



City Xtra broadens content coverage and boosts revenue with SmartFrame Images

About CityXtra

Formed in 2018, City Xtra is an independent, fan-run sports publisher dedicated to providing comprehensive coverage of Manchester City Football Club. The site delivers breaking news, the latest transfer rumors, match coverage, and press conference and interview round-ups to a highly engaged audience, with close to two million followers across its various social media platforms.



Background

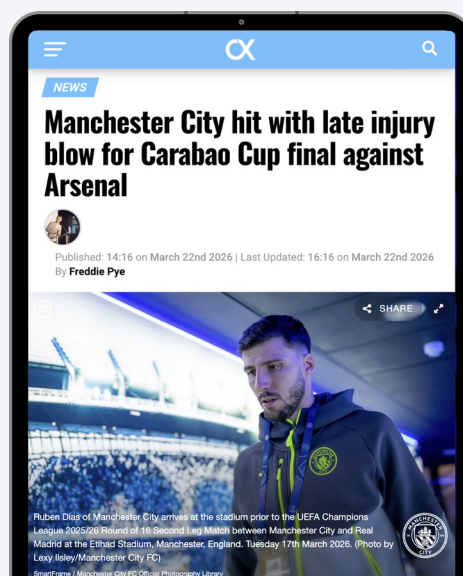
Before going independent, City Xtra relied on content-sharing partnerships with several sport platforms. While this freed the site from sourcing its own images, the syndication model negatively impacted search performance, with partner platforms often outranking City Xtra for its own original content. But going independent would mean sourcing high-quality editorial images, and incurring the hefty cost of licensing fees. Furthermore, the site's workflow would require the manual entry of photographer credits and captions for each image, adding friction to an already demanding publishing schedule.

Objectives

City Xtra set out to transform its visual content strategy, seeking a cost-effective alternative to traditional licensing that could also generate revenue. The focus was on streamlining manual workflows to maximize output, accessing exclusive images, and increasing the commercial impact of each placement. Meanwhile, with AI-driven search overviews eroding referral traffic, securing high-quality, exclusive images became essential to differentiate City Xtra from its competitors.

SmartFrame WordPress plugin

Thanks to the use of the SmartFrame Images WordPress plugin, City Xtra has been able to instantly add feature images to its articles that pull through thumbnail previews to the homepage.



Solutions

SmartFrame was integrated into City Xtra's publishing workflow, with the SmartFrame Images WordPress plugin handling the discovery and placement of featured images. This gave the team a reliable, scalable foundation for managing high volumes of images without increasing operational demands.

- **Automated metadata** – By replacing manual metadata entry with SmartFrame's integrated caption and photographer credit system, City Xtra eliminated a significant publishing bottleneck.
- **High-volume image deployment** – Image use was scaled to a minimum of 30 images per day, with 3 to 4 strategically embedded per article to balance ad placements and enhance the reader experience.
- **Hyper Zoom** – SmartFrame's proprietary Hyper Zoom feature was used to analyze training ground galleries, allowing City Xtra to accurately identify players and strengthen match and training coverage.
- **Exclusive images** – SmartFrame provided access to official club photography, including pre-game arrivals and women's team coverage, giving City Xtra an edge over rivals not using the SmartFrame Images platform.

Results

City Xtra has seen significant growth in productivity and revenue since adopting SmartFrame.

✓ New real estate monetized

Thanks to in-image advertising, City Xtra has profited from previously unoptimized space on its site without impairing the user experience.

✓ Over 900 images used per month

Embedding three to four exclusive images per article has boosted reader engagement while giving City Xtra an edge over rivals.

✓ 33% increase in monthly revenue

SmartFrame ads significantly boosted the site's income, now accounting for a quarter of its total monthly revenue.

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"I don't know how we would operate without the SmartFrame model. Sometimes it's played a significant role in paying salaries – and you don't get that through any other image provider relationship."



Freddie Pye

Founder and Director
City Xtra

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