merapar

Whitepaper

Transforming Data into Competitive Advantage

Navigate Data Overload. Don't Drown in It.

Written together with Matt Eaton
Founding Director Nepholve

Lead. Don't follow

A note before you start.

In today's competitive market, media companies must adopt a data strategy to stay ahead. This whitepaper explores the importance of a data-driven approach, highlighting how media organizations can leverage data to enhance performance, improve consumer experience, and make informed business decisions. We discuss the key components of a successful data strategy, the challenges and opportunities in implementation, and the role of AI in this process. Finally, we provide a practical framework to help media companies get started.

The Authors of this whitepaper:

Klaus Seiler
Merapar

Simon McGrath
Merapar

Matt Eaton
Nepholve

Alex Borland
Merapar

Capture value. Don't leave it behind

The Challenge: "Too Much Data, Not enough insights!"

"Too much data, not enough insights!" It's a common complaint we hear when working with content owners. In their 2024 Predictions, the DPP stated, "Everyone will need a Data Strategy", with one of their experts saying, "Data gathering becomes much more relevant. A focus on the datasets to feed AI is a hugely important issue for us". Most leaders in the media industry would agree that data is an organisational asset and that, coupled with people and creative ideas, helps their business create value. Media organisations rely on data to make informed decisions about content acquisitions and productions, drive their content supply chains, repurpose assets for different audiences, enable personalisation, increase discoverability, and conform to legal and regulatory reporting. However, far from being a strategic asset, media companies often use data very tactically to drive the content supply chain ecosystem. Data frequently resides across disparate, isolated systems and spreadsheets, making it a challenge to find the right data in the correct format at the right time.

Additionally, the complexity of media businesses and the data under management has grown significantly in the past 3 years as content is delivered to audiences across a growing range of digital devices and formats. This fragmented approach leads to challenges in obtaining insights and making data-driven decisions. Not being able to locate the right data at the right time in a very competitive market is a big problem for media companies. Internet-born media organisations that are data-driven as part of their DNA work with data to give them insights, improve performance and enhance the consumer experience. Many content owners are struggling to keep up, so a data strategy is essential to allow them to capture and organise all the most valuable data available to them.

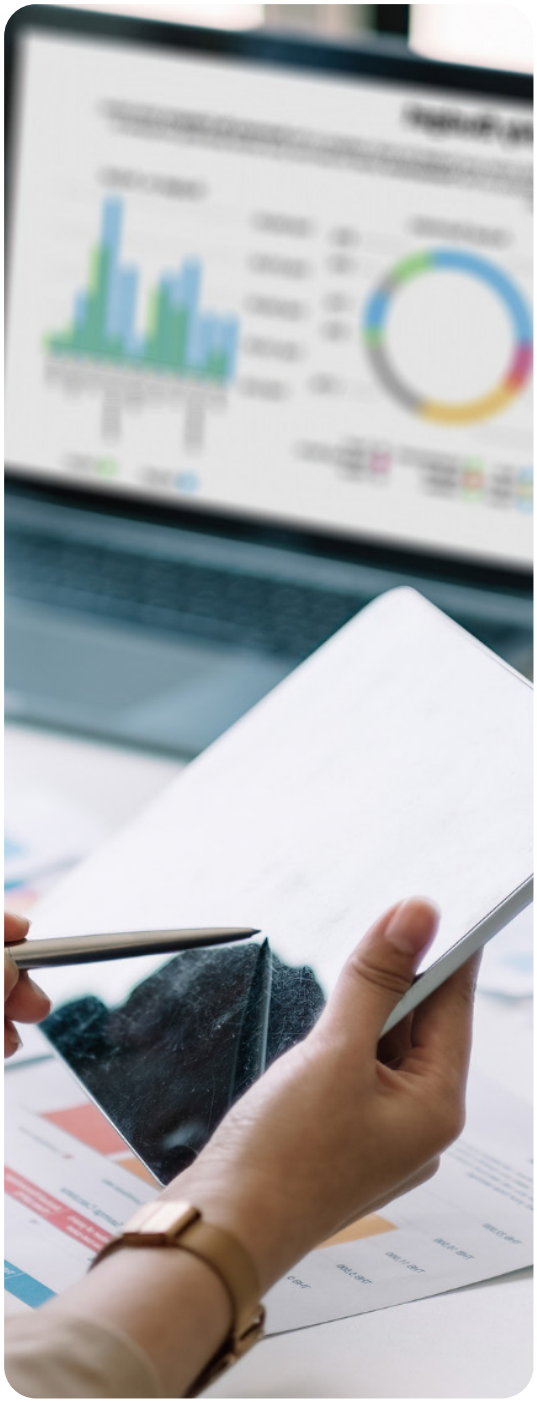
Case LAUNCHING A FAST CHANNEL IN THE MIDDLE EAST

To illustrate the challenges facing media companies coordinating data to provide insights, here's an example of a broadcaster creating a business case for launching a FAST channel in the Middle East. There is a short window of opportunity where data needs to be sourced, cleaned, combined, and analysed before the board can sign off on the new service. The analyst assigned to this job has to answer some of the following questions:

Data related questions

- What content do we own with FAST rights in the Middle East that hasn't expired and is worth exploiting?
- Where is this content stored, and how quickly can it be transcoded?
- Is the content localized with subtitles or dubbing? Do any scenes require localization?
- Is our current broadcast operation at capacity? If so, how many additional resources are needed?
- What budget is available for content promotion?
- Will the potential revenue justify the investment based on historical data?
- How will we make relevant metadata available to the distributor to support the content on my new FAST channel?

Much of this data resides in people's email inboxes, is embedded in Excel, and exists across the organisation's Rights, Scheduling, Resource Management, and Financial systems. Once extracted, the data needs to be double-checked by the heads of Programming, Operations, Creative, and Finance to ensure it is correct (or cleaned) – it may be out of date or just incomplete. Historical data may exist across several systems, where the collection exercise resembles archaeology more closely than data science!



All of these activities must be completed within a tight 5-day deadline, putting immense pressure on the team to deliver accurate and actionable insights quickly. In every media organization we've worked with, there are analysts with remarkable "data superpowers" who can swiftly locate and synthesize valuable data from a wide array of sources. These individuals are the unsung heroes, performing data gathering and analysis feats on a weekly basis that keep the wheels turning.

However, while these data superheroes are indispensable, their abilities are often difficult to scale across the organization. Relying solely on a few individuals for critical data tasks is not sustainable in the long run. Media organizations must harness these talents strategically, involving them in the development and implementation of a comprehensive data strategy. If these key players are overlooked in this process, the organization risks missing out on vital insights and efficiencies.

> **By turning scattered data into actionable insights, we empower media organizations to make informed decisions and stay ahead in an increasingly competitive landscape.**

So, what exactly does it mean to be a data-driven media company? Before we dive into the components of an effective data strategy, let's take a moment to explore what this truly looks like in practice and why it's so crucial for success.

Create Momentum. Don't Miss a Beat

The Data Flywheel: Driving Continuous Improvement

What does a data-driven media company look like? In "Good to Great," Jim Collins talks about the flywheel effect – big things happen by doing small things supremely well, which compound over time. Data-driven companies like Amazon have taken the 'flywheel' effect or a virtuous circle of data to the heart of their retail business. In its retail business, Amazon works backwards from its customers to create a great experience, which increases traffic and attracts more sellers who can offer a better selection, creating a great customer experience. In the same way, a data flywheel can be discussed for media organisations as shown below:

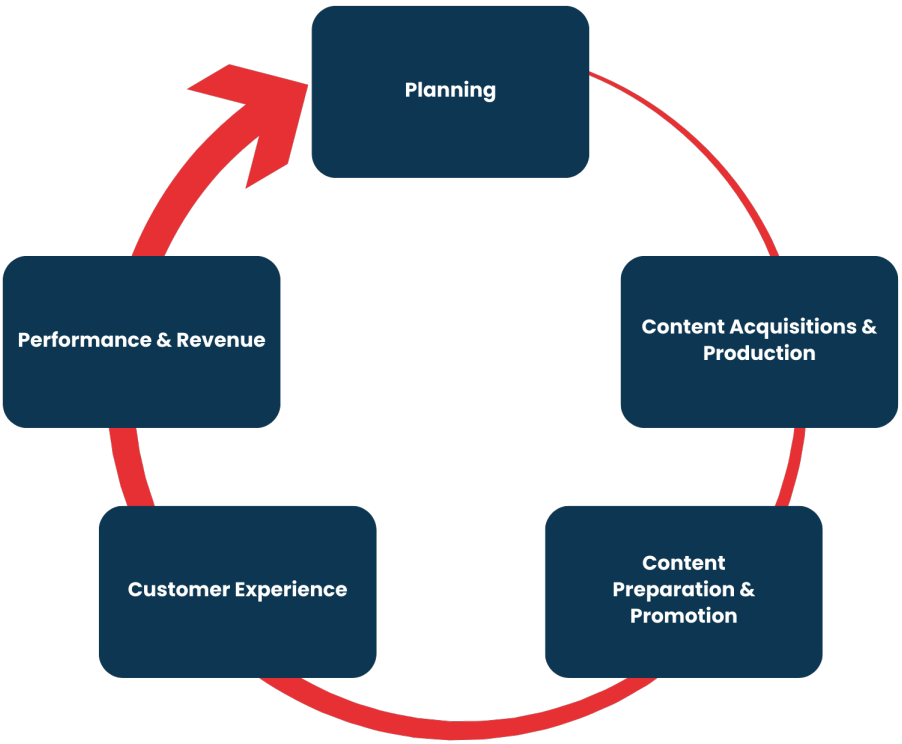


Figure: Media Data Flywheel

In the Media Data flywheel, the same data can be harnessed to drive continuous improvement and audience engagement through the content supply chain. By applying the media data flywheel to the FAST TV example above makes the analyst's job of gathering, cleaning, and publishing data sourced from the rights management, scheduling, resource management, and financial systems much easier. To achieve this, however, organisations need a coordinated strategy for data that cuts across traditional functional department silos and a platform which allows them to provide a unified view of their data.

Data-driven decision-making can significantly improve media companies' content creation, audience engagement, and overall business performance. For example:

Benefits of Data-Driven Decision-Making for Media Companies:

- **Content Personalisation:** Deliver tailored content to enhance user experience and engagement.
- **Advertising Revenue:** Maximize advertising effectiveness with targeted campaigns based on viewer data.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Streamline internal processes, reduce costs, and improve productivity.
- **Competitive Advantage:** Stay ahead of competitors by leveraging data insights for strategic decisions.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Ensure data handling practices comply with relevant data protection regulations.

If organizations aim to effectively leverage AI models in their business operations, it is crucial to establish a well-defined data strategy. This strategy should encompass the provision of high-quality data for AI models, which is essential for their success. By implementing such a strategy, organizations can streamline the processes of data collection, integration, and management, ensuring that AI initiatives are not only efficient but also aligned with broader business goals.

Make Data Work for You. Don't Just Collect It

Crafting a Data Strategy: From Collection to Culture

A data strategy is a comprehensive plan that outlines how an organisation will collect, manage, and use data to achieve its business goals. It must be aligned with the business strategy; otherwise, it is just an academic exercise. Some have described the need for "Data for the Strategy" rather than a "Data Strategy". Regardless, as with all data projects, it is best to start with the questions the business is trying to answer and work backwards from there.

There is no one template for a data strategy; the most important thing is that it is a framework that develops over time and provides guidelines for the organisation. It is certainly not all about technology, though. It is essential to consider the following regarding people and processes, as well as technology, when thinking about the flows of information through an organisation:

Data Quality

Sound business decisions rely on data quality, defined by accuracy, completeness, reliability, relevance, and timeliness. Ensuring data quality is crucial for effective acquisition, organization, analysis, and stakeholder delivery.

Data Culture

Culture is central to being a data-driven organisation and refers to the behaviours, talent, tools, and practices around data and how it is used to make data-informed decisions. Culture is central to being a data-driven organisation.

If people do not trust the data (quality) or feel confident enough to make decisions based on the data (culture), then a data strategy is pointless. A comprehensive data strategy for a media company should include the following components:

- **Data Collection:** Define what data is needed (e.g., viewer behaviour, content metadata, ad performance) and how it will be collected.
- **Data Quality:** Establish standards for data accuracy and consistency. Implement mechanisms for data validation and cleansing.
- **Data Governance:** Set policies and procedures for data management, including data ownership, access controls, and compliance with legal and ethical standards.
- **Data Integration:** Ensure data from various sources (e.g., different platforms and third-party data) is unified and compatible.
- **Data Storage:** Decide on storage solutions that balance cost, performance and security (e.g., on-premises, cloud storage) cleansing.
- **Data Analytics:** Develop capabilities for analysing data to extract actionable insights (e.g., using machine learning models and business intelligence tools).
- **Data Utilisation:** Outline how data will be used to drive business objectives, such as content recommendation engines, targeted advertising, and audience analysis.

In addition, when implementing the data strategy, defining a set of guiding principles such as "data is reused" or "data is a valued asset" is important. These provide guidelines that help media organisations evaluate how data is treated when thinking about people, process, or technology change. So where can media organisations start?

Plan with Purpose. Don't Leave It to Chance

Creating a Data Strategy: Step-by-Step

Developing a robust data strategy is essential for any organization aiming to harness the full potential of its data assets. A well-crafted data strategy serves as a roadmap, guiding the collection, management, and utilization of data to align with overarching business objectives. However, creating a data strategy is not a one-size-fits-all process; it requires a tailored approach that takes into account the unique needs, challenges, and goals of the organization.

To build an effective data strategy, it's crucial to follow a systematic process that ensures all aspects of data management are considered and addressed. By carefully following these steps, organizations can create a data strategy that not only supports their current needs but also positions them for future growth and innovation.

Step 1

Engage Stakeholders

Involve key stakeholders from different departments to ensure the strategy addresses various needs and perspectives.

Step 2

Define Objectives

Align the data strategy closely with the company's overall business goals and specific objectives to ensure strategic alignment.

Step 3

Assess Current State

Evaluate the existing data assets, infrastructure, and capabilities thoroughly to identify strengths and improvements.

Step 4

Develop Roadmap

Create a detailed plan that outlines the specific steps needed to achieve the data strategy, including clear timelines and resource allocation.

Step 5

Implement Governance

Establish a governance framework to manage processes effectively and ensure full compliance with regulations..

Step 6

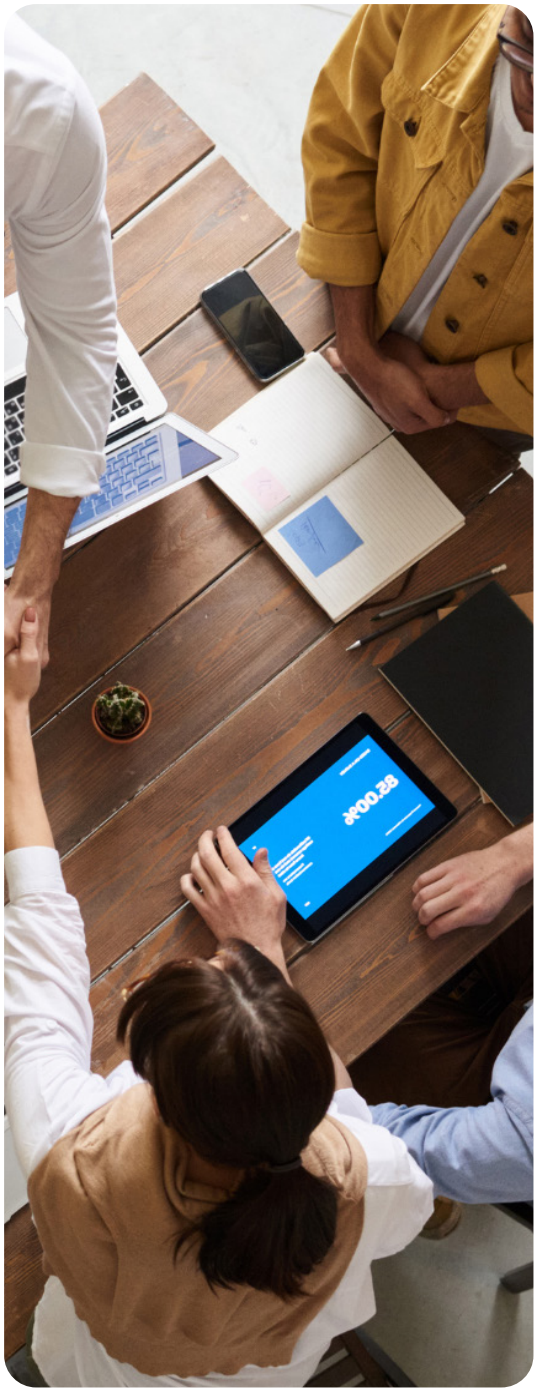
Build Capabilities

Invest in the essential tools, technologies, and skills needed to support the successfull implementation of the data strategy.

Using a recent example from our work with an international broadcaster that distributes content through a combination of linear, FAST, syndicated, and direct-to-consumer apps, we approached the creation of a data strategy in three key parts. First, we focused on creating a vision. Operating on the principle that data should serve the purpose of enabling critical business decisions, we engaged senior stakeholders in the process. We conducted a workshop with the leadership team to identify and prioritize the most valuable use cases for data within the organization.

Next, we moved on to assessing the current data capabilities. We conducted a comprehensive data review to better understand the broadcaster's existing use of data and its overall value. This involved gathering information through structured interviews and online surveys about current working practices, report generation, data accuracy, data governance, and potential areas for improvement. We also conducted a report audit, documenting both formal and informal methods of data capture and presentation, while quantifying the manual effort involved in report creation. Using this information, we assessed the organization's current data maturity, evaluating infrastructure, people, tools, organization, and processes.

Finally, we constructed a strategic framework for data based on the previous analysis. This framework included a set of guiding principles that would support the vision and a roadmap for implementing changes in technology, people, and processes. A crucial component of this framework was establishing strong



> **Implementing a data strategy is the key to transforming fragmented information into powerful insights that drive informed decisions and foster sustainable growth in a competitive environment.**

data governance, which identified the necessary guardrails for implementing improvements and created structures within the organization to uphold the data strategy. This process also included detailed considerations for data security guidelines, ensuring that all data handling practices met the highest standards of protection. We also addressed regulatory and legal obligations, carefully aligning the strategy with current laws and industry regulations to avoid any compliance issues. Additionally, we developed an ethical framework for the organization's use of AI, ensuring that the integration of AI technologies would be both responsible and aligned with the company's values. By engaging senior leadership early in the process, the strategic importance of data was clearly recognized and emphasized across the entire organization. This engagement revealed the fragmented nature of the company's data, which was dispersed across various systems managed by different departments. It became evident that unifying this data was essential to provide the comprehensive insights necessary for informed decision-making and long-term success. Now that you have a data strategy in place, the next step is to bring it to life and implement it effectively.

Integrate Seamlessly. Don't Let Growth Outpace you.

From Vision to Reality: Making Data Strategies Work

Before any implementation is started, ensure that the senior leadership and business stakeholders fully understand the vision and goals set out in the data strategy. Start by implementing the data governance element of your strategy. This may include appointing individuals within the business as data owners – remember those data superheroes we mentioned earlier? In our experience, the appointment of data owners for different data types not only supports the overall data strategy but also gives people the agency to identify process and system improvements themselves. Schedule a regular data owner meeting and involve them in reviewing the impact of planned technology and process changes.

As with any large initiative, it is advisable to start with small, manageable pilot projects to test the data strategy and demonstrate its value. For example, you might begin by improving the management of real-time sports data within the organization. These pilot projects should be designed to yield quick, tangible results, which can help build momentum and confidence in the strategy. As these pilot projects move into production, it's essential to ensure the solutions are scalable to accommodate increasing data volumes and complexity. Additionally, provide thorough training to employees and manage the change process to cultivate a data-driven culture, helping build trust in data as the foundation for decision-making. Regular feedback loops during this phase are crucial to identify any issues early and make necessary adjustments. Collaboration between IT, data science, and business units is crucial for alignment and effective implementation of the strategy's roadmap. Establishing clear communication channels and setting shared goals can further enhance this collaboration. When introducing new technologies and tools, make sure they can integrate smoothly with existing systems to allow for future growth without disrupting ongoing operations.

For instance, the Unified Metadata Platform (UMP) is an accelerator that Merapar has developed. Built with media organisations in mind, it understands the character, value and volume of inbound metadata from multiple sources and offers a semantically intelligent data source for downstream distribution and analytics technologies. Using this solution, it is possible to store and index data from existing sources (e.g. MAM, rights, scheduling systems) and combine them to generate data-driven insights.

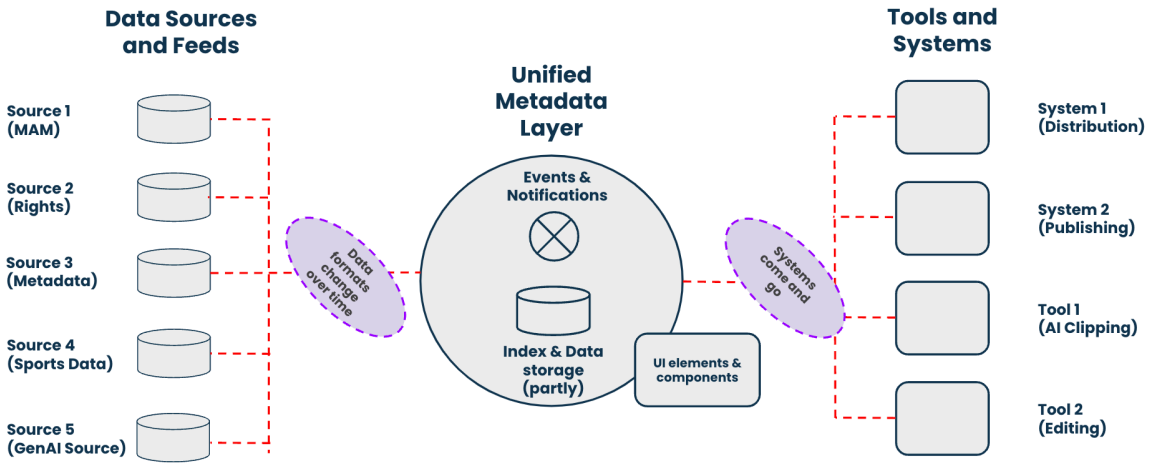


Figure: Merapar's Unified Metadar Platform

A Unified Metadata Platform (UMP) is a comprehensive software solution that creates a persistent, unified metadata mesh—a structured framework accessible to other systems within the organization. By pulling data from multiple sources, cleaning, indexing, and combining it, the UMP provides a single overarching view that is consistent and reliable. This structured data is then made uniformly available for consumption by other systems, ensuring seamless integration and use across the organization. The UMP addresses a common challenge: the difficulty of quickly understanding, valuing, capturing, and making new and valuable data resources available to established systems. By overcoming this obstacle, the UMP enables organizations to fully leverage their data assets.

As organizations grow and evolve, so too must their data strategy. It's essential that the data strategy adapts to meet new business requirements or services as they emerge. This continuous refinement process ensures that the strategy remains relevant and effective. Without this crucial feedback loop, even a well-

built data infrastructure can quickly become outdated, leaving the business lagging behind. Speaking of staying ahead, let's consider the role of AI in this evolving landscape.

AI models thrive on data, making the quality, quantity, and relevance of data critical factors in training effective AI systems. A well-defined data strategy enhances an organization's use of AI by streamlining data collection, integration, and management processes. This makes it easier to supply AI models with the high-quality data they need. Without such a strategy, AI initiatives risk failure due to poor data quality, lack of integration, or insufficient governance. Even worse, AI projects that are not aligned with business strategy can become expensive science experiments with little return on investment.

Integrating AI into a media organization involves more than just technology—it requires a shift in data culture. This shift includes educating and empowering teams while establishing proper technical and ethical governance to ensure responsible AI usage. This is particularly important in creative organizations where generative AI is increasingly being used to create storyboards or even short clips. As media companies build their AI capabilities and develop custom models, these tools will need to be fine-tuned with proprietary training data to perform specialized tasks reliably. Given the importance of intellectual property (IP) and data protection, it's not feasible to simply use an open-source AI model without modification. Therefore, a robust data strategy is essential for guiding the "bringing the model to the data" approach that is crucial for media AI.

Our Conclusion

Media organizations that do not have a well-defined data strategy aligned with their overall business goals will inevitably struggle to generate meaningful insights, improve operational performance, and deliver an enhanced consumer experience. The absence of a strategic approach to managing and utilizing data can lead to missed opportunities, inefficiencies, and a disconnect between the wealth of data available and the actionable insights needed to drive growth. In today's competitive landscape, where data is a critical asset, organizations without a solid data strategy are at a significant disadvantage compared to those that are fully leveraging their data capabilities.

merapar

Thank you for reading !

For more insights, feel free to contact us or listen to our podcast, where we dive deeper into this topic with industry experts. Tune in today!

www.merapar.com/destination-cloud

Lead. Don't follow