

# DeskDigest

*A personal research-agent newsletter. The user picks 3–8 topics; a weekly LLM-curated brief lands in their inbox every Monday with the 12 things they should know. Slow-burn \$7–12/month consumer SaaS.*

<b>Category</b>	Set 4 · 12-mo Cash
<b>Customer</b>	Knowledge workers, researchers, hobbyist subject-matter enthusiasts wanting a curated weekly briefing on niche topics they cannot otherwise track
<b>Monetisation</b>	\$7/mo Basic · \$12/mo Pro (10 topics + Slack delivery + Saturday deep-dive)
<b>Build effort</b>	Low
<b>Plan version</b>	v1.0 — 2026-05

## Executive Summary

DeskDigest is a personalised research-agent newsletter — the user picks 3-8 topics on signup (anything from 'state of robotics in agriculture' to 'mid-tier US college basketball recruiting' to 'developments in lithium-air battery research'), and every Monday morning receives a curated brief: 12-18 items the user should know about, drawn from the past week's coverage across news, blogs, academic papers, podcast transcripts, and Substack posts. The product addresses a category of pain that did not exist before LLMs: the desire for niche topical curation that no human newsletter editor will serve and no algorithmic feed will surface coherently.

Pricing is \$7-12/month consumer SaaS. The wedge against generalist newsletters (Morning Brew, Axios, etc.) is genuine personalisation — each subscriber's brief is generated specifically for their topic set, not a one-size-fits-all editorial. The wedge against vague AI tools (ChatGPT 'research this topic for me') is the cadenced delivery, the curated 12-item structure, and the cumulative subscriber memory (DeskDigest learns over time what items the user clicks, what items they skip, what subtopics they care about).

Year-1 target: 1,400 paying subscribers, generating ■85 lakh annual revenue against ■28 lakh costs. Founder-and-zero-engineer business that can run on cron + LLM API + Substack-style email infrastructure. Cash-positive month 1; scales slowly via word-of-mouth and niche-community placement. Year 2-3 trajectory depends on whether retention compounds (sticky daily-habit potential exists if execution is right).

## The Problem

Knowledge workers and curious people have a recurring problem: there is information about their topics of interest that they want to know, scattered across news, blogs, podcasts, papers, Substacks, that they cannot reasonably track. The traditional answer was a hand-curated newsletter, but newsletters are general (Morning Brew covers 'business news'; nobody is writing a personal newsletter on 'developments in solid-state battery research and EV adoption in Southeast Asia').

The alternatives all fail. Google Alerts produces low-signal noise (every press release mentioning the keyword). RSS aggregators (Feedly, Inoreader) require active reading and topic-pruning that most users abandon. ChatGPT 'tell me what happened this week in X' requires the user to actively prompt and lacks cadenced delivery. The category is unserved by existing infrastructure because the per-user curation cost was prohibitive before LLMs.

With current LLMs (Claude, GPT-4) the per-user cadenced curation is now economically viable at consumer subscription prices. A weekly brief for one subscriber covering 5 topics requires perhaps \$0.40-0.80 in API costs; at \$9/month average ARPU the unit economics work easily.

## The Solution

DeskDigest's product is one weekly email. The user signs up, picks 3-8 topics described in natural language ('developments in lithium-air battery research', 'state of robotics in agriculture'), optionally specifies preferences (technical depth, geographic focus, sources to prefer/avoid). Every Sunday night, the agent runs: pulls last 7 days of coverage from a wide source pool (RSS feeds across major news + niche blogs, arXiv papers in selected fields, podcast transcripts from selected shows, Substack and Twitter from selected accounts), summarises and ranks per user's topics, generates 12-18 item brief, delivers Monday 7am local time.

Each item is one short paragraph (60-150 words) capturing what happened, why it matters, with a link to source. The brief structure: 4-6 items per top-priority topic, 2-3 items per secondary topic. Item ranking based on novelty (vs. what user already saw last week), substantive importance (factual development vs. opinion piece), and predicted user interest (based on past click pattern).

Three structural differences from generalist newsletters define the wedge. First, personalisation: each subscriber's brief is generated specifically for their topic set. Second, source breadth: pulls from a much wider pool than any single editor would curate, with intelligent filtering. Third, cumulative learning: the agent learns over time what the user reads vs. skips, adjusting future briefs accordingly.

Pro tier (\$12/month) adds: 10 topics (vs. Basic's 5), Saturday-morning deep-dive on the week's single most important development, Slack delivery option (the brief lands in a personal Slack DM rather than email — for users who live in Slack), API for personal automation.

## Market Opportunity

Addressable subscribers globally: anyone willing to pay \$7-12/month for cadenced niche-topic curation. This is a long-tail market with no clear ceiling but realistic capture is gated by distribution rather than addressability — the market is essentially everyone who has a topic they wish someone would just summarise for them weekly.

Comparable consumer-SaaS: Readwise (\$8/month, 35,000+ paying subscribers), Hey email (\$99/year, 75,000+ subscribers), various niche Substacks (best-case 20,000+ paying subscribers each). DeskDigest's realistic 4-year capture: 8,000-25,000 paying subscribers = \$700k-\$2.3M ARR. Modest at the absolute level, very strong margin profile, sustainable single-founder business.

Adjacent opportunities: B2B team tier (multiple seats sharing topic sets — Sales Ops, Product Marketing, Competitive Intelligence use cases), white-label for newsletter publishers (give your subscribers personalised supplemental briefs), API for embedding personalised summaries into other products.

## Target Customer

Primary persona: a 42-year-old VP Product at a tech company who wants to stay current on AI infrastructure developments, robotics, and one or two side interests (climate tech, biotech). Reads 3-5 hours of substack and news per week now; would rather get the signal in a 15-minute Monday brief. Will pay \$12/month Pro tier without hesitation.

Secondary persona: a 34-year-old founder of a small fintech startup who needs to track regulatory developments + competitive landscape + emerging technologies relevant to their wedge. Currently misses things; finds out about competitor moves weeks late from Twitter. Will pay \$7/month Basic tier and likely upgrade to Pro for the Saturday deep-dive.

Tertiary persona: a 67-year-old retired professor with sustained intellectual interests in 4-5 distinct areas (cognitive neuroscience, geopolitics of Central Asia, restoration of historic pipe organs, mid-century jazz). Will pay \$7/month Basic tier; appreciates the curation he can no longer access through institutional library subscriptions.

## Product

Onboarding: 4-minute signup with topic specification (3-8 topics in natural language with optional sub-topic refinement), source preferences, delivery time, language preference (English primary; Spanish + Portuguese + French + German for year 2 launch).

Source pool: ~8,000 RSS feeds across general news (NYT, Reuters, Bloomberg, FT, Guardian, Economist), niche topic-specific publications (Stratechery, Construction Physics, Asianometry, individual Substacks), academic preprint servers (arXiv, bioRxiv, SSRN, PubMed), podcast transcripts from ~400 selected shows (via Listen Notes API), Twitter from selected accounts, Hacker News selected threads.

Curation engine: nightly source pull + per-subscriber LLM run on Sunday evening producing the brief. LLM workflow: filter source items by topic-relevance (LLM scoring against user's topic descriptions), de-duplicate against prior briefs, rank by novelty + importance + predicted user interest, write each item as 60-150 word paragraph with link.

Click learning: subscriber clicks tracked; agent learns which sub-topics within each user's stated interests they actually engage with, refines future briefs accordingly. Visible to user as 'what we've learned about your interests' optional dashboard.

Delivery: email primary (clean responsive HTML), Slack DM (Pro tier), API push (Pro tier) — let user choose preferred channel.

Subscriber dashboard: minimal — topic management, source preferences, delivery schedule, billing. Most interaction is via the email itself.

## Technical Architecture

Backend: Python on Hetzner cloud (single small box scales to 5,000+ subscribers). Postgres on Neon for subscriber and topic data.

Source ingestion: nightly scheduled jobs pulling RSS feeds via feedparser, arXiv papers via API, podcast transcripts via Listen Notes API (~\$300/month at this scale), Twitter via selective scraping (respectful).

LLM curation: GPT-4o-mini for topic-relevance scoring (~\$0.05/subscriber/week), Claude Haiku for brief composition (~\$0.20/subscriber/week). Total LLM cost: ~\$25/subscriber/month at average usage.

Email delivery: Resend or Postmark (~\$0.50 per 1000 emails sent; well under \$0.05/subscriber/month).

Subscriber dashboard: simple Next.js + Stripe for billing.

Slack integration: per-subscriber Slack DM via Slack API; user grants permission once at signup if Pro tier.

## Business Model & Unit Economics

Two tiers. Basic (\$7/month or \$69/year): 5 topics, weekly Monday brief, email delivery. Pro (\$12/month or \$119/year): 10 topics, weekly Monday brief + Saturday deep-dive, email + Slack delivery, API access.

Conversion economics: 14-day free trial converts to paid at 28%. Distribution: 65% Basic, 35% Pro. Annual prepay adopted by 45% of subscribers; reduces churn meaningfully. Monthly churn target under 4% (consumer SaaS at this price point typically has higher churn than B2B; target represents quality benchmark).

Gross margin: 86% blended. Major cost lines: LLM API (~₹25/subscriber/month), email delivery (~₹3/subscriber/month), data sources (~₹5/subscriber/month allocated).

Customer LTV: \$9/month × 14 months average lifetime = \$126 LTV. CAC target: \$35. LTV/CAC: 3.6 (modest but workable for consumer SaaS).

### Unit Economics (Year-1 base case)

<b>Year-1 paying subscribers (target)</b>	1,400
<b>Blended ARPU</b>	\$110/year (~\$9/month)
<b>Year-1 revenue</b>	\$103,000 (~₹85 lakh)
<b>Gross margin</b>	86%
<b>Customer acquisition cost (CAC)</b>	\$35
<b>Payback period</b>	3.9 months
<b>Year-1 all-in costs</b>	~₹28 lakh
<b>Year-1 net contribution</b>	~₹57 lakh

## Go-to-Market

Channel 1 — Niche-community organic (40%): post in Reddit communities (r/ProductMgmt, r/cscareerquestions, r/dataisbeautiful, r/StartupIndia and similar), Hacker News (Show HN), IndieHackers, niche Discord communities. The product itself is shareable when subscribers find it valuable.

Channel 2 — Content + SEO (30%): publish substantive sample briefs as content on topics with SEO potential ('weekly state of robotics', 'weekly state of LLM research'). The sample briefs themselves are the marketing.

Channel 3 — Influencer / creator partnerships (20%): partnerships with newsletter writers and YouTubers in adjacent niches for cross-promotion.

Channel 4 — Word of mouth + referral programme (10%): 1 month free for each successful referral.

### Roadmap (first 12 months)

- Month 1-2: MVP — source pipeline + LLM curation + email delivery + Stripe billing. 50 free-trial signups via personal network + Show HN.
- Month 3-4: Pro tier launched, Saturday deep-dive feature, 200 paying subscribers, ₹2 lakh MRR.
- Month 5-7: Click-learning feature, source-pool expansion to 12,000 feeds, Slack delivery, 550 paying subscribers.
- Month 8-10: Spanish + Portuguese launch (sources + LLM prompting), API tier, 950 paying subscribers.

- Month 11-12: 1,400 paying subscribers, ■85 lakh annualised revenue, foundation for team-tier launch in year 2.

## Key Risks

- LLM API cost escalation: a 5x price increase from OpenAI/Anthropic would compress margins meaningfully — mitigated by multi-provider abstraction and willingness to use open-source models (Llama 70B variants via Together AI) at trade-off in quality if economics demand.
- Slow consumer-SaaS conversion: \$7-12/month is in the impulse-buy band but consumer subscriptions are notoriously low-conversion — mitigated by 14-day free trial that demonstrates value, by careful onboarding to maximise topic-set quality (poor topic selection = poor briefs = churn).
- Source-pool dependencies: RSS feeds break, sites add paywalls, Twitter scraping becomes harder — operational tax; mitigated by diversified source pool, by graceful degradation when sources unavailable, by ongoing source-curation work.
- Differentiation against improving general AI tools (Perplexity 'Pages', ChatGPT 'Memory', etc.) — possible long-term threat; mitigated by cadence advantage (push delivery vs. pull interrogation), by cumulative subscriber-learning that general tools don't yet match, by curation-quality investment.
- Topic-quality variance: some topics work brilliantly (well-covered domains with good source pool), some work weakly (very specialised domains with thin sources); subscriber experience varies — mitigated by topic-quality feedback during onboarding (we tell users honestly when their topic is hard to cover well) and by ongoing source-coverage investment in popular topic categories.