

Case Study

AWA's AI Transformation Delivers 40% CTR Boost for Core Users

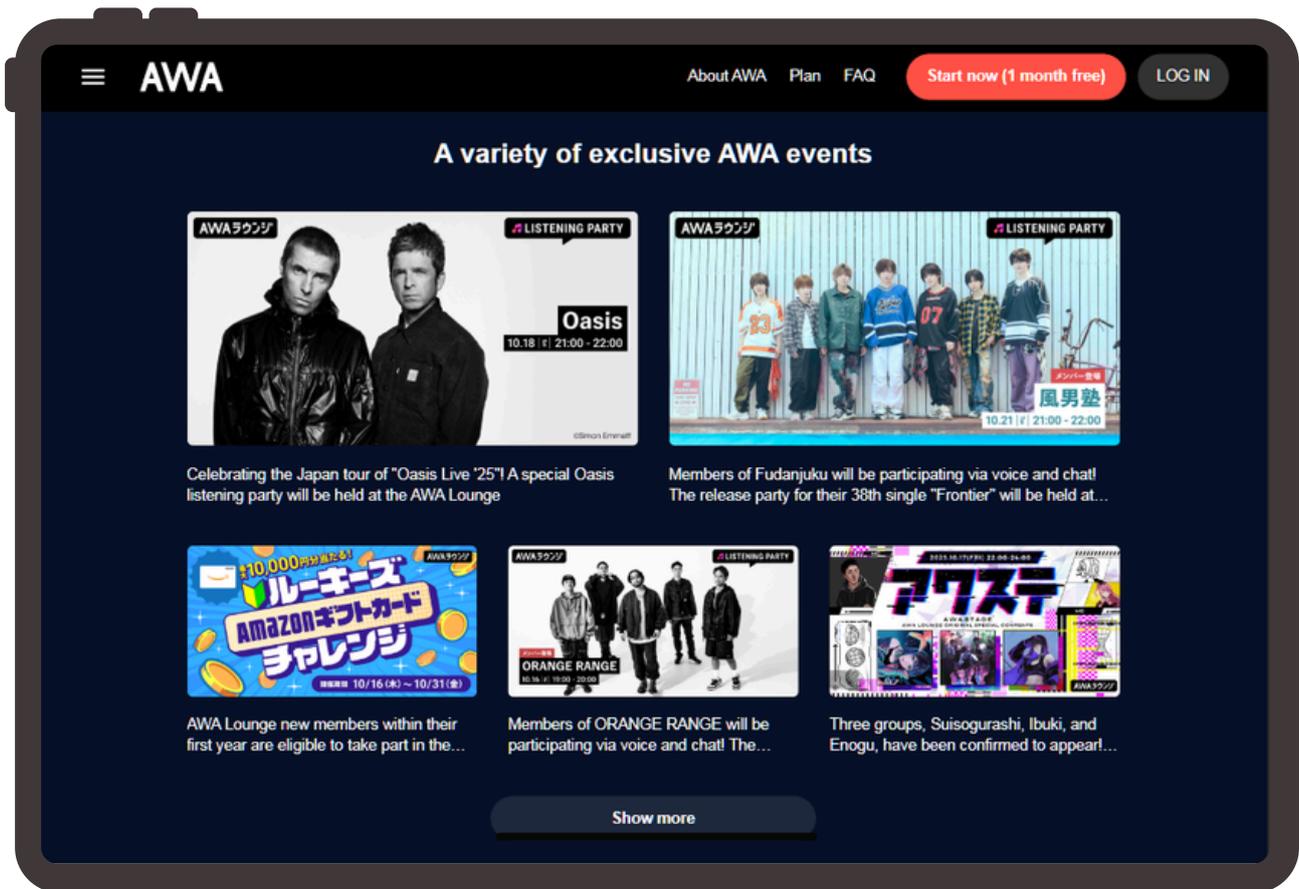


AWA reimagines music discovery with AI, helping millions find the one song that can brighten their day — and boosting engagement where it matters most.

Finding the Song That Finds You

In the bustling heart of Tokyo's Shibuya district, AWA faced a paradox familiar to many music-streaming leaders: a catalog of more than 170 million songs — enough for a lifetime of listening — yet listeners often struggled to find the tracks that could truly light up

their day. **AWA's CEO Togashi reflected on this dilemma: with so much music in the world, there's always that one song that can brighten a listener's life — the real challenge lies in surfacing it at just the right moment.**



The core issue was clear: while users could stream AWA's massive catalog, the platform's personalization wasn't responding to their actual listening context. A power user hunting for underground J-pop gems was getting the same mainstream recommendations as someone just discovering Japanese music.

AWA, the joint venture between entertainment giant Avex and digital powerhouse CyberAgent, wasn't just competing against global platforms like Spotify and YouTube Music. They were fighting for something

more nuanced: the ability to understand the soul of Japanese music discovery — from the mainstream appeal of chart-topping J-pop to the intricate world of indie artists, idol groups, and emerging genres that define Japan's rich musical landscape.

In a market where user acquisition costs continue to climb, converting free users to paid subscribers hinges on that magical moment when a recommendation feels perfectly timed, perfectly matched, and perfectly you.

The Need for Personalization

AWA's existing recommendation system told a familiar story of early-stage streaming platforms. **"Over the years, as our catalog expanded, the vector calculation-based recommendation engine became harder to maintain — updates slowed and sometimes failed, which limited how much we could personalize,"** recalls Togashi. This bottleneck made it difficult to adapt recommendations in step with listeners' changing tastes.

"Their system was essentially asking: 'What song is most likely to be listened to next?' rather than 'What does this specific user want to hear at this moment?'" explains Satoshi. The approach worked for mainstream listeners seeking familiar sounds, but it left power users — those who stream daily and drive the platform's most engaged communities — underserved.

How do you compete with algorithmic giants when your recommendation engine can't differentiate between a newcomer and an aficionado?



The AI Breakthrough: From Rules to Real-Time Intelligence

AWA partnered with BytePlus to fundamentally reimagine how AI could understand musical intent. BytePlus brought something different to the table: **a move beyond non-personalized systems trained on aggregate playback statistics to AI-driven personalization that learns for each individual user.**

"While conventional methods treated everyone as a set of statistics, our AI models consider each listener as an individual — adapting in real time as tastes and contexts shift," explained Satoshi Kuno, BytePlus's solution architect.

"We found that user preferences were much broader than anticipated," Satoshi recalls. "Even with basic personalization, legacy systems still gravitated toward globally popular songs. We needed to segment users and train our AI models to reflect the true diversity in musical taste."

The solution required a sophisticated approach to user understanding. BytePlus worked with AWA to develop a comprehensive user segmentation strategy that went beyond simple demographics.



Light Users:

New or casual listeners who depend on recommendations to explore content



Mainstream Listeners:

Users drawn to popular songs and familiar sounds



Power Users:

Daily streamers who favor underground and niche tracks

This segmentation took approximately one month to implement, combining onboarding questionnaires with analysis of actual listening behavior and user engagement patterns.

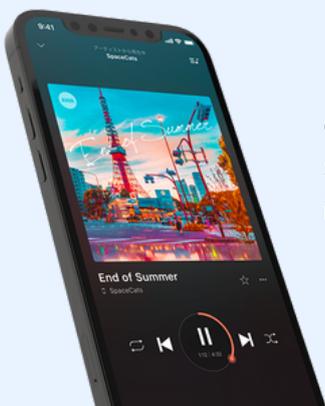
The AI model learned to adapt dynamically: surfacing long-tail content for enthusiasts while offering accessible entry points for newcomers. More importantly, it began recognizing contextual signals — understanding that the same user might want energizing tracks during morning commutes and relaxing melodies for late-night listening.

The Science of the Single Moment

Rather than attempting to overhaul AWA's entire interface, BytePlus and AWA's team designed a laser-focused A/B test that would isolate the impact of AI-driven recommendations. The test centered on one critical interaction: the "next song you might like" tile that appears after a track finishes.

"Instead of optimizing an entire screen with multiple variables, we isolated just one row," Satoshi explains. "This allowed us to control for layout biases and directly measure how well our AI model matched user intent."

The experimental design was elegantly simple:



Group A:

Saw AWA's original in-house recommendation



Group B:

Experienced BytePlus's AI-generated suggestion

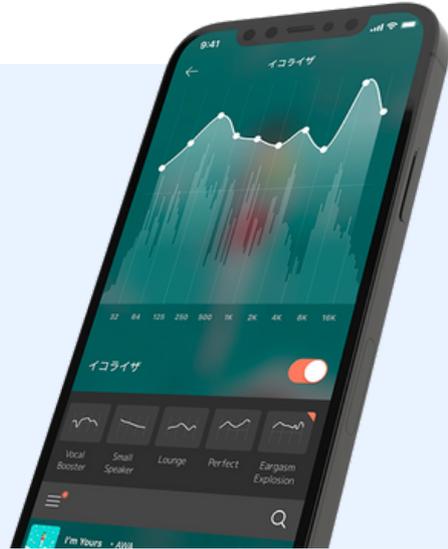
What happened next validated everything the teams had theorized about intelligent personalization.

The Numbers That Changed Everything

The results spoke with statistical clarity:

+0.44 percentage point uplift in overall click-through rate across all users

>40% CTR increase among playlist listeners



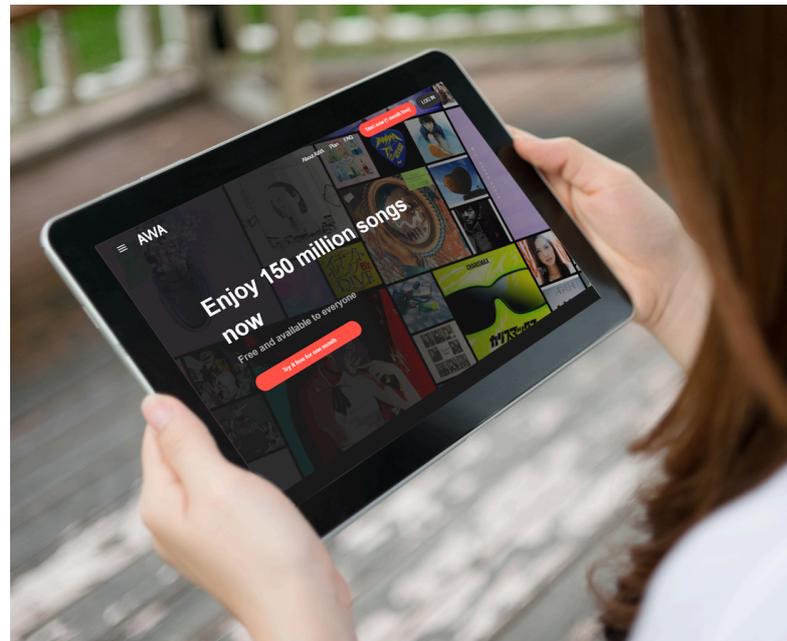
"A 0.44% uplift is transformative at AWA's scale," notes Satoshi. "That's not just increased engagement — it represents higher potential for retention and, ultimately, subscription conversion."

For Togashi, the uplift wasn't just a metric but proof that smarter recommendations directly spark deeper engagement: "Seeing these improvements confirms we're on the right path — it's a direction we're committed to pursuing further."

The numbers told a deeper story. BytePlus' AI system was encouraging genuine musical exploration. Users were engaging with songs they hadn't heard before, particularly tracks outside the mainstream catalog.

"We noticed significantly more engagement with lesser-known tracks," Satoshi observes. "This told us we weren't simply reinforcing existing trends — we were helping users discover music that matched their evolving tastes."

For playlist-listening users — AWA's most engaged segment — the improvement was even more pronounced. These users saw their click-through rates jump from 10% to 14.4%, representing the most significant uplift across all user segments.



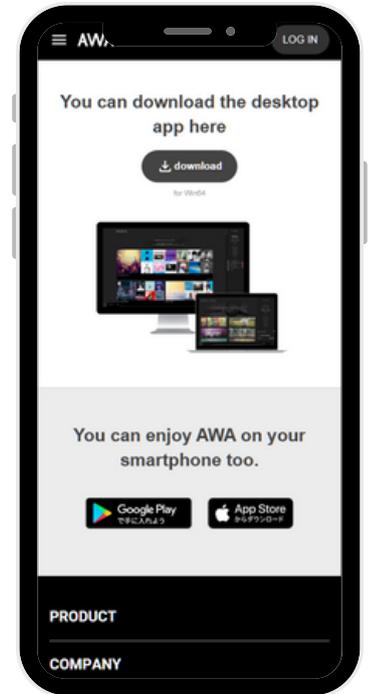
Beyond Recommendations: The Vision of AI Search

AWA's success represents more than a recommendation system upgrade — it's a glimpse into the future of AI-powered content discovery. As BytePlus evolves its AI-driven recommendation technology toward comprehensive AI Search capabilities, AWA's implementation provides crucial real-world validation.

"Testing what users click next gives us real-time signals about their mood, intent, and discovery preferences," Satoshi explains. "That's the foundation of AI Search — surfacing content you didn't know you wanted, precisely when you need it."

This evolution reflects a broader shift in how we think about content platforms. Rather than simply suggesting similar items, AI Search understands context, anticipates needs, and creates discovery paths that feel intuitive rather than algorithmic.

For AWA, this technology alignment supports their strategic positioning in Japan's competitive streaming market. While global platforms compete on catalog size and brand recognition, AWA can differentiate through intelligent, culturally-aware personalization that understands the nuances of Japanese music discovery.



The Cultural Intelligence Factor

What makes AWA's partnership with BytePlus particularly compelling is how AI-driven personalization enhances cultural specificity rather than homogenizing it. Unlike recommendation systems that default to global popularity, BytePlus' approach amplifies local nuances.

AWA serves diverse listeners with varied musical preferences, from those seeking mainstream J-pop to others exploring niche genres. BytePlus' AI learns these preference patterns and uses them to enhance discovery rather than defaulting to global popularity trends.

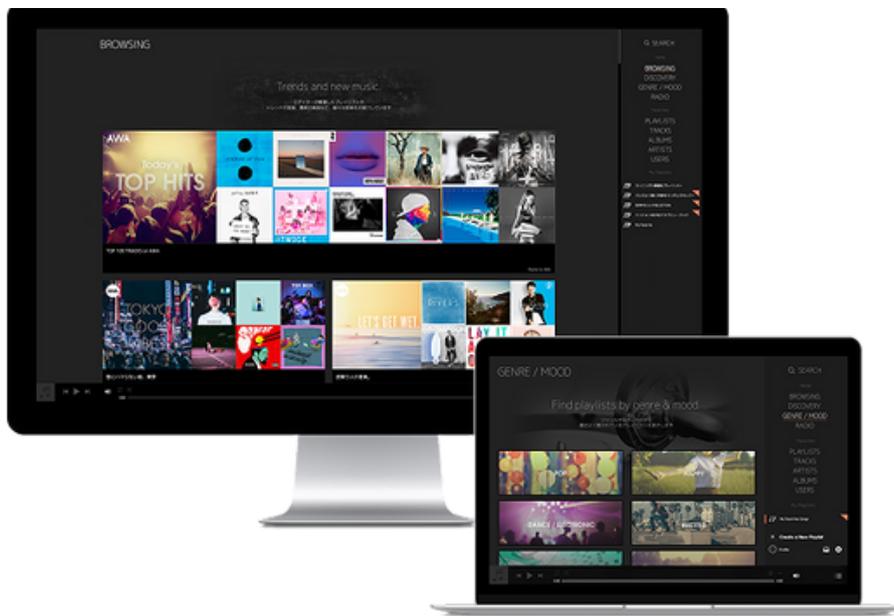
This cultural intelligence becomes a competitive advantage. While international platforms struggle to understand the interconnected nature of Japan's music scene — where mainstream and underground frequently intersect — AWA's AI-powered system recognizes and leverages these connections.



Bottom Line

AWA's partnership with BytePlus demonstrates how AI-driven personalization creates measurable business impact. The +4.4% CTR improvement among playlist listeners represents significant progress for AWA's core user base, with improved click-through rates directly correlating to better user engagement and

potential subscription conversion. As BytePlus continues evolving toward comprehensive AI Search capabilities, AWA's implementation validates how systems learning from actual user behavior outperform rule-based alternatives, particularly for engaged user segments.



If you would like to learn more about our products and solutions, please reach out to us at www.byteplus.com/en/contact.

