

PLAYBOOK

Winning Over New Readers

4 Key Metrics That Predict
Return Visits

 Chartbeat



When 86% of new visitors won't return to your website in the next 7 days, there's a lot riding on the first visit.

You only get one chance at a first impression, which is why it's essential to understand the actions first-time visitors take and what they reveal about their propensity to return to your website.

Repeat visits form habits and lead to loyalty. Loyalty then leads to revenue in the form of ad impressions and subscriptions. To develop a clearer understanding of the audience behaviors that result in repeat visits, we analyzed millions of data points from our global network of publishers to see how metrics like number of pages visited, scroll depth, content type, and more affect likelihood to return.

For this study, we reviewed the first session of more than 300 million visitors to news and media websites in our global network. Overall, 14% of first-time visitors returned to the same site in the next 7 days. This is a benchmark we'll return to as we analyze how different factors affect return rate.



What's Inside

Findings on how deeper, more engaged visits drive an increase in return visits

Strategies to encourage additional pageviews

Tactics for increasing scroll depth

Tips for boosting engagement on your website



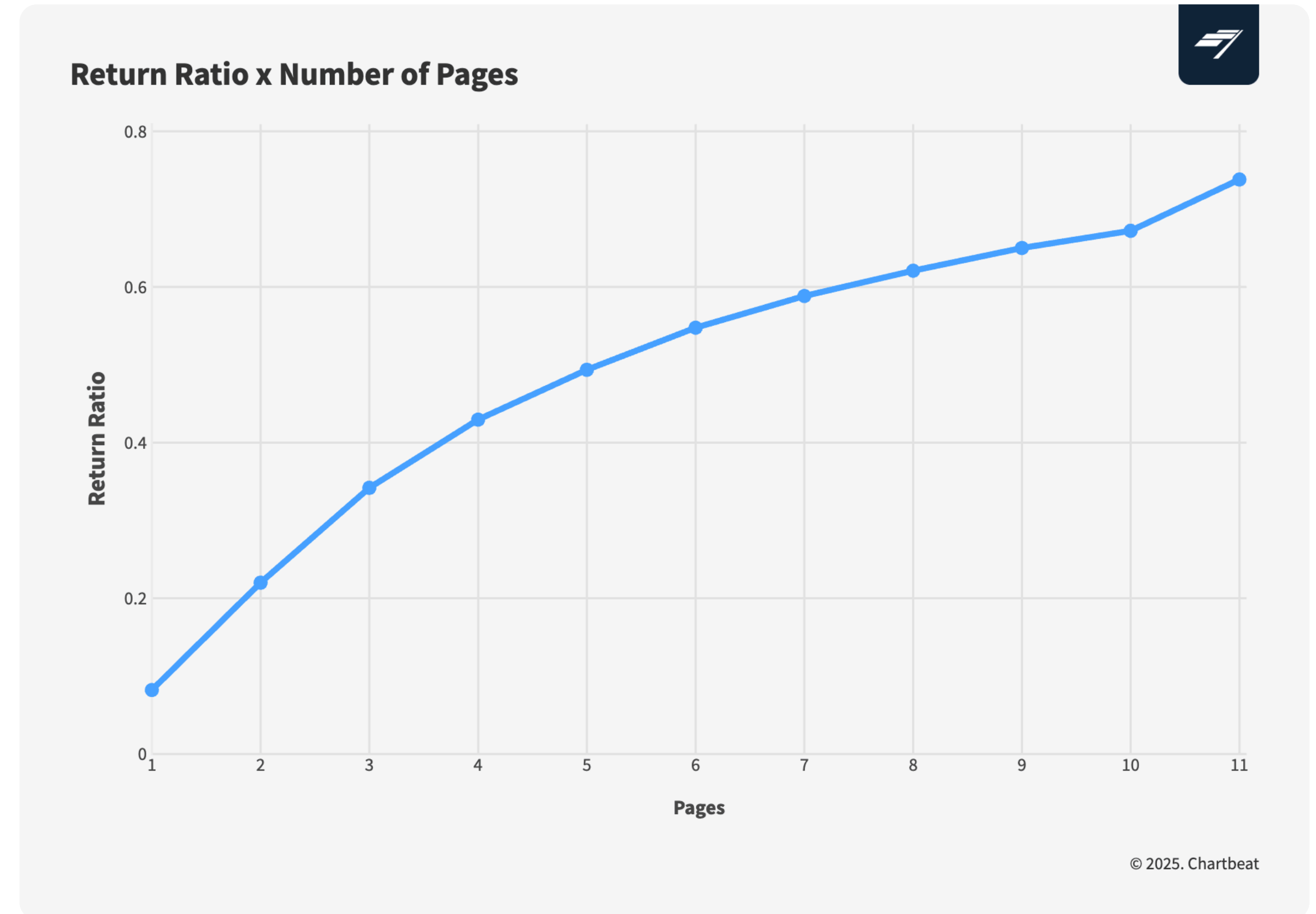
How deeper visits influence return rate

It all starts with the first pageview. Without it, there is nowhere to scroll, click, or otherwise engage on your site. But just how much does it matter whether or not a first-time visitor stops on their first page or continues deeper into your site?

We found that visitors who viewed one page on their first visit returned at a rate of 8%, below our benchmark of 14% for the average visitor.

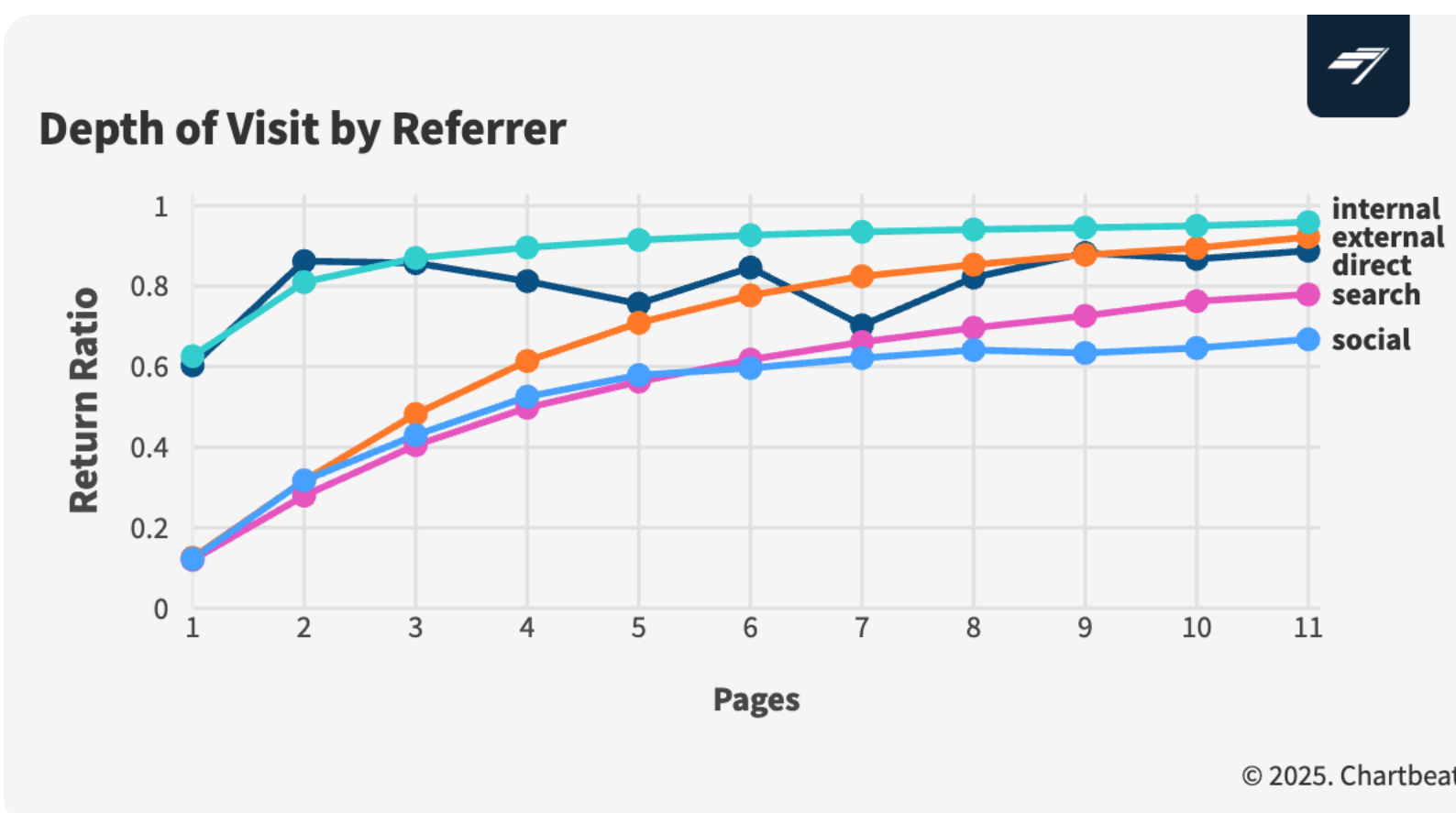
For visitors who viewed just one additional page, their return rate jumped up to 22%, making them 2.75x likelier to come back.

Beyond 2 pages, return rates continue to increase. Visitors who view 11 pages or more return at a rate of 74%—but the relative change in return rate starts to plateau after this mark. For example, visitors who view 4 pages return at a rate of 43% and those who view 5 pages return at a rate of 49%.

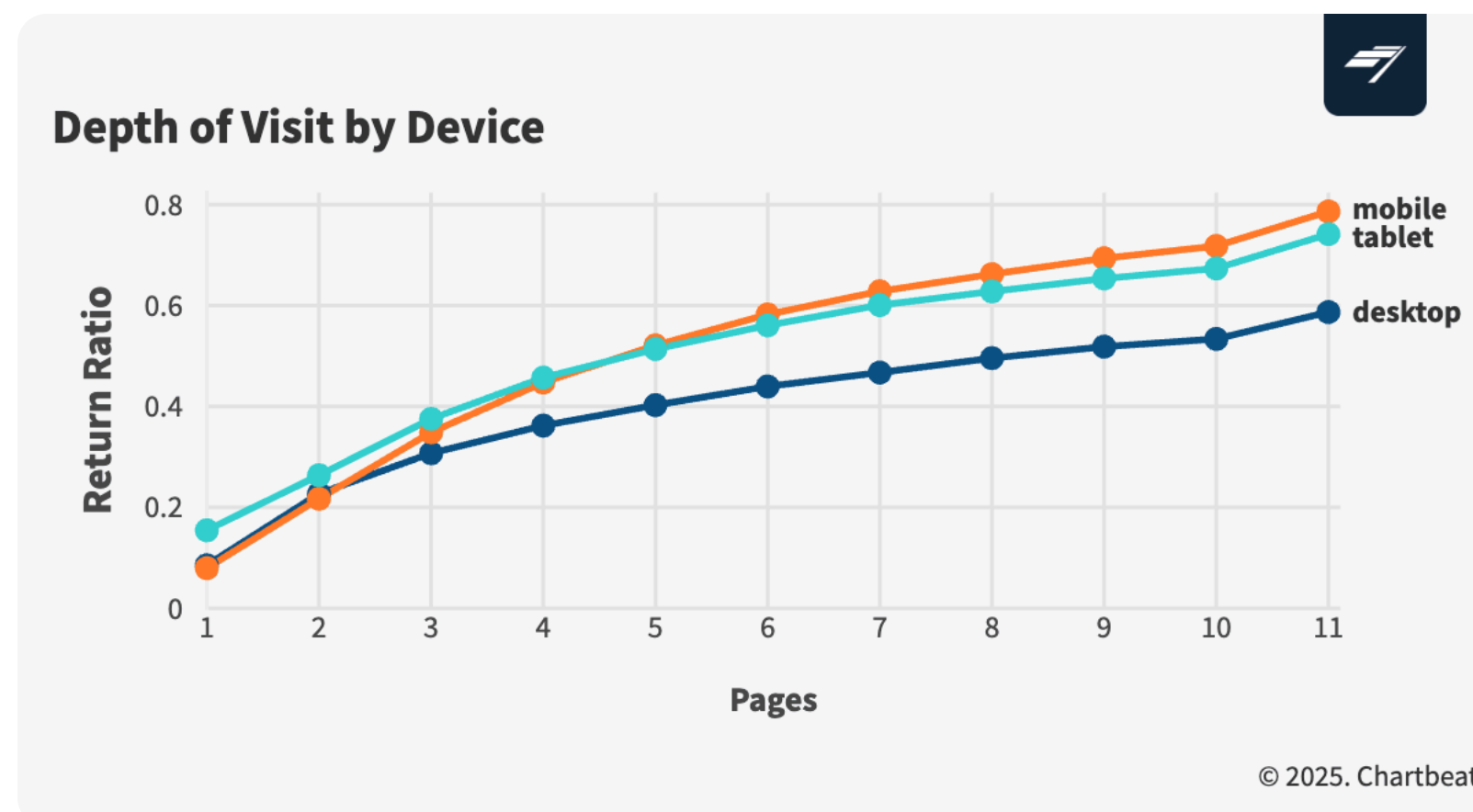


How referral source and device influence depth of visit

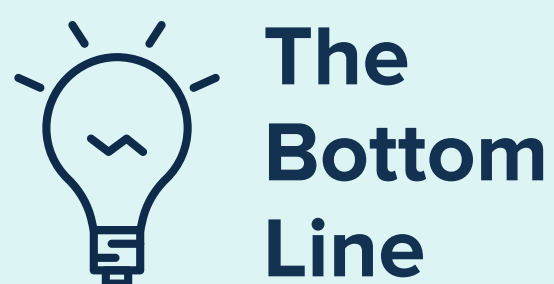
While each additional page viewed helps, incentivizing new users to visit just one more page on their first visit will have a measurable impact on whether or not they return. Let's look at how this is influenced by referral source and device type.



For external referral sources like search and social, return rate increases as pages viewed increases, plateauing after 4 pages. Visitors from search are more likely to return than those from social as pageviews increase beyond that point.



For visitors using all device types, we see the return rate increase as pageviews increase. Past the 3-page threshold, desktop visitors are not as likely to return as mobile visitors.



The Bottom Line

Incentivizing new users to visit just one more page on their first visit will have a measurable impact on whether or not they return.

How to Encourage Deeper Visits

1

A/B test headlines and images to find winning combinations.

Find the combination most likely to encourage another click from your homepage to an article.

On average, testing headlines and images together increases quality clicks 3x more than testing headlines alone.

2

Take cues from high-recirculation pages on your website.

Previous research shows that financial and sports content has higher Recirculation than news & media or arts & entertainment. Other industries may also offer inspiration.

3

Consider device types to enhance user experience for return visits.

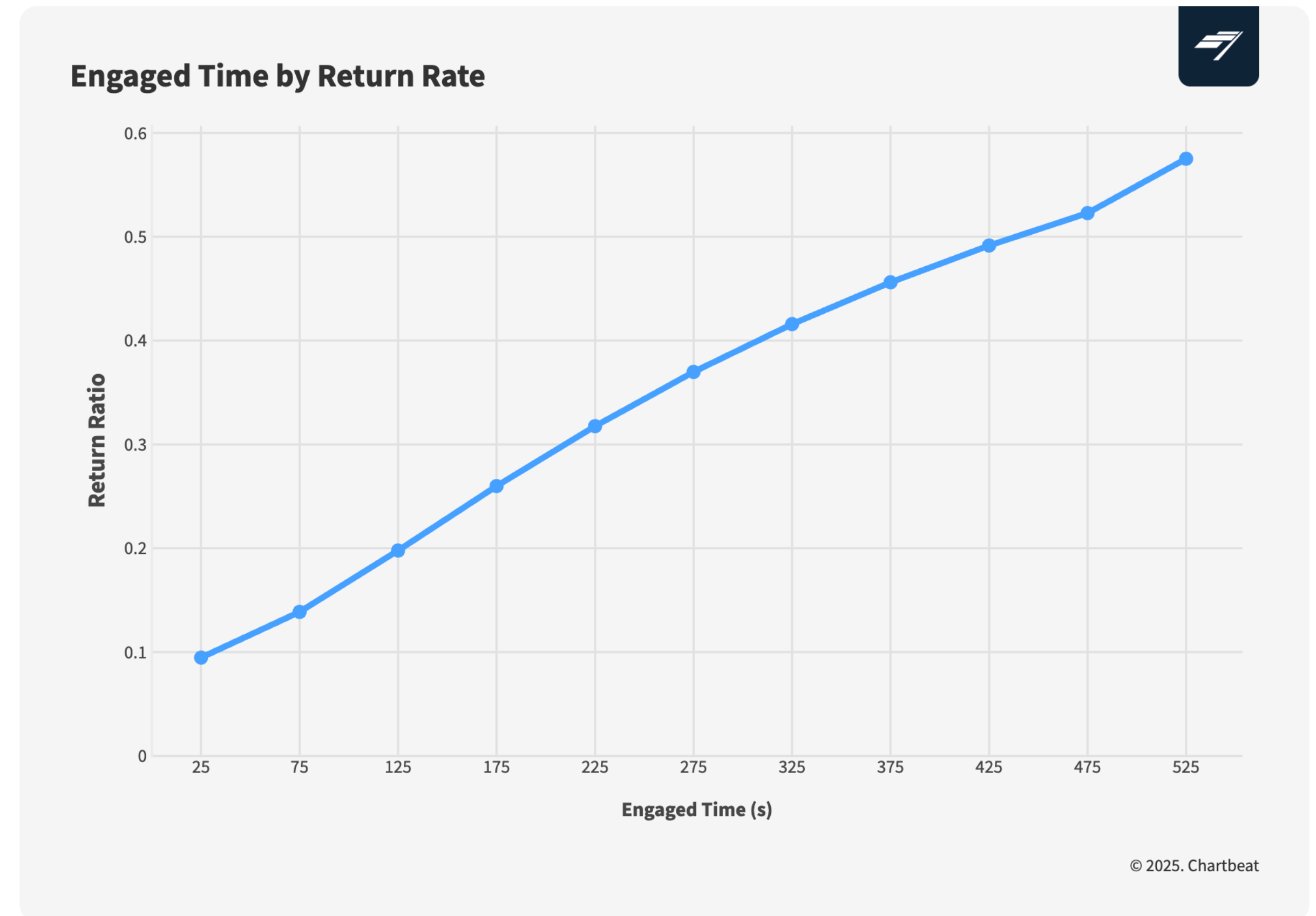
Mobile visitors are more likely to return after viewing 3+ pages. Use shorter formats that deliver key content upfront and encourage further exploration.

How Engaged Time influences rate of return

Recognizing the impact of the number of pages viewed during a new visit, it's no surprise that the more time a visitor spends scrolling, clicking, and engaging with content on their first visit corresponds to a greater likelihood of returning.

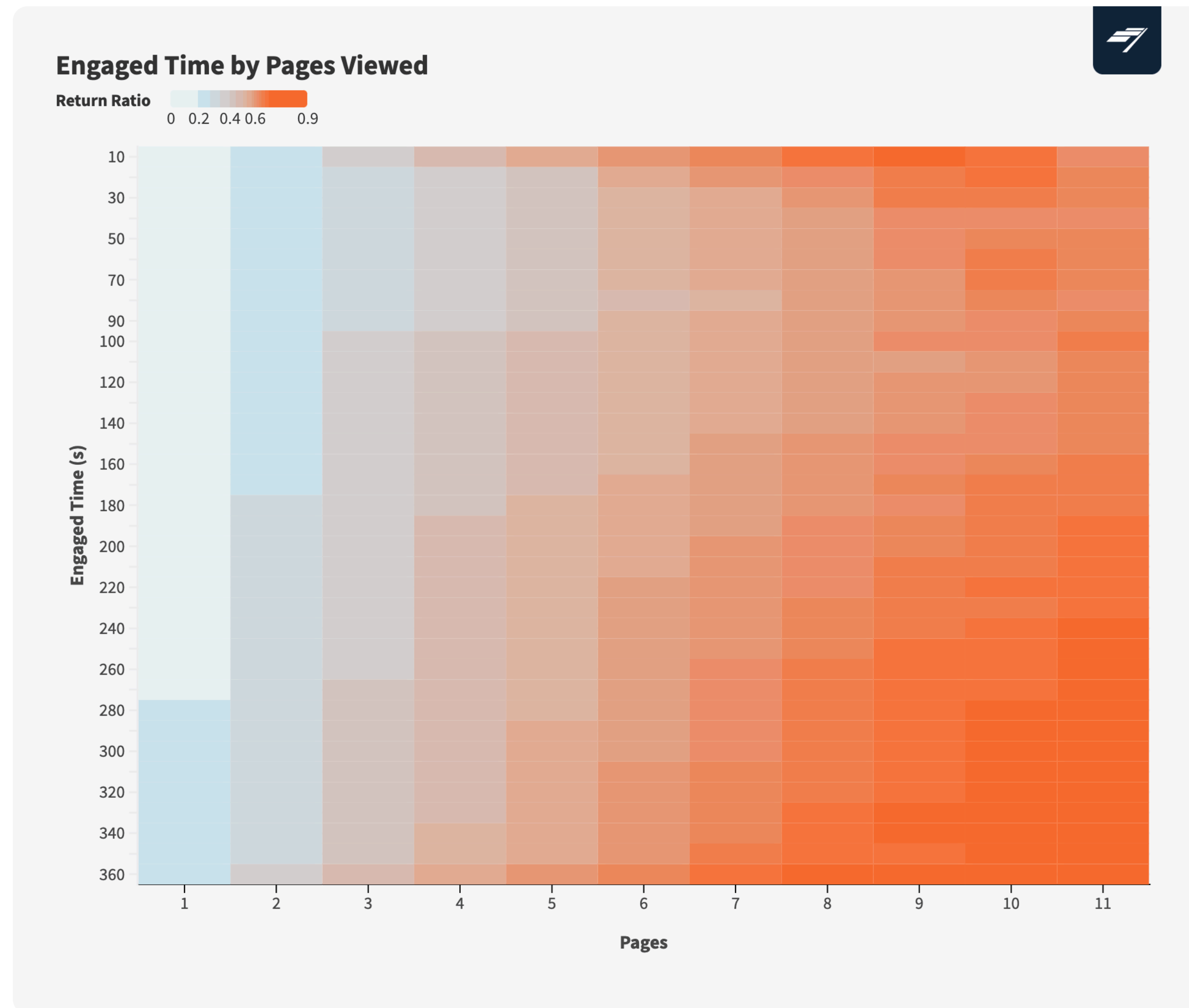
Compared to pages viewed, the effect of engaged time is less immediate but a lot more linear. In this chart, we see that of visitors who engage for 25 seconds, only 9% return, below the benchmark of 14%. For visitors who engage for 75 seconds, 14% return within the next 7 days.

To achieve the same return rate as someone viewing 2 pages (22%), visitors need to spend 150 seconds actively engaging on their first visit. Though not uncommon for a particularly compelling article, it's worth noting that the worldwide [Average Engaged Time in 2024 was 29 seconds](#).



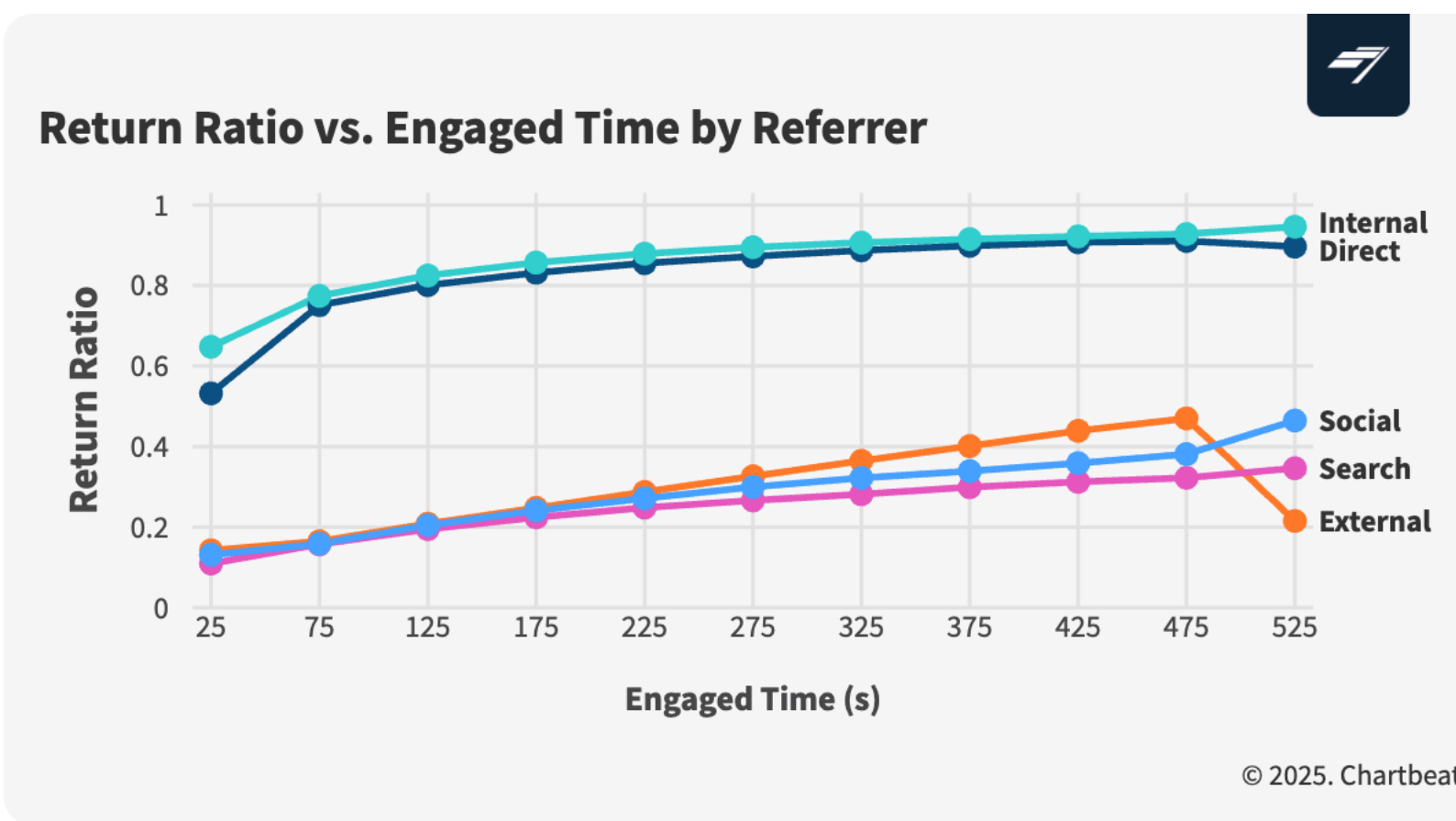
Should you optimize for more pages or more engaged time?

Another way to look at the effect of pageviews and engaged time is by looking at sessions that had varying levels of both. When we look at this heatmap, we see that visitors who viewed one page for 5 minutes are as likely to return as those who viewed 2 pages during a 20-second session (15%). And those who viewed 3 pages for 10 seconds are more than twice as likely to return (33%).

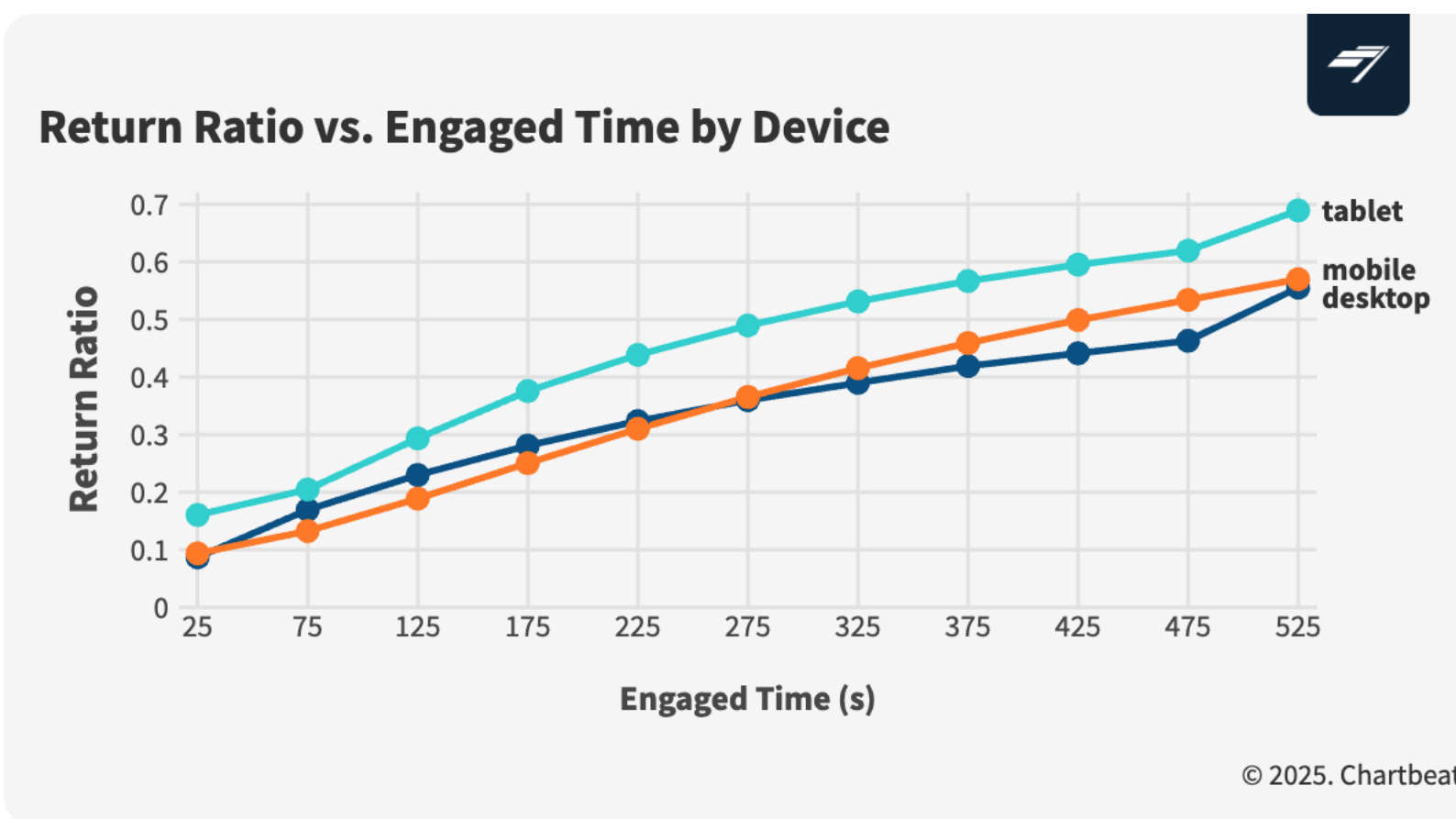


How referral source and device affect engagement

No matter where a visitor comes from or what device they use, higher engaged time corresponds with a higher likelihood to return in the future. Let's look closer at each source and device.



Internal and direct traffic are highly likely to return no matter the amount of engagement on their first visit. This makes sense as internal visitors, by definition, are visiting more than 1 page. After 3 minutes of engagement, visitors from external sources like news aggregators are more likely to return than social or search visitors.



When looking at engagement by device, tablet users are more likely to return, regardless of engaged time during their first visit. Mobile users are least likely to return initially, but after 4 minutes their return rate overtakes desktop users.



The Bottom Line

Though increasing pages viewed and engaged time both lead to a higher propensity to return, if you have to focus on one, additional pages are more effective. On a first visit, focus on providing visitors with recommendations that are personal and interesting in addition to optimizing the page they land on to encourage deeper site engagement.

How to Increase Engagement from New Visitors

1

Use real-time data to see which stories drive quality views and which don't.

Give better positioning and promotional resources to the stories proven to engage new readers.

2

Boost engagement with longer, more in-depth content.

Research shows that engagement increases as word count increases, especially from 0 to 2,000 words. If certain topics are underperforming, try a more in-depth approach that incorporates previous coverage to provide greater context to the current event.

3

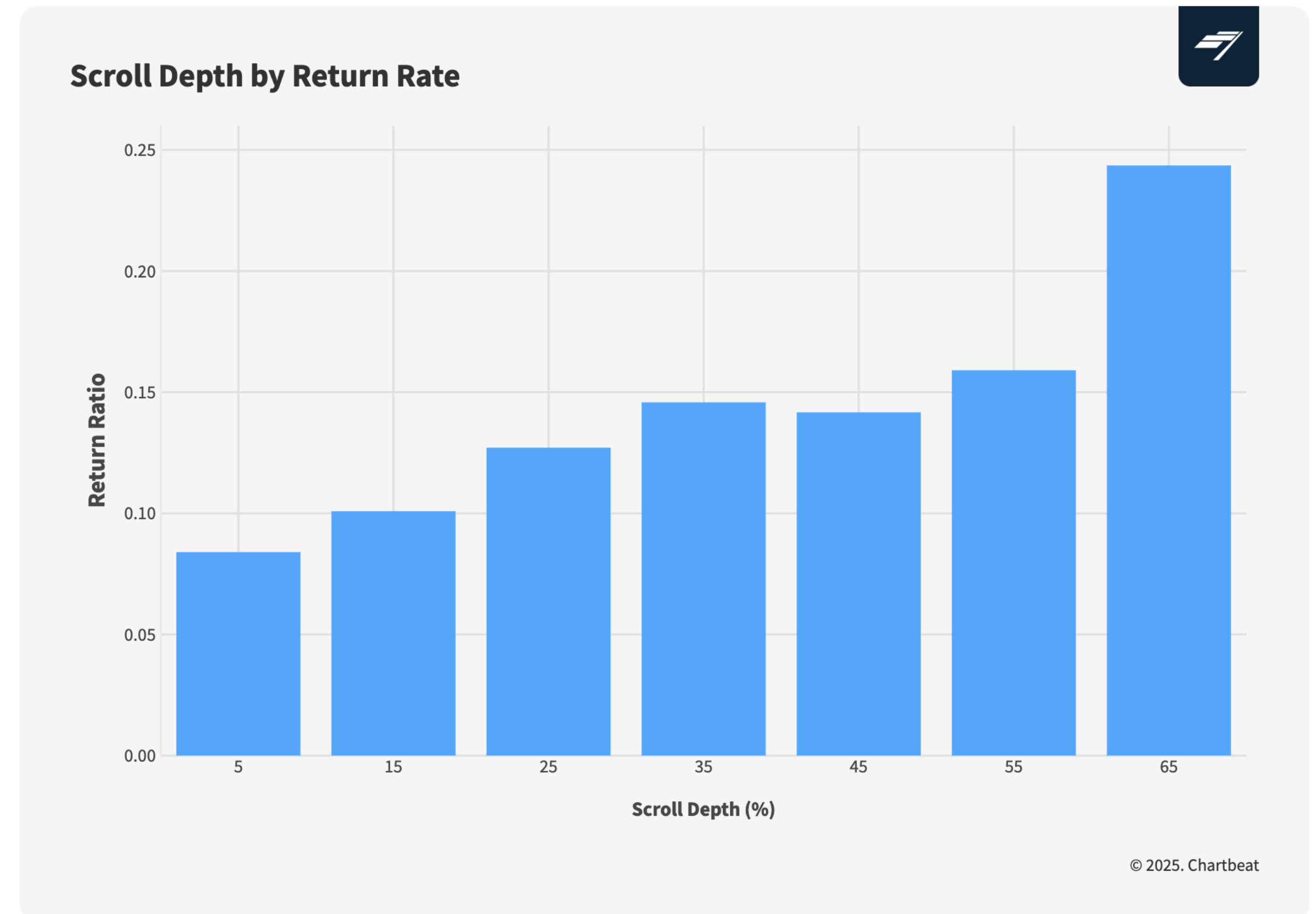
Consider using live blogs where applicable to keep your audience engaged.

Live blogs have also shown higher levels of engagement than static articles. Incorporate live updates when breaking news offers a chance to refresh a story.

How scroll depth influences rate of return

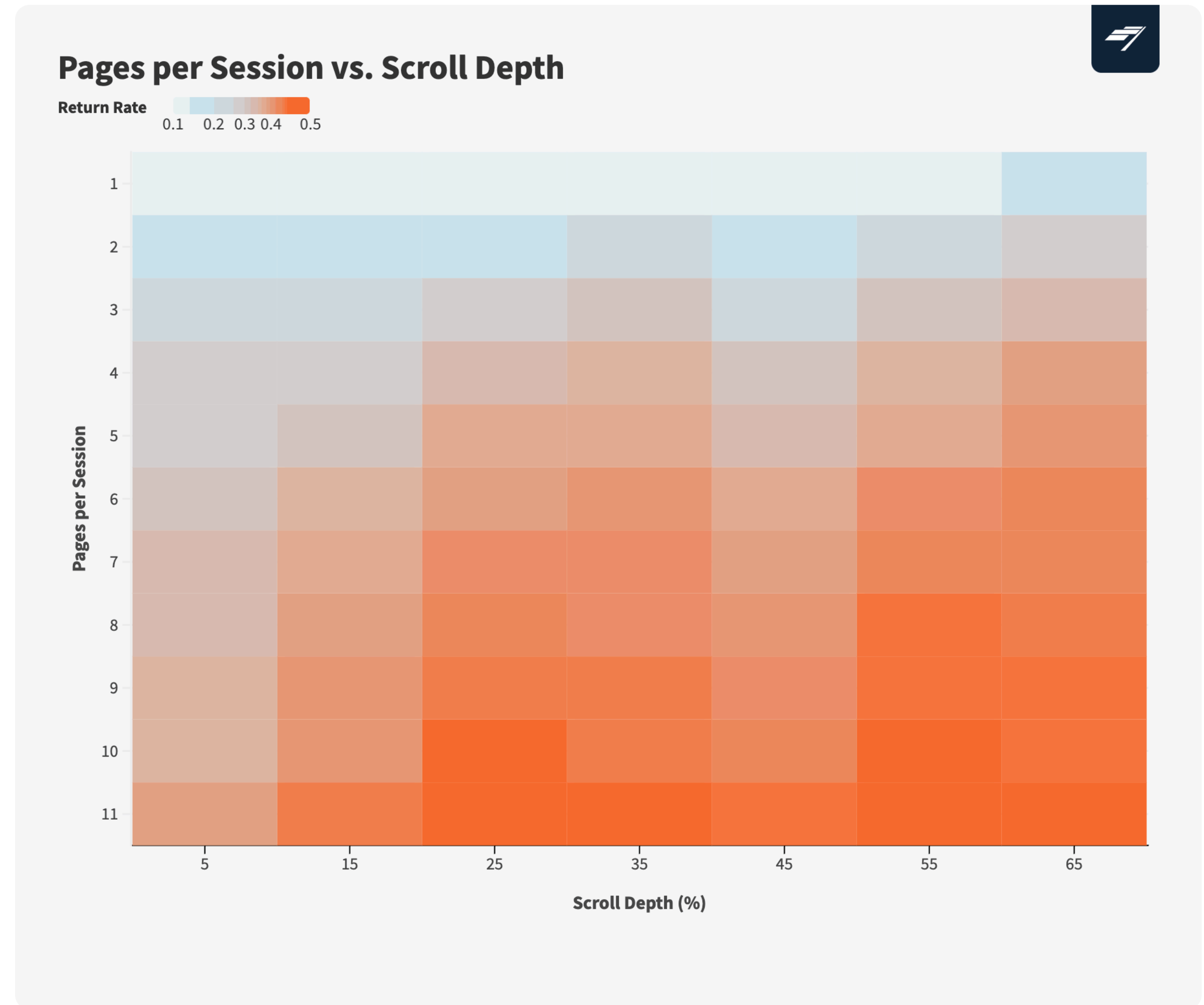
Scroll depth's influence on return rate is not as dramatic as pages viewed or engaged time, but in general, deeper scrolling also equates to a higher return rate. Those who scroll 25-35% of the total page return at around our benchmark rate of 14%, but the relative change on return rate diminishes quickly past this point.

This isn't to say that additional scrolling is a bad thing, but it's helpful to remember that deep scrolling is indicative of extended engaged time on one page, which isn't as effective in increasing return rate as other metrics.



Combining scroll depth and pageviews

Because we know that scrolling deeply on one page can limit time spent on additional pages, let's look at scroll ratio in conjunction with pages per session. Even with a minimal amount of scrolling, one additional pageview increases the return rate from 5% to 15%. At 5 pages, it jumps up to 28%.



How to Promote Deeper Scrolling on Multiple Pages

1

Optimize for mobile.

3 out of 4 articles are now read on mobile devices. Make sure that formatting appropriately accounts for these smaller screens.

2

Experiment with layout.

Move images and reformat headlines to make it easier for readers to reach the body text.

3

Drive scroll depth with engaging headlines.

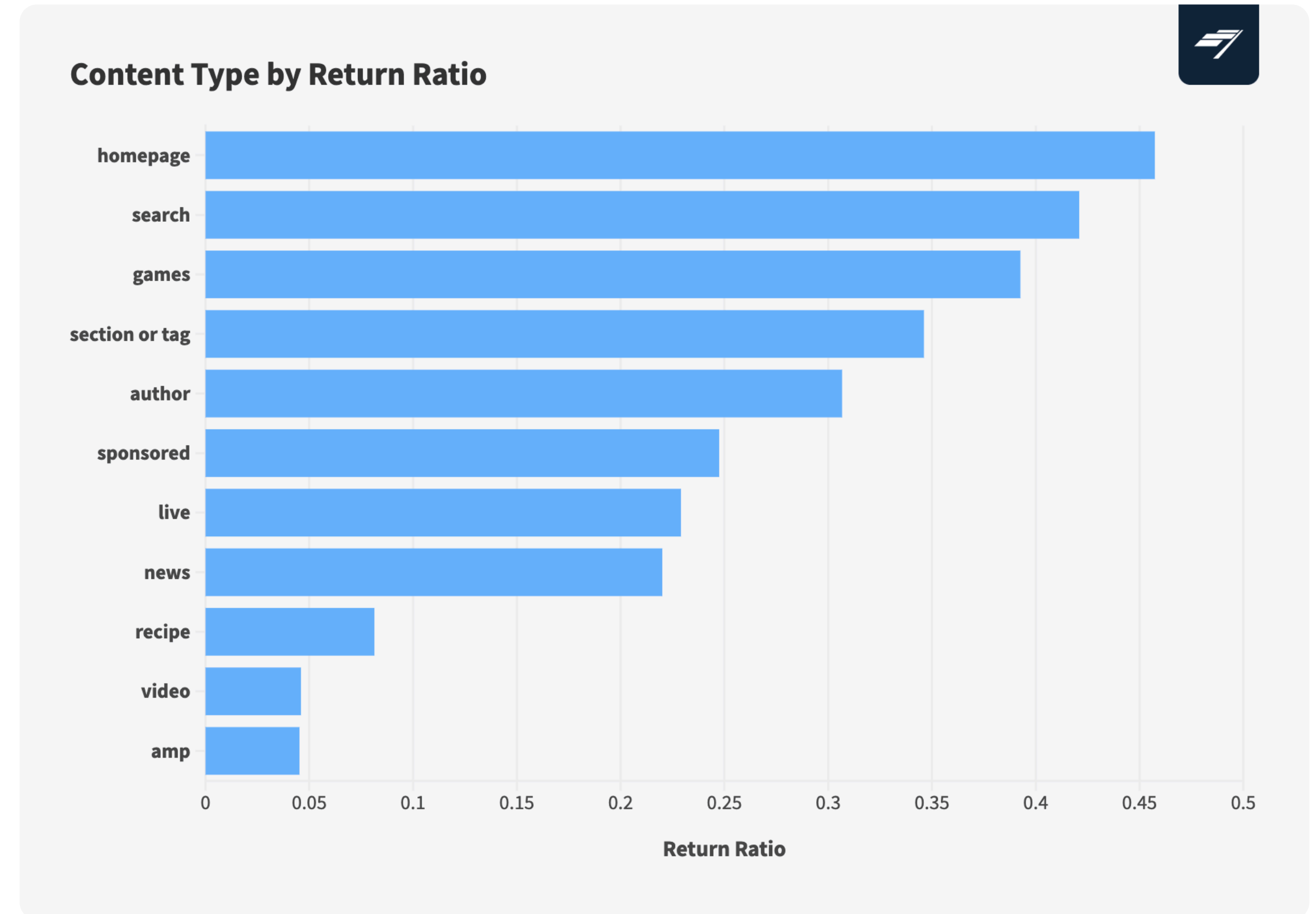
The area below the fold is viewed nearly three times longer than the top. Use attention-grabbing subheadings to get visitors to scroll further down the page, increasing engagement and improving the likelihood of them exploring additional content.

How content type influences rate of return

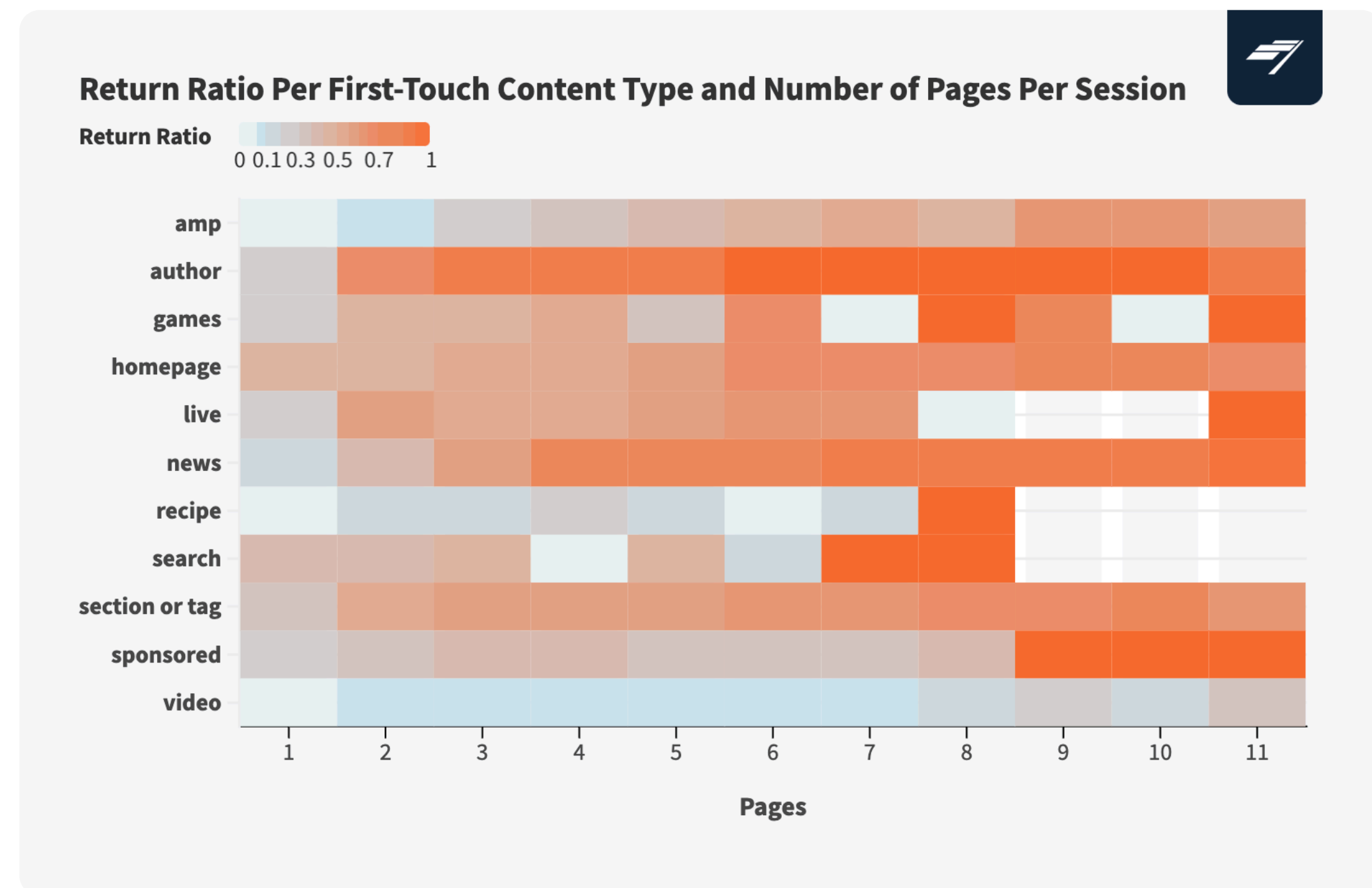
When we analyze return rate by the type of content a visitor lands on first, it's clear that **the homepage is the best place to send new visitors**. 46% of those who land here first return within 7 days. Other content types with high rates of return are games (39%) and section pages (35%). News and live blogs also outperform our 14% benchmark while recipes fall below (8%).

When optimizing for repeat visits, it's clear that sending readers to pages with more options to choose their next move is more effective than sending them to a specific news piece or recipe.

But what if they stayed a minute longer or engaged with one more page?

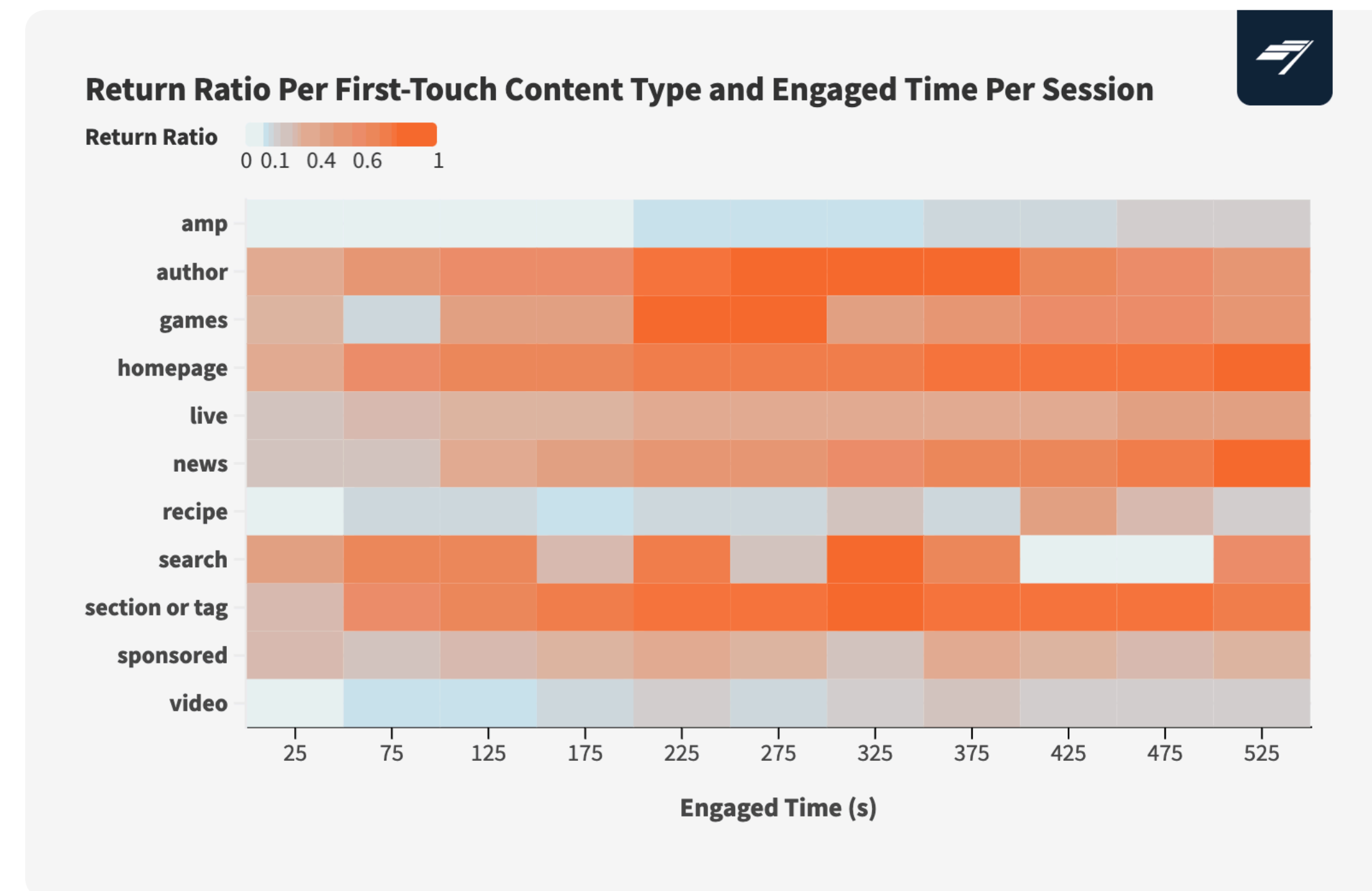


What happens when first-time visitors read one more page?



When we look at content type and pageviews together, we see significant jumps in return rate for author pages (29% to 73%), live blogs (22% to 59%), and sections (32% to 53%) when visitors visit an additional page. Making sure there are ample opportunities on these pages to click through to another page makes it much more likely that these visitors will return.

What happens when first-time visitors engage for an extra minute?



Increased engagement with these content types matters less for return rates than pages visited. However, news articles see the biggest benefit from longer engagement. Of those who engage for 25 seconds, 18% return, and after 2.5 minutes, the return rate nearly doubles. While the homepage is an ideal entry point for new visitors, news stories also hold potential when they are optimized to engage readers for minutes rather than seconds.

How to Diversify Content Formats to Your Advantage

1

Optimize experiences for continued engagement beyond the homepage.

Now that we've confirmed the importance of the homepage, that doesn't mean you should drive all traffic there and call it a day. It means optimizing story position in real time to make sure new visitors are visiting additional pages and becoming even likelier to return.

2

Experiment with various content formats to improve reader retention.

Try new content formats as they can be surprisingly effective vehicles for exposing new audiences to more traditional news content.

3

Use live blogs to make a significant impact on traffic and increase return rates.

Live blogs are great vehicles for acquiring traffic, and getting these readers to view one additional page increases their likelihood of returning to 59%.

The playbook for increasing return visits

If you could wave a magic wand, we'd tell you to wish for new visitors who read at least 4 pages and engage for more than 2 minutes. Since we know those are lofty goals, the best thing to focus on is encouraging new visitors to take one action during their first visit. This could be as simple as clicking a link or scrolling one paragraph deeper. Our research shows that one of these actions alone increases the rate of return and the more actions they take, the more likely they are to return.

Already thinking of ways to incorporate this information in your newsroom?

Here's a recap of the 4 most important findings.

Increasing pages per visit is our strongest indicator of return. Visiting 2 pages increases the return rate from 9% to 22%.

Of visitors who engage for 25 seconds, only 9% return. At 75 seconds, 14% return, and at 125 seconds, the return rate is 22%.

Visitors who scroll through the first third of a page are more likely to return than those who don't.

46% of first-time visitors who enter on the homepage return within 7 days.

Make every new visit count.

Explore our analytics and optimization tools today.

[Request a Demo](#)

Chartbeat, the leading content intelligence platform for media, delivers simple, reliable analytics and optimization tools that show your editorial team how people are engaging with content across your site and empower you to keep them engaged even longer.

Tracking more than 50 billion pageviews across more than 70 countries, our real-time and historical dashboards, in-page optimization tools, and robust reporting help the world's leading media organizations understand, measure, and build value from their content.

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