
City Bureau	4.6	11
Bellingcat	4.1	8
Muckrock	6.1	10
DW Data	8.8	13
The Pudding	23.2	31

It worked incredibly well and was central to what 538 did. The biggest barrier is just that 538 is not there anymore.

» Dhrumil Mehta, Tow Center

When the rest of the news industry is being squeezed, it provides you with some job security to keep all your secrets.

» Jan Diehm, The Pudding

Journalism does not pay my bills in any way. Neither does open source. But I can do enough [paid] dashboards for private companies.

» E.J. Fox, Room 302 Studio

2. Technological

*“Everything that can be invented
has been invented.” (1883)*

There's a vendor in my face for everything now.

» Joe Amditis, Center for Cooperative Media

At this point, for almost every gem or library or NPM module, there are five of them that do what I need.

» Andrew Kuklewicz, PRX

**Who needs to build another
DocumentCloud? It exists.**

» Aron Pilhofer, Chicago Public Media

**We think that our problems are
ours alone. We need a venue for
problem sharing.**

» Aron Pilhofer

We're in a moment. AI is going to open up and change things in God knows what way. Here is this open moment again to pioneer and create things.

» Andrew Kuklewicz

3. Institutional

*We changed as an industry,
as teams, and as people.*

Once software becomes more important to your operation, the incentives for keeping it closed are greater.”

» Derek Willis, University of Maryland

You pushed further and further into the center of the newsroom and became more inward-facing and less outward-facing.

» Paul Bradshaw, Online Journalism Blog

**It's all professionalized. You're
driving agile processing cycles.
You're meeting your OKRs.**

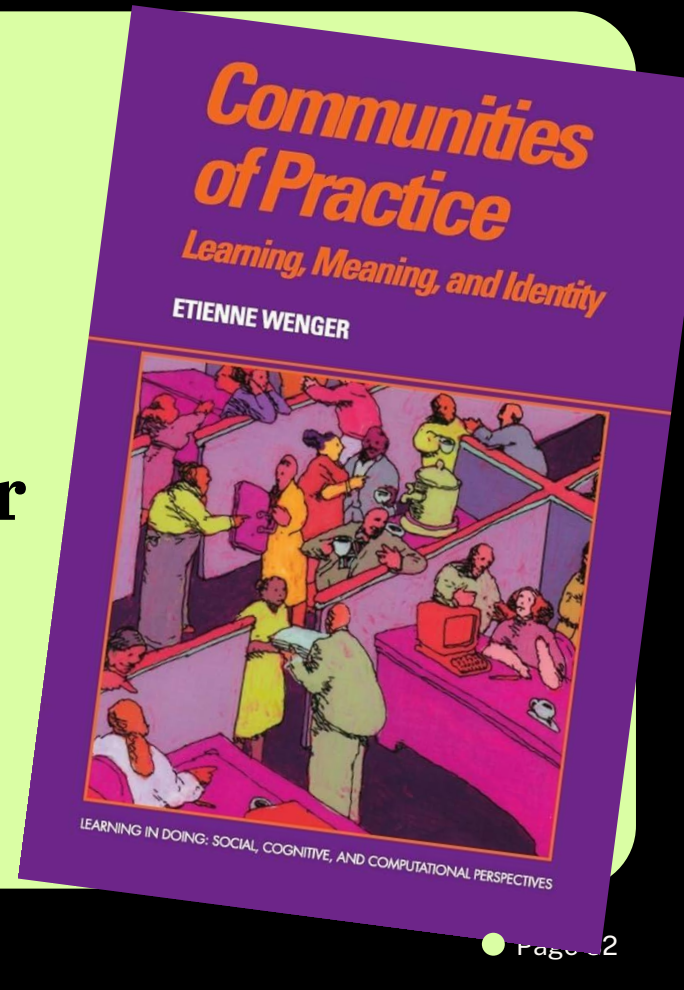
» Tiff Fehr, Gasworks Data

**It comes from having
leadership that wants it.**

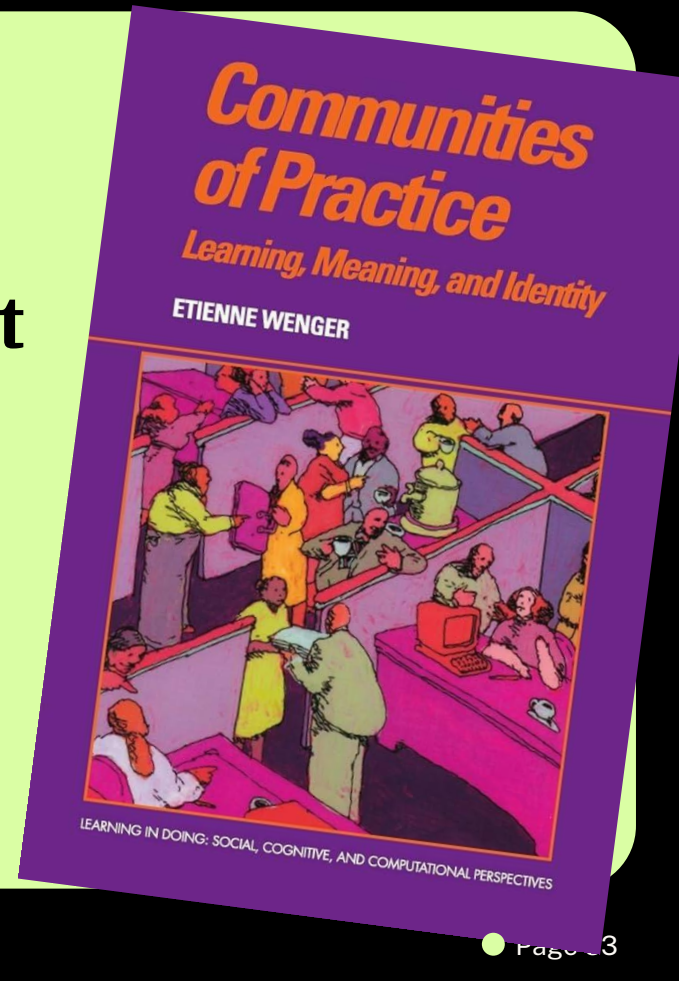
» Brian Boyer, Independent

Some final deep thoughts ...

Although workers may be contractually employed by a large institution, in day-to-day practice they work with – and, in a sense, for – a much smaller set of people.

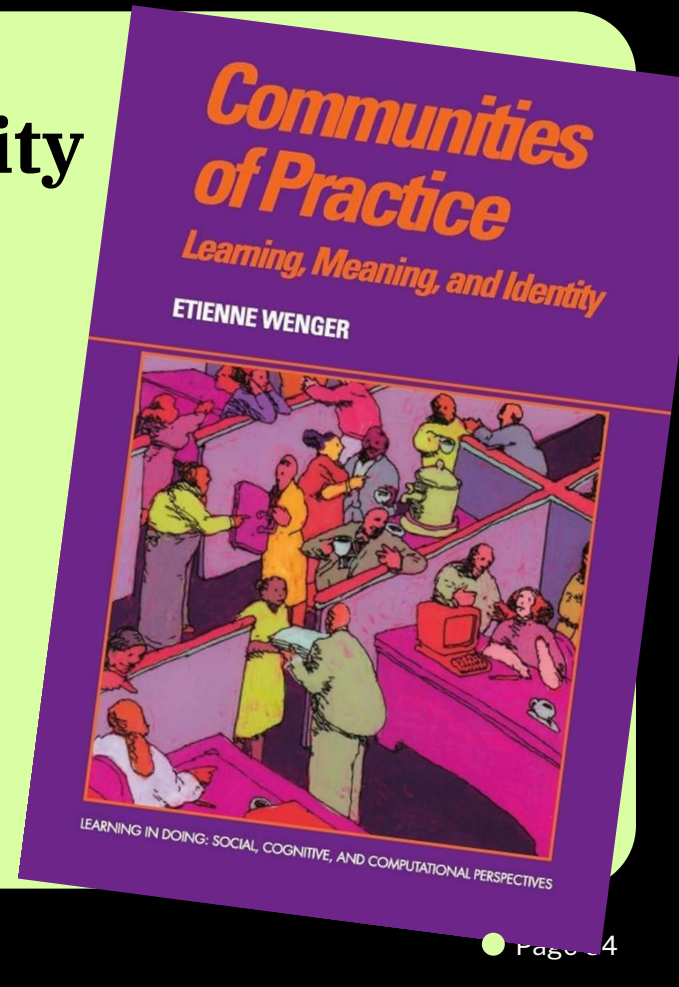


The learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice.



Practice resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement by which they can do whatever they do.

» Etienne Wenger



We missing anything?

Move past incremental change and efficiency gains and think about the transformation we can only achieve if we work together.

» Feli Carrique, NPA

How do we fix it?

With Post-It Notes of course!

Groups

1. Economic
2. Technological
3. Institutional

*How might we address this obstacle
and encourage people to share more?*



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