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COMING NEXT MONTH

Next month *Publish* will take a look into virtual training options for community publishers. Industry specific as well as generic training availability will be examined in the March issue along with the events, people and companies that shape this industry.

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If you're not receiving the invitation emails or want to join ACP, call the ACP Office at 877-203-2327 or email cassey@communitypublishers.com.

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THE NEXT STEP

“ You don't have to have it all figured out to move forward. Just take the next step.

Anonymous



JOHN DRAPER –
ACP PRESIDENT

It seems that the past number of months have embodied this quote many times over. As AFCP and IFPA continue to move forward with the development of ACP, our board members and association staff have kept forward momentum through a variety of unknowns.

We may not have everything figured out, but we know just enough to move forward. We know that one solid, combined, association will serve our members well into the future. This one, solitary piece has been our driving force since day one. We keep this in front of us while knowing that our membership is solidly behind us (about 97% approval with fantastic voting participation).

Identifying the goal is always step one. You all know this. You set sales goals, efficiency goals, personal goals and many more. You also know that the path to achieve your goals will be riddled with obstacles, distractions, and perhaps even new opportunity.

The path to our goal is no different. We know what we want, but how to get there is what we continue to figure out. There is no set playbook on how to tackle issues like creating a combined sales network, how to integrate staff responsibilities, or how to blend event ideas into one solid program. So, we just take the next step - every day the next step.

Taking the next step without having everything figured out can be frightening. I think most people feel more confident and comfortable when they have a full understanding of the given situation. In life, in business, and in the ACP merger, we don't always have that luxury. We must draw confidence from the larger view, from knowing that our goal is the destination and that to stop the walk keeps us from that destination.

One great aspect of this ACP journey is that there are plenty of companions working together to get us where we're going. The vision and dedication of AFCP and IFPA board members and staff have brought us to where we are. This group of individuals are selfless and driven by what's best for the association and all of our great members. As you take steps toward your goals, remember that you're not alone. Surround yourself with quality individuals and each step will become less frightening.

As ACP moves forward on this journey, there is one other companion we need along side us. That companion is you. Our members are the backbone of what will make ACP the strong association we strive to develop. We appreciate and need your input and participation. Your engagement will help us navigate the path, and when we reach our goals, together, we will set some more and take the next step forward. ■

TURNING A NEW PAGE!

“ Innovation is the ability to see change as an opportunity – not a threat.



Steve Jobs



BY LOREN COLBURN

It's not every day we get an opportunity to take a fresh start with a clean sheet of paper. That is exactly what *Publish* presents to both the Association of Community Publishers (ACP) and the industry. A chance to incorporate all that was good from its predecessors, TIP and INK, as well as add those things that the industry needs to be more successful.

Publish will strive to provide a means to celebrate the people, companies and events that make up the community publishing industry. Each and every month it will be our mission to include material that will inform, educate and entertain our readers while providing them a connection point to the industry they have invested their time and talents to. This premier issue is focused on the immense opportunity that is presented by the unification of the two national associations into a single, consolidated voice for the community media world.

ACP faces the opportunity to take all that was successful for both IFPA and AFCP and incorporate that into a new association. This undertaking will take some time and will need to be a constant work in process to keep pace with the constant parade of changes within the industry. ACP will evolve as the industry evolves, continually looking to provide the leadership and support that members need to be more successful. The most critical aspect for ACP's success will be the need for each of you to get involved. The association is founded on connecting members together in an effort to share information and provide the strength of a collective voice. The more participation ACP gains, the more benefits for all the participants.

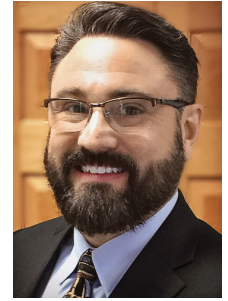
We envision *Publish* playing an instrumental role in driving that engagement. We welcome your input, your celebrations, your success stories and your participation in shaping *Publish* into an innovative monthly magazine that will bond industry participants together. Publishers, advertisers and industry professionals from all aspects of the publishing world are invited to assist in providing the content we develop for *Publish* each month. This is your industry and it's important that *Publish* embraces your industry needs.

As we turn the page on how you are represented by one national association and one national publication, we invite you to grow with us. We will do everything we can to help you successfully evolve in this ever changing publishing world as we evolve right along with you. Steve Jobs said it best, “*Innovation is the ability to see change as an opportunity – not a threat.*” Join us in embracing these changes and pursuing a vision of growth and prosperity for the community publishing industry.

Until next month, don't forget to tell all those media buyers, “If it's FREE, buy it!” ■

ERIC MCROY FROM ADVANTAGE LOVES CONNECTING BUYERS AND SELLERS

BY BARBARA HOLMES



Eric McRoy

From its humble beginnings in an oversized coat closet, the AdVantage has grown to an 86,000-circulation multimedia company.

“In 1986, my mother and some other people worked for the daily newspaper,” said owner and Publisher Eric McRoy. “There were some ownership changes and they didn’t like the way things were headed, so they quit to start their own paper.”

Founders Sharon McRoy and James Seibold cleaned out a coat closet at Gribble Printing, one of Sharon’s customers, put up a folding table, bought a ruler, scissors, border tape and a wax pot and got started. They called their new paper Today’s AdVantage.

“That summer I came home from school and they recruited me,” said McRoy. “My first job was to sit and watch the mailing list run on a dot matrix printer. One night I went in to run the printer and noticed new computers sitting across the room. I thought, *I can’t stand it! I’ve got to go over and check them out.* So I went over and hit the button and BONG! A little smiley face came on the screen. I played with it for a while and just loved it. I was hooked.”

McRoy particularly liked using the computers, so he taught himself desktop publishing. From helping



First edition with St. Louis Cardinals’ pitcher Jack Clark on the cover.

some of the salespeople sell ads, he discovered he liked selling. Sometimes the reps would bring in a customer to build an ad, and he found that he liked graphics and working with the customers too. Finally someone said, “Eric, why don’t you go out and get your own customers?” So he did, and he’s been involved in all aspects of the business ever since.

His mother sold the company to an investor in 2013, who asked McRoy to stay on and manage it. The new owner changed the paper from a shopper to a weekly newspaper with no subscribers, 50% advertising and triple the staff, which was not a profitable business model. So when COVID hit last year and the investor was ready to call it quits, McRoy bought the paper and changed it back into a shopper. He was sad-

dened to have to lay off the editorial staff, but happy that he was able to save nine jobs – including his own.

McRoy said, “Before the pandemic started, I said, ‘Let’s do an experiment. Can we produce these papers if we all work from home?’ So I locked everybody out [of the three offices] and we did it. It worked so well that most of us never went back. I closed three brick-and-mortars and we’re all working from home. So when the pandemic set in, we were already set up for it.”



The late Doug Fabian with Eric at an IFFA conference. Doug lost the bet as his Boston Bruins lost to the St. Louis Blues.

The company includes four print titles – three weeklies (Greene County AdVantage, Jersey County AdVantage and Riverbend AdVantage) and one monthly (Granite City AdVantage) with a combined circulation of 86,000. The papers are all direct-mailed to homes in Alton, Illinois, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, and Alton’s surrounding rural communities.

“We also have a branch called the AdVantage

Reach, which is the digital side,” said McRoy. “A lot of customers request that we help them with their online marketing, so we’re doing everything from setting up Google My Business, to setting up review platforms, building websites, getting testimonials, and managing Facebook and pay-per-click campaigns.”

The AdVantage has not lost any print circulation due to the pandemic and still offers total market coverage, including 60,000 unique monthly visitors to the website. Although AdVantage no longer prints the news, it does include press releases, birth announcements, obituaries, and more on the website and send out daily email blasts to 20,000 subscribers. The daily emails also include ads, which get good response for the advertisers.

“I’m a student of advertising,” said McRoy. “What I particularly love is neuromarketing, the science of what affects the brain. You know, certain smells, colors, music. It makes me wonder. Do consumers really have free will? Or are they being manipulated into buying? It just fascinates me that you can see a color or a brand and have an impulse. So when we build ad campaigns for people we use neuromarketing.

“I love connecting buyers and sellers. That’s why I’m in the business,” he said. ■

A YEAR LATER, TIM BINGAMAN IS STILL OPTIMISTIC

BY BARBARA HOLMES

In early “pre-COVID” 2020, Circulation Verification Council (CVC) President Tim Bingaman envisioned a bright future for the free paper industry; and even after ten long months of COVID lockdowns, he still does.

“All in all, I think the community paper industry weathered the storm better than some other types of print,” he said. “Because the free paper industry is either carrier delivered or mailed to every house, it’s insulated a little bit and can recover a little faster. Before COVID the average readership of a print publication was 74%. Right now it’s 72.9% so it is unchanged because the accuracy level of the study is plus or minus 4%. In other words, there’s been no change in print readership as far as a percentage of the overall distribution. We just lost some circulation as publishers had to make adjustments.”

The loss of print circulation does not equate to the loss of readership however. With the majority of the country sheltered at home and on their computers all day, people are signing up for email newsletters and following publications on social media. CVC added a new item to its audit reports to reflect this trend – *total gross contacts* – which includes not only the net print circulation but also social media followers, email newsletter respondents, website visitors, digital editions and more.

With over 270 social media sites approved for audit, virtually any social media that a publisher participates in can be included in the audit. For example, contests, giveaways and promotions is a new segment of digital that CVC is seeing a lot of growth in only because it didn’t exist six months ago.



“The addition of total gross contacts in CVC reports has really changed the metrics,” said Bingaman. “I think you’re going to see far less emphasis on net print circulation being an important number, and total gross contacts becoming a far more important number. Publishers who are embracing digital are finding ways to monetize it now faster than ever before. They’re way ahead of the curve because it takes a while to build a digital audience.

“For instance, there’s a parenting publication in a major city in Michigan. They have 325,000 gross contacts. At their best point in print, they never had more than 80,000 print readers. So by embracing digital, they went from delivering 80,000 print readers to delivering over 325,000 gross contacts, which is far more eyeballs and far more people who purchase things from the ads that they see than they ever had before,” he said.

There’s been a significant increase in all components of unique digital visitors, with a 51% increase in social media, a 7% increase in digital (flip books), and an 85% increase in email newsletter marketing.

Bingaman stressed that the most important thing to the large national retailers and buying agencies is that your publication is still in business a year from now so that they can still advertise with you. “They are as

afraid as you are,” he said. “If you cease to exist, they have no way to get their message out and they’re out of business too.”

Bingaman is optimistic about the industry’s recovery. “I think we’re probably looking at complete recovery in most areas across the country by the third or fourth quarter. By complete recovery I mean a weekly may still be a bi-weekly, a monthly may still be doing six times instead of 12 times a year. There’s going to be a far heavier reliance on digital components and growth in those categories to offset any audience losses. But for the most part, I think you’re going to see most circulations come back to pre-COVID numbers in the third and fourth quarter of 2021,” he said.

So how do we get from here to there? Bingaman shared some suggestions.

First, he recommends concentrating on growing your digital audience while slowly and methodically recovering the print side. There’s no reason to pump a lot of money out the door in expenses you’re not quite covering in advertising revenue.

Second, don’t be afraid to report your numbers. No one is being penalized for what they had to do during the pandemic for their business to survive.

Third, if you haven’t taken the time to do the free online studies and the 30-minute online training sessions, do it now. Publishers who have are recovering much faster than those who have not.

Bingaman said, “If I’m willing to do it for free, and take the 40 hours a week I used to do billable work to do the online studies, publishers better take a look at them because there’s not a better deal out there!” ■

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CIRCULATION AUDITS – YOUR KEY TO SELLING SUCCESS!

BY RENÉE K. GADOUA

Barbara Perry headed to a recent sales meeting with a clear pitch for a local car dealer. “I led with our circulation audit,” said Perry, sales manager at Reminder Publishing in Massachusetts. “I told him we could prove how many papers we’re delivering. We have the largest circulation in western Massachusetts on Thursdays. The audit shows him that.”

She also shared a particularly relevant detail from Reminder’s audit readership survey: 12% of readers in the auto dealer’s service area planned to buy a new car in the next 12 months. And 17% said they were likely to buy a used car in the next 12 months.

Data points like that are gold to Perry, who oversees ad sales for six weekly newspapers, one daily newspaper and two monthly magazines. “The audit kept him talking to us,” she said. “If I hadn’t had it, we would have been done in 15 minutes. We’re hoping we’re going to develop a good relationship with them.”

Perry, an Association of Community Publishers (ACP) board member, remains bullish on community newspapers. “They are part of the future and having an audit proves we’re going to be part of that future,” she said.

Perry’s experience illustrates how circulation audits translate into sales, said Tim Bingaman, CEO of Circulation Verification Council (CVC). “Publishers should take the audit seriously,” he said. “It’s a growth opportunity.”

CVC will perform audits that ACP offers as a member benefit.

“Associations fund these audits because they have to make sure their members are doing what they say they’re doing,” Bingaman said. “If they’re going to have any integrity for their national ad programs, they need an audit. If they’re going to persuade local businesses to advertise, they need an audit.”

Free publications enjoy stable readership even as daily newspapers and large consumer magazines experience precipitous circulation and advertising decline, Bingaman said.

Circulation audits provide data that confirm publications’ readership and highlight potential ad sales publishers may overlook.

“In small and rural communities, free papers are really an information lifeline, not only for news and information, but also for local advertising,” he said.

CVC audits include circulation verification and readership studies. Publishers provide quarterly reports listing circulation of all their platforms, including social media and e-newsletters.

Publishers also provide zip code and county reports to define their geographic reach. Auditors request documents to verify circulation claims, then review materials including carrier payrolls, mail receipts, printing bills

Auditors randomly call residential landlines and cell phone numbers within the publisher’s geographic area to verify that the number of people who received the publication matches the publisher’s claims.

INDUSTRY FEATURE

“We don’t believe that just saying you have X number of circulation is enough,” Bingaman said. “We perform a variety of different types of readership studies as a part of our audit process to verify what percentage of the publications that are distributed are actually read and to pull together some demographics.”

A basic readership study collects readers’ age, income, education level and gender. It also surveys how readers interact with the publication: How long do they read it? How long does it stay in their home? A list of 41 product and service categories asks readers whether they intend to purchase from that category in the next 12 months.

Publishers can request more in-depth, targeted reader studies.

The reader survey makes a publication eligible for listing in the national databases of all the large national retailers, ad agencies and media buying firms.

“It also helps you speak the correct language when [sales people] are talking with regional ad agencies in their own market,” Bingaman said. “They also can talk with local advertisers, small mom and pops, about why their readers or their potential customers are going to buy or use their service in the next 12 months.”

The potential for audits to lead to ad sales belies the myth that print is dead, Bingaman said. “You have to bring data to the table that shows them that doesn’t apply to your industry or your publication,” he explained.

About 72% of free publications across the country are read, he said. Readership has remained within 4 points of that percentage since 1992.

“When you’re delivering to every home in a community, that is an incredibly large audience,” he added. “Anything above 50% would be considered an excellent readership number. The average daily newspaper would have fits of happiness if they could get back to 25%.”

Unique website visitors average 173% of publications’ net print circulation, increasing the potential customer base.

Bingaman described one publisher who got an unsolicited call from a national ad agency in New York that wanted to buy center spreads in all his magazines. “It was tens of thousands of dollars. It was like winning the lottery from an advertising perspective,” he said. “And the only reason they knew about him was because he was audited and we released his data to SRDS (Standard Rate and Data Service) and they subscribed to SRDS and found his magazine through that.”

“The audit kept him talking to us. If I hadn’t had it, we would have been done in 15 minutes.”

Without an audit, “the odds of a small publication getting national advertising or inserts is zero,” he said. “Every national retailer, large ad agency and large media buying firm across the country uses those directories. If you’re a part of those weekly releases, they know you exist.”

Not everyone will get a call from a national ad agency eager to spend. But audits provide the tools to pitch agencies or national companies directly. “If I’m not selling those nationals the same way I’m selling my local people, why would I expect a national advertiser to advertise with me?” he said.

The free paper industry’s circulation stability is a great selling point, Bingaman said. “Most retailers would love to see about 40% market penetration for their inserts,” he said. “And they’re not going to get that just by buying the daily newspaper anymore.”

Audits also help sales associates target small businesses. “They want to know, ‘How many people can you bring through my door and why are your readers my potential customer?’

The readership study allows them to say, for example, that 3,314 automobiles are going to be purchased by readers this year. And with an average car sales price of \$28,000, I know they’re going to spend this much money.”

The readership survey “allows you to talk about your audience instead of yourself,” he said. “And once you do that, you differentiate yourself from the other print products in the market, from radio, from TV, from direct mail. You’re giving them information that is specific to their industry.”

He offers one word for skeptical small business owners: Amazon.

“If I was a local jewelry store and I’m not investing in the daily newspaper, the weekly newspaper, radio and TV, I might as well shut my doors tomorrow,” he said. “Because I could go on Amazon at 10 o’clock at night and I can order a beautiful ring for my wife and it’s delivered to my home that next day.”

Businesses wrongly assume people know all about them, Bingaman said. “They have to be reminded constantly. Just because you’re a jewelry store sitting on a corner and you’ve been there for 50 years doesn’t mean anybody’s going to automatically walk through your door. You have to constantly tell them why you’re better than Macy’s and Amazon.”

The bottom line, Bingaman said: “You have to know your readership numbers. And you either have to promote it like crazy and work it to your advantage, or you have to fix the problems that are causing low readership numbers. If you don’t know what percentage of your publications are read, you’re sitting in a dark room. I don’t see how you could possibly make a business decision.” ■

Renée K. Gadoua is a freelance writer and editor based in Central New York and a journalism instructor at Caizenovia College. Follow her on Twitter @ReneeKGadoua.



DATE CHANGE ALERT!

Covid-19 Strikes again! As was the case last April in Orlando and now, this April in Des Moines, the pandemic has forced a change in schedule for the Association of Community Publishers Annual Conference and Trade Show. Both ACP and MFCP have agreed to push the conference to September to allow time for the vaccine distribution process to work through our communities. The safety of members traveling to conference combined with the need for publications to focus on rebuilding revenues is of the utmost importance.

The in-person conference will reschedule for September 17-18, 2021 in Des Moines, Iowa. Details on this joint conference will be reexamined and adjusted for the fall dates and the content redesigned to meet the changing needs of our members. Stay tuned for details as they become available and as we all begin to emerge from the unprecedented business disruption created by the pandemic.

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5 REASONS EVERY PUBLISHER SHOULD BE SELLING WEBSITES WITH SITESWAN

1. Every Business Needs a Website

There are over 28 million small businesses in the U.S. and over 500,000 new businesses are started every month. What's the one thing they all have in common? They all NEED a website, but only about half of them have one. That leaves thousands of advertisers in your market in need of a local web designer...will it be YOU?

2. Generate Worry-Free Recurring Income

Building and selling websites provides a reliable and sustainable source of recurring revenue. Most small businesses have a "set it and forget it" mentality when it comes to their website, providing years of locked-in, worry-free income. While businesses will often pause or completely stop advertising in print during slow months, it's nearly unheard of for businesses to do that with their website. You can count on your clients to pay you month after month, year after year for their website.

3. You Already Have the Staff in Place

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4. Websites Are a Gateway to Other Services

Websites are often referred to as the "hub" of the small business marketing wheel. The website is at the core of your client's local marketing efforts and all other services are spokes stemming from that hub. Control the hub and you can control the entire wheel. This gives web designers a huge amount of control and influence over how small businesses will spend their marketing budgets.

5. Print Ad Revenue Continues to Decline

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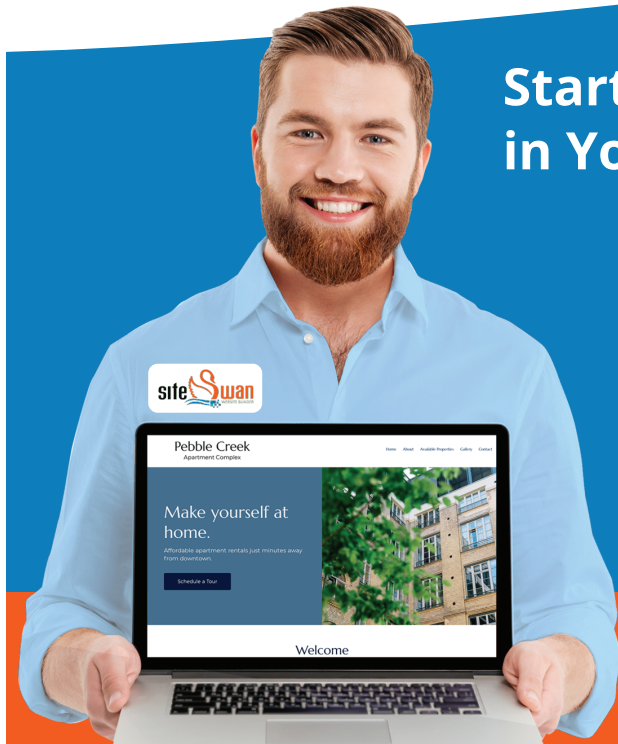
“ When you manage a business's website, it's much easier to pitch them on other marketing services like **PRINT ADVERTISING**. One of the most common questions a small business will ask their web designer after launching a new website is "How can I get more traffic to my site?" Wouldn't it be nice if you could recommend your print publication to advertise their business (and new website)? ”

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ONE BITE AT A TIME



BY DOUGLAS FRY

When we moved in to our present home we were greeted by piles of labeled boxes all over the house. Before we left our previous house we wrote where each box was supposed to go so that when it came time to unpack it would be a breeze. Well, that's what we thought.

The movers simply ignored the names on the boxes and put them wherever they wanted. Most of them ended up downstairs. It's funny how a crate labeled "Upstairs 2nd Bedroom" could end up right next to the closest exit downstairs. What's even funnier is how quickly the moving company disappeared when we weren't looking. I think they might work for the Ninja Moving Company. Anyway, we had a fun time moving each box to its correct room to begin unpacking. But that's when inertia and dread immobilized me to the point of absolute inaction.

There were so many cartons of items to unpack that I was paralyzed. I simply didn't know where to begin. The task seemed so large that I couldn't figure out where to begin or how to start. I wanted to give up and let my wife do it all but that would have caused other problems I wasn't ready to grapple with. Instead I looked at the containers upstairs in my new office and opened one. It was a rats nest of cables, drives, and routers to the computers and printers. Upon seeing that cluster of problems I again wanted to give up.

I decided I couldn't do it all and would simply do one thing. I would take the cables out of the box. Maybe the next day I would work on it again. At that time all I could do was empty the crate. With that one manageable act I began putting our home together. When I saw how easy it was to empty the box I thought, "Maybe I can arrange

the cables so when I put the computer together it will be simpler."

The remaining boxes were attacked in a similar manner. I kept asking myself, "What is one single, simple thing I can do to put together the office?" Soon enough the desk came together, the computer was assembled and working, and finally the laser printer began spitting out pages. This wasn't accomplished by doing it all at one time. It was done by finding the one thing I could do right then to get things moving in the right direction.

When you are faced with a problem that seems larger than you can handle try this technique. Think to yourself, "What is the one thing I can do right now?" You don't have to figure out how to solve the entire challenge. Just decide what small step you can take at that moment. You can even make it the easiest, least taxing item. For example, if you are going to put together a new publication

don't try to do it all at once. Instead look for the one thing you can do right then. Maybe it's designing the new cover. Even that may seem like too much to tackle at once. So, instead just open up a new blank document. That was easy, wasn't it? Next find another "One Thing" to work on. Maybe decide on the typeface to be used. Continue that process and even the largest problem can be broken down into simple, manageable tasks.

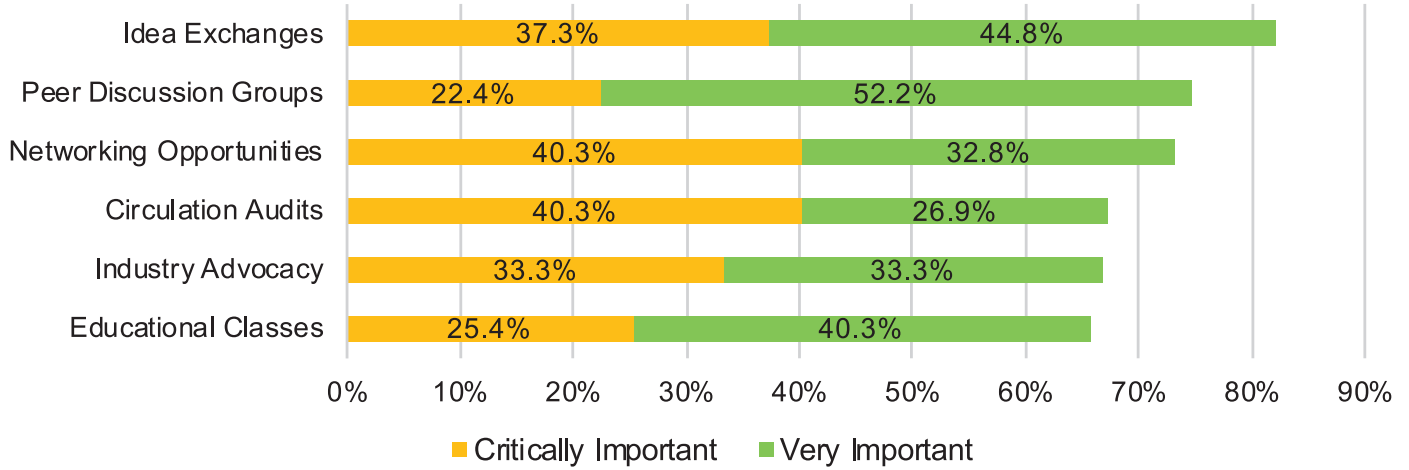
The comparison is always made regarding "Eating an Elephant - one bite at a time." But I don't plan on eating an elephant. Gray isn't my color. So, instead of thinking of elephants think of the one thing you can do. The easiest thing. The fastest thing. You'll be amazed how much you can get done by concentrating your efforts that way. You'll do great.

Now, where did I put that carton of semi colons for the next article? ■

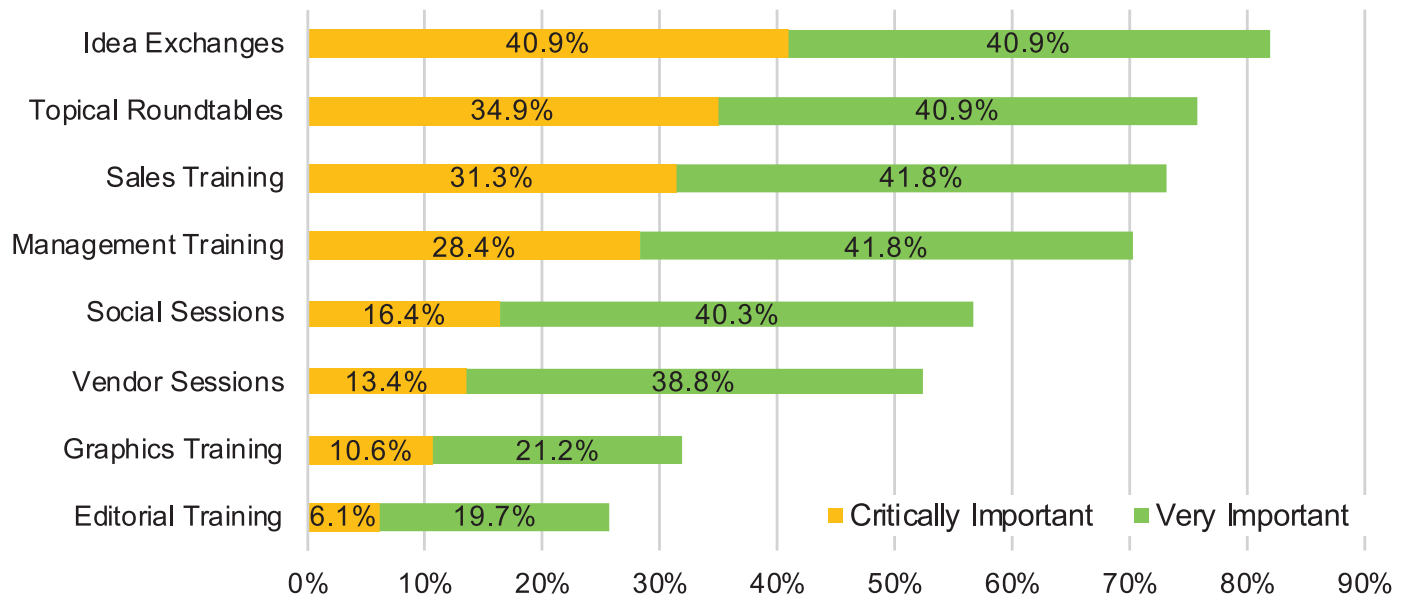
“When you are faced with a problem that seems larger than you can handle try this technique.”

THE SURVEY SAYS

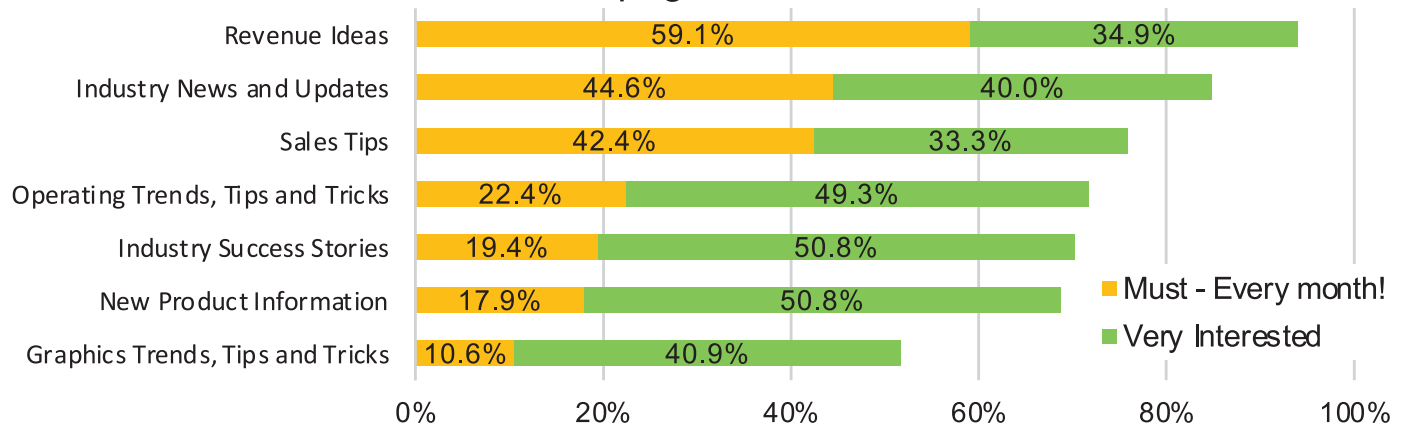
Top 6 Deliverables Needed From Your National Association



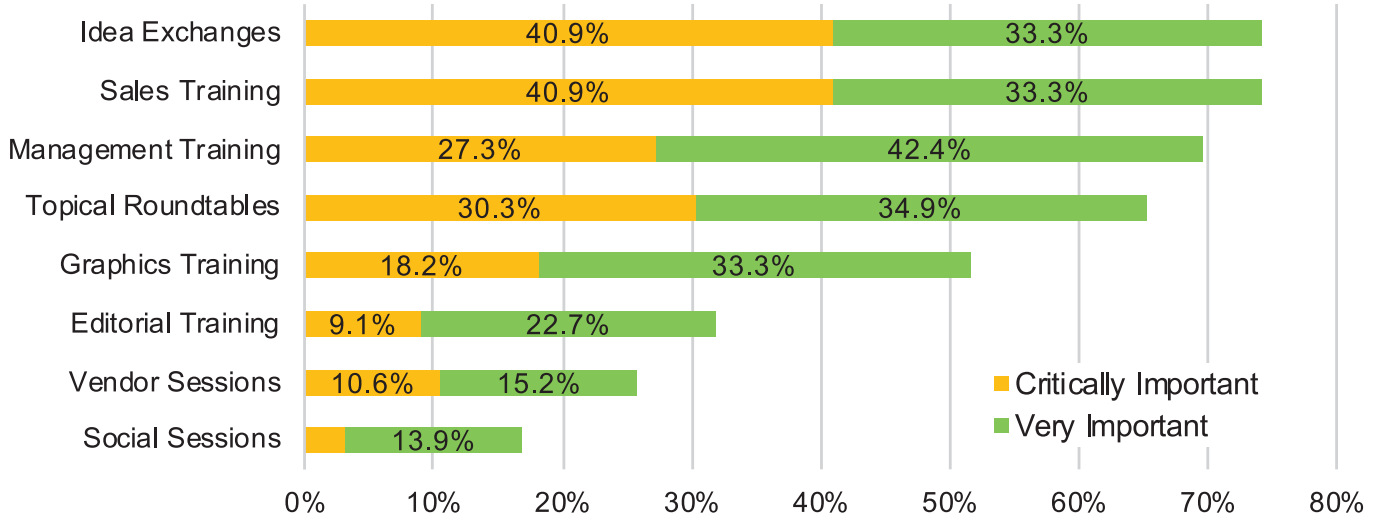
Most Important Components for Effective In-Person Conference



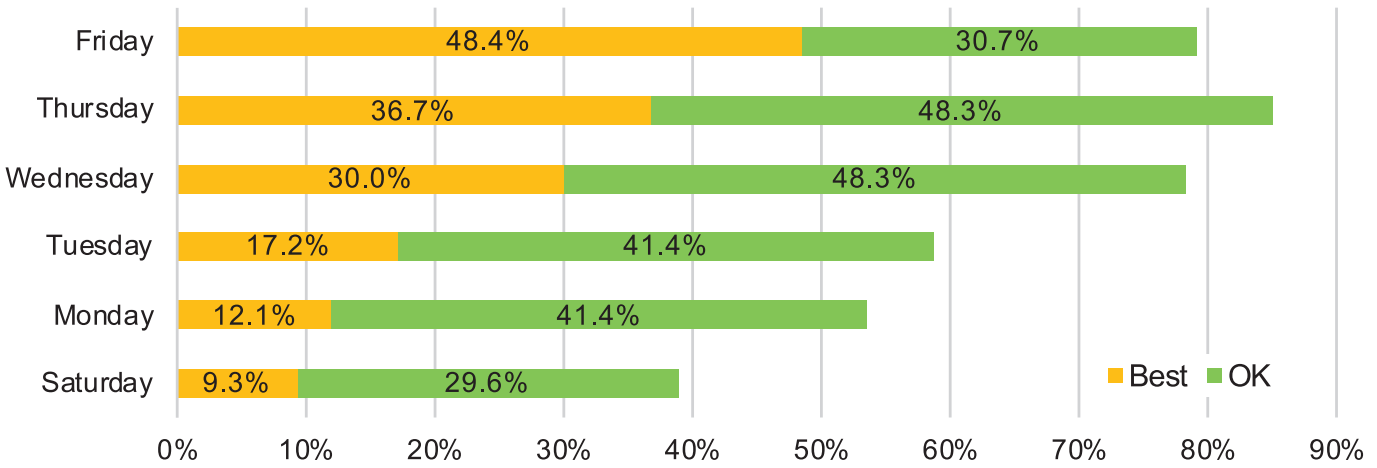
What would you most like to see fill the future pages of *Publish*



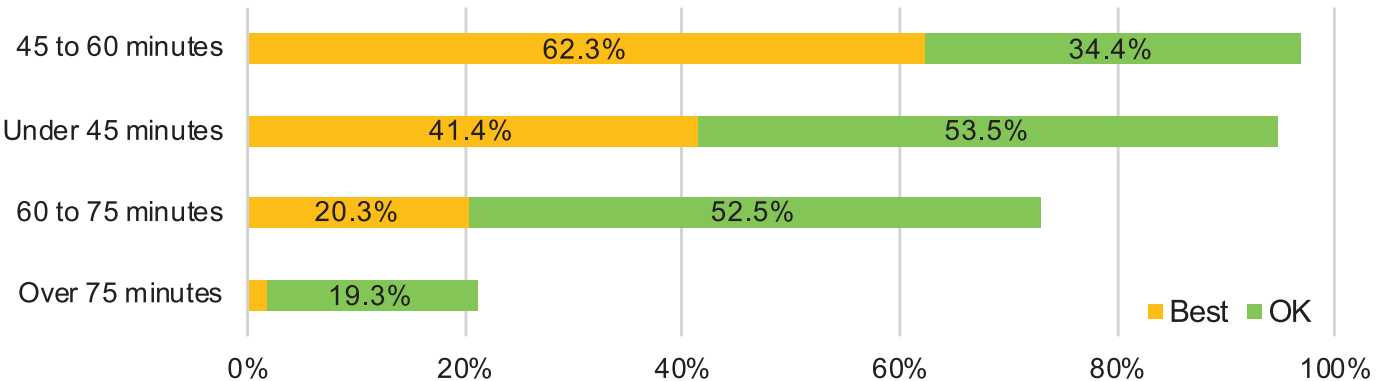
Most Important Components for Effective Virtual Conference



Day that would work best for a virtual conference



Best session length for virtual conference sessions



USPS DELAYS ARE THREATENING SMALL-TOWN NEWSPAPERS

So is a postage price increase

BY JACOB BOGAGE
(C) 2021, THE WASHINGTON POST



STRATOS BRILAKIS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Jeff Wagner hardly knew what to tell his delivery driver when the man returned one day in late December from a run to the post office in their northern Nebraska town with a trailer still full of newspapers.

The post office wouldn't take them, the driver said, as it had every Tuesday for decades, because it was so stacked up with packages and delayed mail there was simply no room. Wagner, the president of Iowa Information, a regional printing press that publishes four newspapers and a handful of shopping pamphlets, then checked his messages, where he found at least a half-dozen complaints about late or missing newspapers.

The U.S. Postal Service has been under siege for months as record volumes of holiday packages and election mail ran up against a spike in coronavirus cases within its workforce, leaving the agency severely short-staffed. Nearly 19,000 workers

were in quarantine at the end of 2020 after becoming infected or exposed to the virus, according to the American Postal Workers Union.

That has left hundreds of small publishers struggling to deliver their products, according to the National Newspaper Association, undercutting their advertising revenues and subscriber bases, and depriving the largely rural communities they serve of crucial news coverage. Some news operations have even called on reporters and editors to deliver papers.

They're also staring down rate increases of as much as 9% in 2022 and for years thereafter. Mail service is already one of their biggest costs, industry insiders say, and such a scenario could force hundreds of small publications out of business given their already bite-size margins.

"These are little, tiny rural communities, and typically papers like mine are the only sources of information

about that community," said Brett Wesner, chair of the National Newspaper Association and publisher of Wesner Publications, which includes 12 titles in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. "Most don't have digital coverage of any kind. Most don't have radio stations. We are the source of community information, both in terms of covering community events but also the city council, the school board, the county commission.

"So delays are concerning," he said. "And people are willing to make allowances today for that but not forever."

Newspapers have relied on the Postal Service since its founding 245 years ago. The first postmaster general, Benjamin Franklin, was himself a news publisher and the founder of several periodicals.

Publishers like Wesner pay the Postal Service 22 to 36 cents for each copy it delivers, based on whether

it's staying within state lines. That's at least 35% less than the cost of a letter, greeting card other first-class mail.

But the agency is poised to raise prices after losing \$9.2 billion in 2020 due to steep, pandemic-related declines in mail volume. It also has \$116.6 billion in liabilities, the bulk of which is tied to pension obligations. Leaders have long sought to raise new revenue and, in 2021, it's slated to push through its first big postage rate increase in more than a decade.

The Postal Service will get an annual rate increase tied to inflation, plus a corresponding bump based on the growing number of delivery points mail carriers must visit six days a week. It can charge more each year when it begins paying down its liabilities (something it hasn't done since 2011), and can charge 2% for each mail product that doesn't cover its own costs.

For periodicals, mailing industry insiders say, the price changes could add up to nearly 9% compounded annually.

"That's a scare for us," said Tonda Rush, the National Newspaper Association's director of public policy. "No one has the money to stomach those cost increases."

Larger newspapers generally hire scores of part-time workers to deliver newspapers. The mail service is more cost-effective for smaller publications, which can rack up additional discounts by delivering them to postal facilities on their own and presorting items in the sequence of a letter carrier's route, allowing postal workers to pick up the newspaper bundle and start their routines.

Still, postage is one of a local newspaper's largest expenses, after payroll and newsprint. And when newspapers arrive late, there can be financial consequences: Advertisers demand refunds. Patrons cancel their subscriptions. And small newspapers – Wagner's publications circulate to roughly 6,000 people – don't generate much money from online ads.

The plight of the news industry is well-documented: The rise of the Internet in the 1990s gutted a busi-

ness model that had largely gone unchanged for generations. News organizations tightened their belts by cutting editions, producing thinner papers and laying off staff.

Journalists at community papers often fill many roles: They write and edit their own copy, take photos and video, and layout pages, making it difficult to find new places to cut.

"The problem with most newspapers is that we're willing to cannibalize ourselves in order to maintain our profit margins," Wagner said.

Matt Paxton, fourth-generation publisher of the 6,000-circulation News-Gazette in Lexington, Va., said the delivery issues began over the summer. That syncs with cost-cutting underway at the mail service, where Postmaster General Louis DeJoy had ordered a crackdown on overtime hours, late and extra mail delivery trips, and other well-established measures.

““ The U.S. Postal Service has been under siege for months as record volumes of holiday packages and election mail ran up against a spike in coronavirus cases within its workforce, leaving the agency severely short-staffed.

DeJoy's agenda sent delivery rates spiraling. By August, periodicals had an on-time rate of 69%, an eight percentage-point drop in a matter of weeks. Performance rebounded over the fall, then fell again during the holiday season. It stood at 54% the week of Dec. 12, the most recent Postal Service data available.

The Gazette-News has 550 subscribers who live outside the county, many scattered throughout western Virginia and along Interstate 81. As DeJoy's changes slowed mail all over the country, including backlogs of more than a week in some processing facilities, readers started calling Paxton saying their papers were not arriving.

He or one of his reporters will frequently drive a new copy out to a subscriber's home later in the day to find that not only did the resident not receive the newspaper – that person didn't receive any mail.

Postal Service spokesman David Partenheimer wrote in an emailed statement that the agency, like the rest of the shipping sector, "continues to face near-term pressure on service performance" because of holiday mail volume and employee shortages because of spiking coronavirus infections.

"Amid the historic volume, the Postal Service continues to flex its network, including making sure the right equipment is available to sort, process and deliver a historic volume of mail and packages this holiday season," Partenheimer wrote. "Our entire operations team, from collections, to processing to delivery, worked throughout this past weekend and continues to work around-the-clock to address the historic volume."

As the delays mounted, Wagner started calling advertising clients offering them free ad space in future editions. His printing facility also produces 75 other regional and national newspapers; he called those clients to explain the issues.

Some of Wesner's readers got three weeks' worth of papers delivered on the same day. He's spoken with local postal officials about the problems, but they've told him there's not much they can do. Plus, it's not like they haven't noticed, Wesner said. They live in the small towns within his coverage area, and frequently are not getting their papers either.

"I think they're trying," Wesner said, "but with this quarantine and people getting sick, in these rural communities, you don't have a staff of 500 [at the post office]. The staff is tiny. You have people out, you're in trouble. I don't know of any recourse that we have. But if it does go on, we will find a recourse."

"I'm not trashing the local post offices," he added. "Those people are heroes. This is a systemic problem that they are, for the most part, trying to deal with." ■

This article was reprinted with permission from the January 4, 2021 Washington Post.

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Somebody once said...

Written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity.

John F. Kennedy

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LESSONS FROM OTHER ADVERTISING SOURCES



BY JOHN FOUST
RALEIGH, NC

As a co-founder of Southwest Airlines, Herb Kelleher was focused on innovation and efficiency. According to legend, he once took his executive team to the Indianapolis 500 to study the pit crews. He wanted to see if some of their techniques could help Southwest's ground crews reduce turnaround times at the gates.

Kelleher knew there was a lot to learn from outside sources. It's the same in the newspaper industry. For example, let's take a look at what can be learned from some other advertising vehicles.

1. BILLBOARDS: An outdoor sign has to grab attention immediately. As drivers pass by at highway speeds, it has one shot to attract readership. As a result, the words should be few (aim for eight words or less) and bold. And the graphic element should be big and simple.

Like billboards, newspaper ads should be easy to read at a glance.

2. TELEVISION/VIDEO: With the one-two punch of sight and sound, TV is tailor-made for the human side of storytelling. Customer testimonials are especially effective here. Newspaper advertisers can follow that example by featuring testimonials in online as well as print editions. That would strengthen campaign continuity.

3. MAGAZINES: One of the most striking lessons from magazines is the way they use color. In addition to color photographs and illustrations, they usually feature a high percentage of four-color and spot color ads. In fact, color seems to be the price of admission to be noticed in many magazines.

4. RADIO: It's all about the right voice. If the tone, enunciation and pacing are not clear, the message will be lost. In the newspaper business, this translates to typography – which has been called “the voice of print.” If the type is difficult to read, even the most brilliantly written copy will be wasted.

5. YELLOW PAGES: The strength of Yellow Page advertising is in its directness and simplicity. There's usually no doubt about what Company XYZ does, because the book is categorized by business type. And consumers don't have to go on a scavenger hunt to find phone numbers. After all, it's a phone directory.

Newspaper advertisers would be wise to strive for this kind of clarity.

“ Like billboards, newspaper ads should be easy to read at a glance.

6. POINT-OF PURCHASE: Store displays are strategically placed to generate as much attention as possible. How many times have you gone into a store to buy Product A and ended up buying product B, too – because an aisle display caught your eye? And don't forget impulse items, like candy bars and mints at the checkout counter.

Urgency is a key factor in point-of-purchase. Newspaper advertisers can establish similar urgency with time-sensitive sales and product scarcity (“Only six new homes left”).

7. DIRECT MAIL: “Target audience” is the key phrase here. A mail campaign can aim messages at accountants, real estate brokers, or restaurant owners. While newspapers can't target readers to that degree, they can strive to address ads to certain demographic groups in copy themes. And many can use zoned coverage to reach specific geographic areas. ■

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John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many ad departments are using his training videos to save time and get quick results from in-house training. E-mail for information: john@johnfoust.com

THANK YOU 2020!

BY DOUGLAS FRY

You are probably glad to put 2020 in the rear view mirror and look forward to 2021 being the year that puts everything back to normal. You are not alone with that sentiment. Political turmoil, a pandemic, figuring out ways to work with a mask on, and gaining extra weight known as the “Quarantine 15” make us all glad to say “adiós” to 2020.

On the positive side we have learned to more effectively communicate with our customers and each other. I know you're sick of Slack, Zoom, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, Messages, Facebook Live, or Team meetings just to name a few. But without those technologies we would be working secluded and limited to emails and phone calls. Remember that one, the phone? You might be interested to know that the phone is just another unused app on your smart phone. My sons become irritated with me if I call and actually leave a voice mail on their cell phones. “Why didn't you text me? Thanks Boomer!”

Through technology we can stay in touch without spreading germs, endangering the ozone layer, or trying to figure out whether or not you are going to shake a new acquaintance's hand. Application of these technologies will give you the opportunity to engage with other publishers in new, exciting, easy ways.

When we had to postpone an event last September because of COVID we were forced to look for ways to join together without an event hall or destination hotel. Thanks to Shane Goodman and Manuel Karam (board members of the Association of Community Publishers) a fun, affordable system was developed that created a prototype for the future.

If you participated in the 2020 Vision Virtual Events you know how



valuable those sessions were. If you didn't, let me give you a short vision (pun intended) of what it was like. For 6 Friday afternoons in September and October we had 2 one hour online Zoom sessions covering things like Social Media Myths, Creating Your Own Podcasts, Sales Techniques in 2020, Using Video in your Sales Calls, Improving Your Creative Department, Managing Your Remote Staff, Website Sales, Gamification of your Sales, and many others. 40 minutes of intense, innovative demonstration was followed by 10-15 minutes of questions and answers, and finally a 5 minute break to get ready for the next session.

Over 200 people just like you were looking for answers to the challenges they faced. The great part is they found what they were looking for. Page after page of notes were taken with ideas that would save money, make money, or help deal with the reality of the day. No one left without a positive experience.

These sessions allowed people to connect with each other, share ideas, and renew friendships they had missed because of lock down. The positives outweighed the negative of not being able to physically see each other in person.

You can look forward to more virtual events because they offer the following benefits:

- You don't have to travel to get there. Just log in from your computer, tablet, or smart phone.

- You don't have to stay in a hotel far from home. With virtual events you can sleep in your own comfy bed.
- Much lower cost. You can always attend in person or you can attend virtually for a lower overall cost.
- You attend only the sessions that you want. Well let's be honest... you do that in person too.
- More of your staff can attend sessions that will increase their professionalism and skills. Everyone employed by you can be part of the virtual events.
- You could attend the event in person and have the remainder of your staff attend virtually, watching those sessions that benefit them most.
- Sessions are recorded and posted online. This gives you a chance to rewatch and get pumped up again. Plus, your staff members are able to watch those sessions as well.
- You will see old friends during virtual events and rekindle relationships that we all missed last year. You might see that they have grown a beard, though she probably didn't want you to notice.

It was so enjoyable for me to have a hand in the last virtual event. I saw people I haven't seen in years. I learned so much and came away with so many great ideas. I eagerly look forward to the next event. We are planning our next Virtual Event to happen this Spring. Since we might still be locked down we know what to do. Your ACP family will be waiting to see you then. I look forward to seeing you then. ■

The Leadership Institute is a structured, industry specific sales and management training program sponsored by the Association of Community Publishers.



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103

DIFFERENT CLASS
CURRICULUMS PRESENTED

UNITY

BY JIM BUSCH

“Unity does not mean sameness. It means oneness of purpose.

Priscilla Shirer

For the last fifteen years, I have had the pleasure of participating in free paper conferences. I have met and worked with our industry's leaders. They are an interesting bunch of people who represent all the best things about America. Maybe it's the time I spent watching TV westerns as a child, but the publishers and executives I've met, remind me of the pioneers of the old west. While they don't have grizzled beards or pack six guns, it is their self-reliant spirit that reminds me of western heroes; people who risk everything to strike out on their own in pursuit of their dreams. I believe the thing that sets the United States apart from other nations is that we are descendants of people who wanted more from life, people that weren't satisfied with the status quo in the old world and risked a hazardous ocean voyage to build a better life in the new world. This may be why we are so adventurous and innovative and it's also why we're a bit rowdy and hard to manage. Our association members are by definition, entrepreneurs. A person doesn't take on the risks of going into business because they enjoy the long hours and crushing levels of emotional and mental stress. They enjoy being their own boss; they trust their gut and want to take charge of their own futures. This can make them stubborn and not particularly willing to take advice; rugged individualists who sometimes don't play well with others.

So why do such individualists join an association? For the same reason that the pioneers joined a wagon train; it helps them get to where they want to go. By banding together with other equally tough and independently minded pioneers, this provided the opportunity to learn from those who had already traveled the trail. By joining a wagon train, or an association, members don't surrender their independence, they get the help they need to preserve it. Publishers not only get the opportunity to learn from the experiences of their peers, they get the chance to share their own expertise. With the rise of competitive media and the pandemic related economic challenges we are all facing some serious "circle the wagons" moments. Our new enhanced association helps ensure our continued success by keeping us in touch with those who share our struggles and our dreams. ■

CUTTING AD RATES CAN BE A TRICKY GAME



BY BOB BERTING,
BERTING
COMMUNICATIONS

While many publishers don't believe in rate cutting, they feel forced to do it to stay competitive. However, rate cutting can be a tricky game. There are many financial, budgeting, managerial, and sales reasons to stay on the rate card. Let's take a look why:

EFFECT ON THE SALES TEAM

Rate cutting puts a lot of pressure on the sales team by creating ambiguity and confusion about how they are to conduct business and how far to go with cutting deals. On the other hand, publishers are sometimes frustrated by the demands of their salespeople who want to make easier sales by offering clients special rates.

“ Instead of concentrating on building and selling the value of their publication, many salespeople are busy worrying about how much to give away and when.

CREATING INSECURE SALESPEOPLE

Forced into price-cutting and deal making, many salespeople perceive themselves and their publications as weak. No one can be convincing as an advertising salesperson if he or she is insecure about their product. Breaking the rate card is also viewed as unprofessional by many media buyers, as well as advertising agencies. Also how can a client trust your word if he or she discovers their competition got a better deal from you? On the other hand, prospects who pressure salespeople to get a price break, often turn into difficult clients, who will desert you for the next better deal.

SALESPEOPLE GET SIDE-TRACKED

Instead of concentrating on building and selling the value of their publication, many salespeople are busy worrying about how much to give away and when.

Negotiating rates encourages salespeople to focus too much on price. Instead of working as consultant-counselors, they must now operate as “deal-makers”. Instead of building long range relationships, they are in danger of losing the confidence of their clients. For the new salesperson who is still learning sales skills and gaining confidence, they do not need to see experienced salespeople negotiating rates.

RATE CUTTING ESTABLISHES A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

Many salespeople offer rate deals because they think once the advertiser is in their publication, they can get them back on regular rate card rates in the future. But the salesperson is setting a precedent that's on the record with their customer. ■

Bob is the author of four best-selling e-books for the newspaper industry: “Dynamic Sales and Image Power”, “Advanced Selling Skills For The Advertising Sales Pro”, “Power Selling Tools For The Advertising Sales Consultant”, and his newest e-book, “Smart Customer Connections For Advertising Salespeople. You can order Bob's books on his website: www.bobberting.com. Read Bob's books and discover how his vast experience and know-how can help you achieve much more business for you and your publication. You'll greatly benefit from the wisdom of one of America's top advertising sales experts. Bob is a professional speaker, advertising sales trainer, publisher, marketing consultant, and leading columnist in many national and regional newspaper trade association publications. He is the president of Berting Communications and can be reached at bob@bobberting.com or 317-849-5408.



BY KEVIN SLIMP
kevin@kevinslimp.com

INDUSTRY PREDICTIONS

Kevin has been making predictions about the newspaper industry since 1994

As I write this column, vaccines are beginning to make their way to first responders, the New Year has begun, and maybe – just maybe – the world is seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. In the past, I often wrote New Year columns with predictions for our industry in the upcoming years. If you went far enough back, you’d see some doozies, including:

- PDF files becoming the method of choice for ad distribution. It replaced FedEx. (1994)
- The Zip Drive overtaking the Syquest Cartridge as the as the storage device of choice. (1994)
- InDesign overtaking QuarkXPress and Page-Maker as the design application of choice. (1999)
- Newspapers would be turning to online journalism, using video audio and more. (2000)
- Editorial Workflow Systems would become commonplace at newspapers. (2007)
- Pocket-size camcorders would be used by most reporters in the future. (2008)
- Newspapers would not be disappearing in the next ten years. (2009)
- JCPenney was making a big mistake by moving away from print advertising. (2012)
- Gannett and Gatehouse would merge before 2020. (2014)
- Remote/home offices will become “normal” at newspapers in the future. (2014)

- Metros would suffer more than community papers in the “digital future.” (2016)
- Joey Young was going to have success starting newspapers in Kansas. (2016)
- Newspapers owned by venture capitalist groups would lose stock value and readership. (2019 interview with The Washington Post)

This year, however, being a bit different from the years that preceded it, I’d like to take a look back – about ten months, give or take. COVID-19 was a new term to most of us. Newspapers were having to quickly learn how to produce papers and find advertisers during a pandemic. It seemed like the sky was falling quickly, and there might be no way to keep it from crashing down on our industry.

In my March 2020 column, I made three suggestions for newspapers searching for straws to help them stay afloat:

- Find ways to bring in new revenue through your traditional newspaper
- Find ways to use tools to bring in new revenue
- Look for tools to help your advertisers to 1) bring in business and 2) help them stay in business

I wasn’t blowing smoke. I was going through similar emotions as my newspaper friends and clients. The speaking business – where I made approximately half my income – was gone,



with no return in sight. My publishing company, focusing on study groups and churches, saw an immediate 80 percent drop in sales. We had to find ways to bring in new revenue, while continuing to publish books, even if it meant losing money on them in the short term. And we had to find ways to help our readers, because we need them to return when the pandemic is over.

My businesses followed those three suggestions:

- We continued to create books. For my speaking/consulting clients, I’ve been fortunate to be able to work with them virtually throughout the pandemic.
- At my publishing company, we created two new divisions to create new revenue. One didn’t work out. The other has become our major source of revenue. At newspaperacademy.com, we began rolling out classes to help newspapers make needed changes because of the pandemic.
- My publishing company created a new continuing education division to help our readers, which brought in revenue and allowed them to complete their CEU requirements online.

I’ve seen community newspapers doing incredible things to make it through this pandemic period intact. I know local owners who have bought nearby papers before they could be shuttered by owners in other states. I’ve seen publishers start new publications, offer free advertising to businesses that were at risk of closing (knowing they would need these advertisers’ business after the pandemic has passed), and come up with other creative ideas to serve their customers and advertisers.

To sum up the past ten months, I’d say it’s no accident most newspapers are alive and kicking, even if they aren’t all thriving, as we begin 2021. I’m not sure my (or anyone else’s) speaking business will ever go back to 100 (or even 20) or more cities per year. I doubt my company’s book sales for all of 2021 will match sales in January and February 2020. I’m willing to bet, however, that the work we’ve done to provide services during this extraordinarily uncommon year will pay off in the years to come.

I’m proud to be associated with community newspapers. ■

Kevin Slimp is founder of newspaperacademy.com and The University of Tennessee Newspaper Institute. In 2017, he founded Market Square Publishing. Despite the changes brought on by COVID-19, he still keynoted several newspaper conferences virtually in 2020.

Graphic Hooks

By Ellen Hanrahan

Finally...Happy New Year? I sincerely hope that 2021 brings all of us a reasonable return to a less "insane" schedule.

Although, to be sure, there will still be challenges, triumphs and renewals. This past year has changed us, how we live, how we work and perhaps a more profound respect for the family, friends and connections we have made over the years.

A Few Resolutions

This past year was unbelievable— certainly unlike any other year I ever experienced— we have all had to adjust. So, I am grateful for "Zoom," because we were still able to connect, albeit a virtual experience. At least I was able to attend the Adobe MAX conference last October, although I still haven't been able to get through the manuals I have accumulated!

At the end of 2016, I wondered whether to join Adobe Creative Cloud, which I did, but still am way behind on most of the improvements and innovations that have occurred since then. The following were my takes on my software programs at the time. Here's an update...

Adobe InDesign: My page layout program is still *InDesign*, but there are now so many features that offer users to design for multiple platforms. I am probably not going to change programs or go beyond what I need.

HOWEVER, I am seriously considering getting *Affinity Designer* or *Affinity Publisher* (first I need to find an expert to help me with that decision... Douglas?)

I do a newsletter for our Camera Club and this seems to be a better option— it is way less expensive and it can open InDesign documents. So this is very doable.

Adobe Acrobat: Same as above... this program has gotten more powerful and interactive! I have begun to create more interactive PDF files for my newsletters and articles. So still working on this!

Adobe Dreamweaver: Yep, tried it, took a class—too intense, too many numbers, too many other programs. Bottom line, it's over.

Adobe Photoshop/Illustrator: I've put both programs together because there have been a slew of advancements for both.

My Camera Club has given me a renewed interest in layers and filters in Photoshop and the Adobe Max Conference gave me a renewed interest in Illustrator.

HOWEVER, I am most interested in learning the programs for the iPad! So that will also be an undertaking for 2021.

Finally, another software program I use is: **ABBYY FineReader:** This OCR Program, (Optical Character Recognition) has helped immensely... not so much for articles or newsletters, but for getting text from newspapers, letters, and articles regarding family history or old notes. It affords me the chance of transferring print to a digital format. It works very well on most of my scanned text.

The program itself is \$119.00, but they ran a 50% off after Thanksgiving, so they do discount. My program is *ABBYY FineReader Pro for Mac*, but I've included a link to their store for a variety of their OCR products—and prices may vary (see bottom of page).

A few questions...

Because of this "unusual" year, it's hard to gauge what is relevant for you. In 2016 I asked a few questions and judging from the response (let's see, four years and no response), I just have to assume that I am doing one heck-of a job!

So, seriously, I will ask some of those questions again. Here goes...

1. **Mac or PC and which operating system?**
2. **What software programs and versions do you use?**
3. **What layout topics would you like to see covered?**
4. **How long have you worked in Graphic Design/Production?**
5. **Do you create collateral material (special sections, flyers, posters, invitations, etc.) or just do ads?**
6. **How has the workflow or production of print publications changed for you?**
7. **What topics would be of more interest to you... Layout? Design? Photoshop? Illustrator?**

That's it! Send the answers to my e-mail address below with the word "Graphic Answers" in the subject line. With our inability to "travel," it's very hard to gauge all the changes that have occurred in our field.

It would almost seem nice to set up a "Zoom-type" Conference for those individuals solely in print production or transferring to on-line or virtual versions of what do. I know that there is a video on "Taking your Publication Graphics to the next Level," but how exactly do you do that. What steps do you need to take and why.

Maybe the focus would be on some of the articles I've written... but you can talk back!



Coming Attractions

While I am waiting for your answers to my questions to roll in, I have prepared a few ideas of my own.

For starters, there's principles of design, where we examine hierarchy, highlighting, interference effects, readability, redundancy and more to create effective advertising.

There is also tried and true typographic combinations and how to work with drop caps, small caps, decorative types and how to create type as a graphic element.

There is still a lot to learn about Photoshop and its new capabilities; making the best of a bad photo (cropping is a god-send); working with the histogram for better photos.

There are also the workbooks and labs that I have from Adobe MAX to go through and I am serious about the Affinity software comparison. I still have ad comparisons, too.

I also hope to provide a more interactive experience with these articles, using *Adobe InDesign* and *Adobe Acrobat*... not to mention the ideas that will be coming from you!

The interactive link I provided at the bottom of columns one and two will take you directly to the ABBYY store.

Final Thoughts

The start of a new year gives me a time to reflect on the past but also to look to the future for hope and a chance to finish what I started in the past; build on the relationships I've formed and learn new things; and hope that the future provides us with time to do all of these things.

Best wishes for a hope-filled, joy-filled and blessed New Year for you all!

Stay Safe & Happy New Year

Ellen Hanrahan hanrahan.ln@att.net ©2020

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APRIL 2021
**Association of Community Publishers (ACP)
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Joint Annual Conference and Trade Show in Des Moines, Iowa is moving to the fall. This spring event will be replaced by a **virtual conference event** currently being designed. Watch for more details as they emerge or contact the ACP or MFCP offices for more details.

SEPTEMBER 17-18, 2021
**Association of Community Publishers (ACP)
and Midwest Free Papers (MFCP)**

Joint Annual Conference and Trade Show in Des Moines, Iowa. For more information as it becomes available, contact Loren Colburn email: loren@communitypublishers.com or Lee Borkowski email: director@mfcf.org

SEPTEMBER 30 – OCTOBER 2, 2021
National Newspaper Association (NNA)
Annual Convention and Trade Show will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Jacksonville, Florida. Go to www.nnaweb.org/convention for more details.

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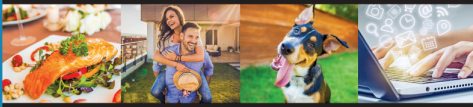
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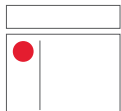
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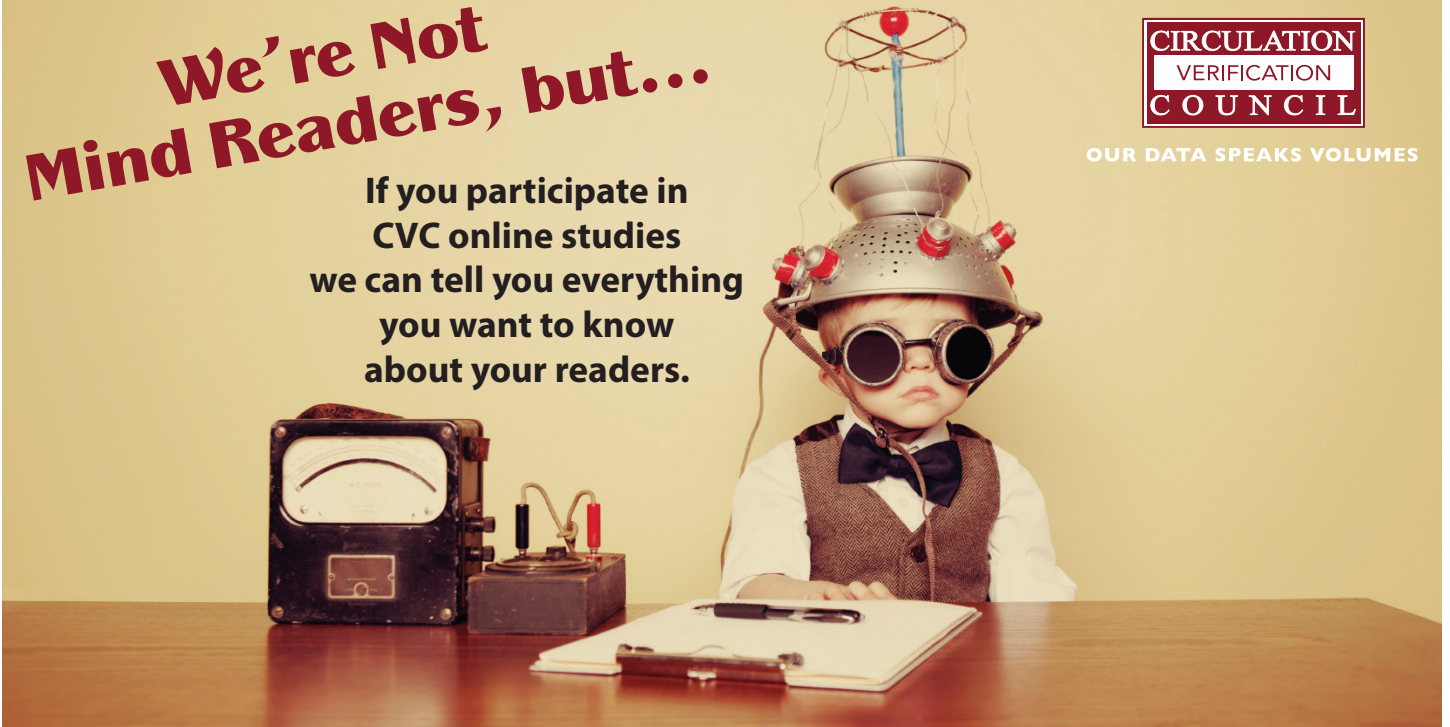
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