

# June 2023 **INFORMER**

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**Community  
Papers of  
Michigan**

# Improving Your Paper

No two newspapers are alike. At least, they shouldn't be.



by Kevin Slimp  
kevin@kevinslimp.com

If you regularly read my columns, you know that I write about focus groups quite often. Don't worry. I'm not writing about focus groups today. However, I want to discuss another kind of group that I find beneficial to many newspapers I visit.

Now and then, I am invited to work on-site with a paper for several days or even weeks. On these occasions, it's a safe bet that I will call the entire staff together for an hour or so to discuss some important issues.

Just last week, I worked on-site with a newspaper staff in Tennessee. Thanks to a government grant, it was my fifth visit with the team since January. Over that time, we've discussed just about everything you might imagine, from sales to reporting to design. As it was my last scheduled meeting with the staff this year, I asked that everyone be on hand for an afternoon meeting. We had folks from the front desk, reporters, editors, ad reps, designers, the press staff, and the publisher.

We began the meeting by discussing customer service, including ways to improve how we interact with our readers and advertisers. Next, I divided the staff into three random groups before sending them to separate rooms with specific instructions. I asked everyone to imagine he or she was the king or queen of the newspaper. Their task

was to create a list of ideas they would enact to improve the newspaper.

I explained that their ideas could be about anything, not limited to the paper's content. Groups were given 15 minutes to create their lists. I figured they would run out of ideas before they ran out of time.

## Boy, was I wrong

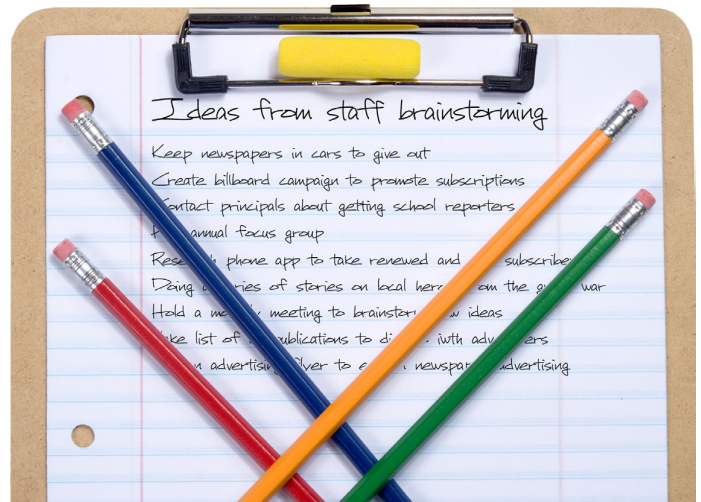
After 15 minutes, I walked to the various rooms to check on the groups. All three groups asked for additional time. After 30 minutes, I gave each group a 2-minute warning and gathered everyone back together.

I never expected so many great ideas to come out of one meeting. The groups gathered in the original room, and we discussed their ideas for 30 minutes or so. Most weren't related to the newspaper's content, but a few were. One group came back with ideas to increase circulation by targeting zip codes with subscription promotions. Another suggested staff members keep copies of the latest newspaper in their cars, so they could give them to potential subscribers they'd meet during the course of a day. One of the groups came up with the idea of finding a phone app that would allow them to handle new or renewed subscriptions on-site.

Story ideas came from the groups. Methods of interacting with subscribers were discussed. Before the 30 minutes ended, the group began planning a billboard campaign.

## Every newspaper should be different

I was visiting with a friend earlier this week who asked



me about the process of redesigning newspapers. I explained to him that I begin from scratch when I redesign a paper.

He asked the obvious question, "Can't you just use a template you created from another paper and change the names?"

He was surprised when I told him that every newspaper is different. Every town is different. Every staff is different. The process of redesigning a newspaper – for me, at least – takes approximately 100 hours because every element is created from scratch. Sure, I could make a couple of templates and fill in the blanks for various newspapers, but that's not how the process works. Just this week, I'm finishing the designs for two newspapers in Nebraska. Frankly, I'm exhausted. When we're finished, however, the results will be worth the effort. They always are. The papers will receive emails and calls from readers about how much they love their "new" papers. Long-lost advertisers will call the papers about placing ads

again. There will be a sense of pride in the communities. It happens every time. A cookie-cutter process wouldn't achieve the same results.

That's why I like to meet with the entire staff when I visit a paper. Sure, I could lead a slideshow on how to improve their paper. But the real results happen when the group gathers to discuss their town and paper. Let me suggest you gather your staff together to discuss ways to improve your newspaper.

Next week, I'm privileged to meet with newspaper publishers in Kansas. The folks at the press association tell me they've filled my schedule on Friday afternoon to meet one-on-one with publishers to discuss their papers. This is always my favorite time at a convention, seeing their work in their hometowns and finding ways to make their newspapers even more effective.

I see community newspapers thriving all over the map. I see it every day. I'm just glad to be a small part of the process.

# USPS RATE HIKE FOLLOW-UP - By Hillary Carroll



Hillary Carroll

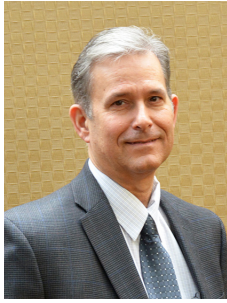
**Previously,** I wrote about USPS proposing a rate hike that's set to go into effect this July. As a follow-up, I want to share a few additional resources. The most recent of which was updated on 5/12/23, the July 2023 [Price Change Log](#).

- 1 The official postal release can be viewed [here](#).
- 2 The article mentions: "The price tables are also available on the Postal Service's Postal Explorer website at [pe.usps.com/PriceChange/Index](https://pe.usps.com/PriceChange/Index)
- 3 If you click on that link it takes you to this [page](#).
- 4 From the July 2023 Price Change page, you can download [July 2023 \(Market Dominant\) Price File - Excel](#).
- 5 Once you download the excel file, use the arrow in the bottom left to scroll through the tabs until you see the tab for Periodicals.



You will probably need sophisticated software to decipher Periodicals pricing but hopefully you find this information to be easy to access and transparent, albeit difficult to decode. For more tips, tricks, and the latest news join our mailing list or email [hillary@requesterpro.com](mailto:hillary@requesterpro.com).





# BUILDING MAIN STREET NOT WALL STREET

## Unraveling the Challenges of Small Local Businesses *by John Newby*



**Jay Conrad Levinson said “Small businesses fail when they ignore the importance of marketing.”**

You can have the best product or service in the world, but if people don't know about it, they won't buy it.” It is true that lack of marketing and advertising are main factors of business failures across the country, but let's explore a few other reasons that may contribute to the downfall of many small local businesses.

We know that small local businesses play a vital role in fostering economic growth, creating jobs, and building vibrant communities. However, their journey to success can be particularly difficult in smaller markets. Let's explore the reasons behind the failure of small local businesses in small markets. We'll utilize a few analogies and logical analyses to shed light on this intricate phenomenon.

When running a small business, one can feel like a small fish in a limited pond, struggling to find sustenance amidst intense competition. Similarly, smaller markets present businesses with smaller customer bases, limited purchasing power, and a reduced demand for niche products or services. Consequently, small local businesses often face challenges in achieving economies of scale, which hampers their ability to compete against larger enterprises that benefit from bulk purchasing and mass production.

Much like a spider web constricting its prey, smaller markets can entrap local businesses within a web of limited resources and opportunities. These markets often lack diverse talent pools, specialized infrastructure, and access to investment capital. Consequently, entrepreneurs may find it challenging to acquire skilled employees, upgrade technology, and innovate, thus impeding their overall growth prospects.

Just as a stone creates ripples on the surface of

a pond, similarly, external factors can have far-reaching consequences for small local businesses in smaller markets. Economic downturns, shifting consumer preferences, and changing industry dynamics impact these businesses more profoundly than their larger counterparts due to their limited resources and less diversified customer bases. They lack the cushioning ability to absorb shocks, making them vulnerable to external shocks.



Sometimes a small business must feel a bit like David as he faced an uphill battle against Goliath. Small local businesses often confront fierce competition from larger corporations. These giants possess substantial market power, extensive marketing budgets, and established supply chains. This disadvantage can make it arduous for small local businesses to capture market share, attract customers, and sustain profitability, leading to their eventual demise.

Analogous to a maze with hidden paths, smaller markets suffer from lack of information providing resources, where local businesses struggle to reach their target audience effectively. Limited advertising and marketing budgets, lack of digital presence, and inadequate access to market intelligence and data can hinder small business's ability to effectively connect with customers. This information gap perpetuates their invisibility, ultimately resulting in

decreased sales and market share.

Infrastructure acts as the backbone of any business ecosystem. In many cases in smaller markets, inadequate infrastructure can create a significant hurdle for small local businesses. Inadequate transportation networks, limited warehousing facilities, and unreliable power supply can disrupt supply chains, increase operational costs, and impede growth opportunities. The lack of infrastructure support further undermines the ability of small businesses to compete effectively.

As you can see, the failure of small local businesses in smaller markets can be attributed to a complex interplay of factors, including limited customer base, constrained resources, fierce competition, lack of the ability to market and advertises effectively, and inadequate infrastructure.

For smaller communities to combat this, they must recognize these obstacles and adjust accordingly. Strong local communities aren't strong by accident, they are strong because they are hyper supportive of small local businesses and have developed the attitude of teamwork. They understand that raising the water level raises all the ships in the harbor and work hard to build an environment of business success. By nurturing an environment that fosters innovation, promotes infrastructure development, builds upon the entrepreneurial spirit, and encourages collaboration, they create a more inclusive community where small local businesses can thrive and contribute to their growth and vitality.

John Newby is a nationally recognized Columnist, Speaker, & Publisher. He consults with Chambers, Communities, Business & Media. His “Building Main Street, not Wall Street,” column appears in 60+ newspapers and media outlets. As founder of Truly-Local, he assists chambers, communities, media, and businesses in creating synergies that build vibrant communities. He can be reached at: John@Truly-Local.org.



BY JOHN FOUST

# Ad - Libs

## What Are They Selling?

My wife and I once visited with Rick and Karen, a couple who had served as missionaries overseas. As part of their work to get involved in the community, Rick was assigned to teach a class at a local school. "For some reason," he said, "they wanted me to teach advertising. I had absolutely no experience in advertising, but they requested that subject, because they wanted their students to learn something about business."

How in the world did he deal with such a big challenge? "I figured the best way to handle it was to make the class as interactive as possible, so we could learn together," he explained. "On the first day, I pinned ads from newspapers and magazines to the wall. Then I asked the students to identify what each ad was selling. To put it mildly, it was a lively discussion. All of their other classes had been lectures, and they weren't accustomed to contributing their ideas in the classroom. They really dove into it, walking around the room, studying the ads. It was interesting to hear their perspectives – and to watch them bounce ideas off each other. From the beginning, the students were attracted to the ads that clearly indicated what they were selling. Along the way, it was surprising to see how many ads were so unclear that none of us could figure out exactly what those particular ads were all about.

"The conversation progressed from 'What are these ads selling?' to 'What makes some ads better than others?' That's when the fun started. They talked about nice-looking photographs and drawings, good headlines, and what types of people would likely buy the things various ads were selling. Their

reaction was so positive that – in the next few class meetings – we went into detail on the things they mentioned."

Rick said the class was a "wow" experience, and it's easy to see why. He discovered an excellent way to teach the basics of advertising – and the students learned a lot about how businesses promote themselves.

***"Together, we learned that advertising is not some distant intellectual topic," he said. "It's ground-level communication."***

The point for us to consider is simple: Are our readers really that much different from the students in that overseas classroom? Aren't readers also drawn to well-written copy, and compelling photos and illustrations? Of course, they are.

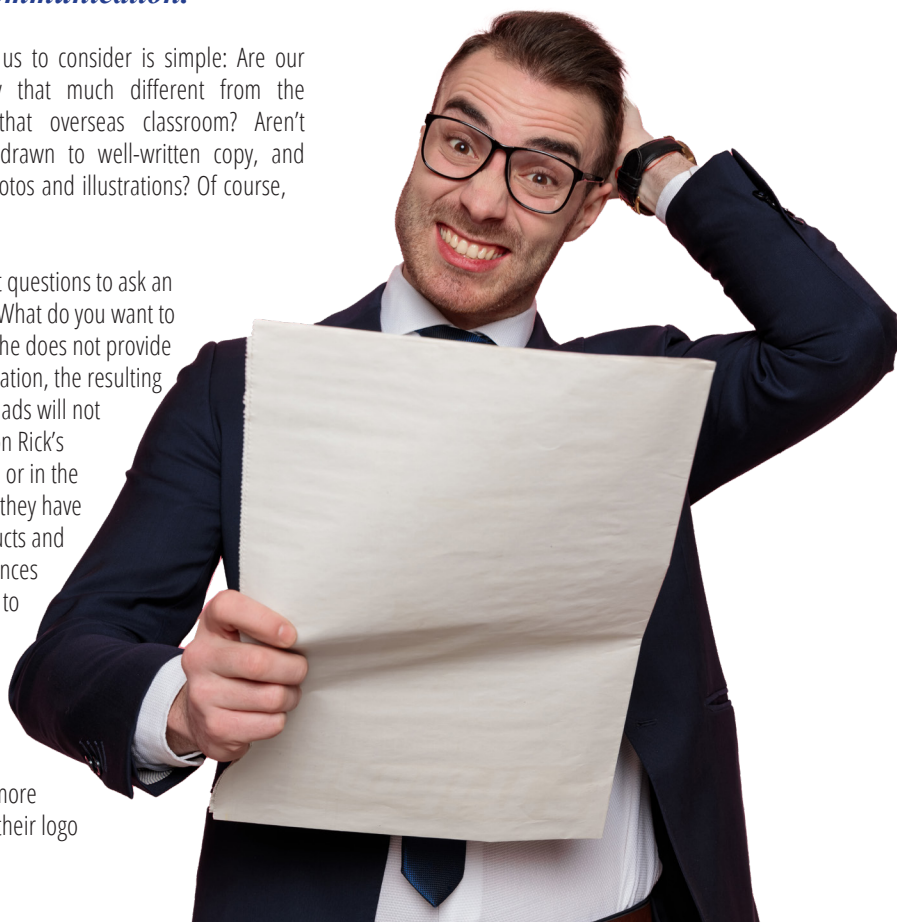
One of the first questions to ask an advertiser is, "What do you want to sell?" If he or she does not provide specific information, the resulting ad or series of ads will not perform well on Rick's classroom wall or in the paper. Maybe they have so many products and possible audiences that they need to narrow their focus. Maybe they don't realize that effective advertising is more than slapping their logo

on the page. Or maybe no other ad person has talked to them about the value of marketing strategy.

In many ways, selling is teaching. Your client list is your classroom.

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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. Email for information: [john@johnfoust.com](mailto:john@johnfoust.com)



*We got a little out of sync last month, but since July is fast approaching, I thought it would be more appropriate to discuss...*

# Our Flag

## Ad Talk

with Ellen Hanrahan

I had intended to follow up our grey scale topic with a re-do of the "Jail House ad," however, with July on the horizon I deemed this more appropriate (I guess if I am responsible for content, I can choose the topic). With Memorial Day, Flag Day (June 14), Independence Day, Veteran's Day, not to mention parades, fairs and other events where the display of our flag is front and center, I decided this was a suitable topic... and here's why (in my opinion)...

### A little history: graphic design

In the 1980s, graphic designers were experiencing a massive change... from a separate design station, a typesetting station, a paste-up station and finally, pagination—by hand. A mere six or seven years later, all the "stations" were beginning to merge. The technology that rocketed us into a maze of hardware, software, peripherals and what-not became more complex. Technology can be taught, but design skills need development. Good design comes from the understanding of the building blocks of graphic design and using them appropriately. Designing an ad is simply organizing the information and the graphic material into the most readable and coherent manner possible.

However, it's not that simple. An understanding of visual literacy, contemporary trends and the ability to convince readers to act requires more than just tools and artwork. Little things such as typography, color theory and presentation depend on the ability to understand how this can affect readers.

The concept of design is simple—good design is good design... period. But the tools of the trade have been subjected to a radical redesign. The idea of desktop publishing had been embraced by the industry and impacted the very process of how we created advertising. The designer was no longer a part of the process, but actually controlled the process... from page layout, graphics, photos, art, to the final output.

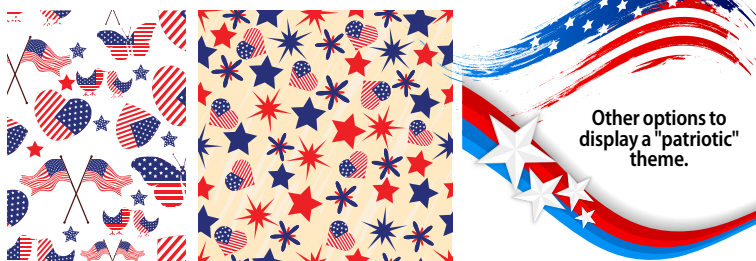
Now we have a lot more responsibility—we've become writer, designer, typesetter, color separator, and trouble-shooter. Where there used to be skilled individuals to handle each of these aspects, technology blurred the lines between these fields.

The good news is that it has also opened up a whole different, and powerful set of tools for me to use—and the responsibility to make myself a more informed individual in a number of graphic areas—including appropriate use of the flag! It takes time, but with each application, I have, in fact, come a long way. Some skills just take longer to master than others.

### A little history: flag use

Once again, it doesn't seem possible that the year is almost half over! This is the time of year that advertiser's want flags and fireworks and all things associated with the festive 4th. As you can see in the next column, use of the flag has some pretty strict rules. Go ahead, just Google "flag in advertising" and see what you get.

But since I am a big fan of vector art (it allows for best and multiple uses of the artwork), I have included various patriotic art that I downloaded from various graphic services. Most art services offer a myriad of similar art to choose from and I can always fit these patriotic themes into a lot of different types of ads without including a graphic of the flag itself.



Other options to display a "patriotic" theme.

## THE US FLAG IN ADVERTISING

The American flag has been used on everything from coffee cups to underwear, and seeing people wearing it or in TV commercials has become a common occurrence.

What many may not know is that the use of the flag in such contexts is expressly forbidden in official US Flag Code. Yep, wearing the flag as a lapel pin might be fine, but bumper stickers, T-shirts, etc. is definitely not acceptable! Check it out here:

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/4/8>

According to the subset of US Code which deals with proper care and use of the American flag, "The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It should not be embroidered on such articles as cushions or handkerchiefs and the like, printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard."

The code, which was drawn up at the first National Flag Conference in Washington in 1923 and adopted in 1942, states, "No part of the flag should ever be used as a costume or athletic uniform."

The code however, is not enforced, nor is it enforceable. It is merely a set of guidelines, letting Americans know what to do—and what not to do—with our red, white and blue national emblem.

I normally do not use a direct representation of the flag because there are so many other ways to signify the flag... or patriotic approach...so keep that in mind.

Most art services offer this option or just Google "free patriotic art" ... it's out there!



I was a student, an art teacher, a graphic designer, a writer and again a student. For info, PDFs of articles, or have ideas or comments, e-mail: [hanrahan.ln@att.net](mailto:hanrahan.ln@att.net) Ellen Hanrahan ©06/2023



By Mark W. Rummel  
Fenton, MI

**YOU'D BETTER SHOP AROUND:**  
**Among U.S. generations, most "old values" are disappearing**

Since the beginning of time, every grown-up generation has said the same thing: *"that next generation coming after us is SO different — they just aren't like us at all!"*

And, of course, we all know this is true — teens and other young adults rarely like the same music, styles, food, movies and even reading material that their parents have favored.

**NOW, A NEW** study says those differences are REALLY changing, as we all might expect in this turmoil-filled time.

A recent poll by The Wall Street Journal and NBC News says our nation is experiencing the biggest

shift in what Americans value that has ever been recorded.

Patriotism, religious faith, having children and other priorities that have helped define the national character for generations are receding in importance to younger Americans, the new poll found. It's no surprise that our nation is sharply divided by political party over social trends, including more racial diversity in businesses and the use of gender-neutral pronouns.

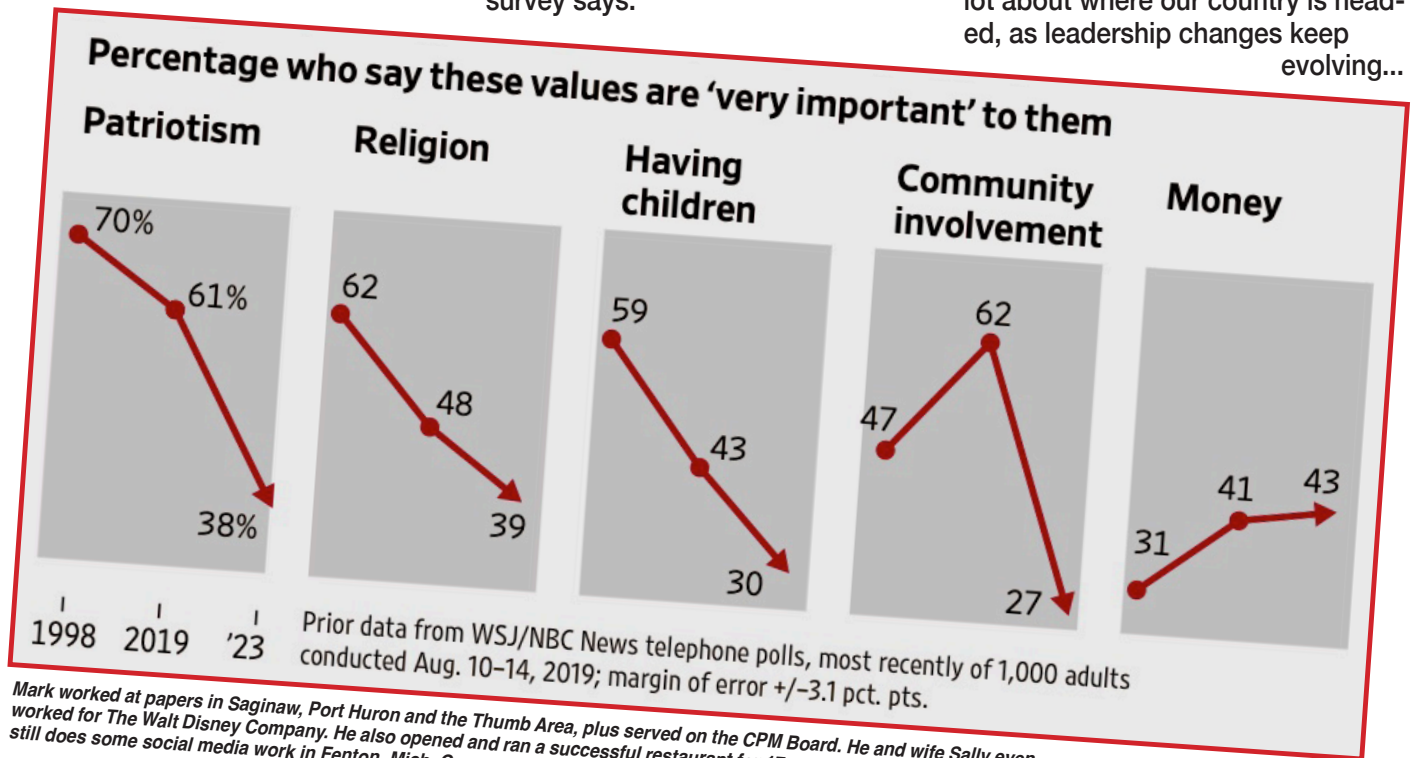
**TODAY, SOME** 38% of respondents say patriotism is very important to them. And 39% say religion is very important to them, the updated survey says.

Yet those numbers are down sharply from when the questions were first asked in 1998. Then, 70% of people said patriotism was very important, and 62% said so about religion. Those are dramatic drops!

**HAVING CHILDREN** and also working for your community are other main points on the decline as of 2023 — very different answers than were given both in 1998 and in 2019.

What IS rising in the past quarter-century is the importance of **MONEY**, the poll says. It's up from 31% to 43% for those surveyed.

Whether or not these trends continue or are reversed soon will say a lot about where our country is headed, as leadership changes keep evolving...



Mark worked at papers in Saginaw, Port Huron and the Thumb Area, plus served on the CPM Board. He and wife Sally even worked for The Walt Disney Company. He also opened and ran a successful restaurant for 17 years. He's mostly retired but still does some social media work in Fenton, Mich. Comments are always invited at [MarkWRummel@gmail.com](mailto:MarkWRummel@gmail.com)



## Two Sides North America Survey

# U.S. Consumers' Preference for Print Media Shows Post-pandemic Gains

- Submitted by Kathi Rowzie

Print media saw significant disruption during the coronavirus pandemic as many people moved online for news and information, but consumers' preference for receiving and reading print on paper has rebounded over the past two years. This according to a new survey commissioned by Two Sides North America and conducted by global research firm Toluna.

"Some observers predicted that people who switched from paper to digital media during the pandemic would never return, but this has not been the case," says Two Sides North America President Kathi Rowzie. "Across every category of media included in the survey, from books and magazines to newspapers and product catalogs, consumers' preference for paper has increased since 2021."

The 2023 Two Sides Trend Tracker Survey asked consumers how they prefer to receive and read various types of media – on paper, mobile/tablet, e-reader (e.g., Kindle), laptop/desktop or no preference. Results showed an increase from 2021 in the preference for paper over digital communication in the following categories.

**Books:** 50% prefer paper, up from 44%  
**Magazines:** 47% prefer paper, up from 38%  
**Newspapers:** 34% prefer paper, up from 29%  
**Catalogs:** 30% prefer paper, up from 22%

As might be expected, the survey showed that younger adults, those age 18 to 24 in particular, prefer to receive and read all types of media online. But even among these younger consumers, more than three in 10 prefer to read books and magazines in print.



The survey also revealed interesting trends over the last two years in consumer attitudes and habits related to how they consume news.

In 2021, 58% of consumers said they intended to read more news online in the future, but this number dropped to 53% in this year's survey. Nearly six in 10 consumers (58%) said they would be concerned if printed newspapers were to disappear, up from 49% two years ago. More than half of consumers (51%) said they get a better understanding of the story when reading news in print versus online, up from 44%. And more than four in 10 (43%) said they trust news stories in print rather than online, up from 34%.

"Print and digital media are often compared as an either/or proposition to suggest one is better than the other," Rowzie says, "but our research clearly shows that consumers value both. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits all digital communications strategy, savvy publishers, retailers and other businesses will continue to offer consumers a choice. In doing so, they will not only satisfy consumers who prefer print on paper, but also will assure that those

with no or limited access to digital information – older Americans, those with disabilities, low-income individuals and many in rural areas – are not disadvantaged."

The 2023 Two Sides Trend Tracker Survey queried 1,000 respondents over age 18 across the United States. It is the second of Two Sides' biennial trend tracker studies designed to explore and better understand consumer perceptions, behaviors and preferences related to the sustainability of paper products.

*Two Sides North America ([www.twosidesna.org](http://www.twosidesna.org)) is part of the non-profit Two Sides global network which includes more than 600 member companies across North America, South America, Latin America, Europe, Australia and South Africa. Our mission is to dispel common environmental misconceptions and to inspire and inform businesses and consumers with engaging, factual information about the inherent environmental sustainability and enduring value of print, paper and paper-based packaging. Kathi Rowzie, President, Two Sides North America  
 P: 937-999-7729 E: [info@twosidesna.org](mailto:info@twosidesna.org)*





There are  
**28 MILLION**  
Small Businesses  
in the US

Nearly  
**40%**  
still do NOT have  
a website

**NOW is the  
Perfect Time**  
to Join Our Website  
Reseller Program

• **SMB's Don't Want DIY**

Small businesses don't have the time or know-how to build a website themselves. They just want someone to build it for them.

• **SiteSwan is the Perfect Fit**

SiteSwan websites are affordable, beautifully designed, fully responsive, search engine friendly and only take minutes to build.

• **Complete Web Design Business-in-a-Box**

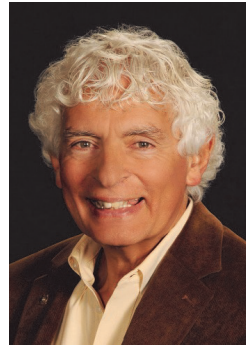
We're more than just a website builder. We provide everything you need to build a profitable web design business.



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Don Rush  
 CPM President  
 View Newspaper Group  
 666 S. Lapeer Rd.  
 Oxford, MI 48371  
 Phone: 248-628-4801  
 Fax: 248-628-9750  
 Cell: 810-636-3798  
[don@shermanpublications.org](mailto:don@shermanpublications.org)



George Moses  
 Director  
 The Marketeer  
 110 E. North St., Suite A Brighton,  
 MI 48116  
 Phone: 810-227-1575  
 Fax: 810-227-8189  
 Cell: 517-404-7807  
[gmoses@georgemosesco.com](mailto:gmoses@georgemosesco.com)



Marty Bennett  
 Vice President  
 Community Shoppers Guide  
 117 N. Farmer - P.O. Box 168 Otsego,  
 MI 49078  
 Phone: 269-694-9431  
 Fax: 269-694-9145  
 Cell: 269-370-9469  
[info@communityshoppersguide.net](mailto:info@communityshoppersguide.net)



Wes Smith  
 Director  
 View Newspaper Group  
 1521 Imlay City Rd.  
 Lapeer, MI 48446  
 Phone: 810-664-0811  
 Fax: 810-667-6309  
 Cell: 810-338-7888  
[wsmith@mihomepaper.com](mailto:wsmith@mihomepaper.com)



Jon Jacobs  
 Past President  
 Buyers Guide  
 P.O. Box 128  
 Lowell, MI 49331  
 Phone: 616-897-9555  
 Cell: 269-208-9223  
 Fax: 616-897-4809  
[Jon@lowellbuyersguide.com](mailto:Jon@lowellbuyersguide.com)



Kara DeChalk  
 Director  
 Salesman Publications  
 102 N. Main Street - P.O. Box 205  
 Concord, MI 49237-0205  
 Phone: 517-524-8540  
 Fax: 517-524-8570  
[ads@salesmanpublications.com](mailto:ads@salesmanpublications.com)



Fred Jacobs  
 Sec./Treasurer  
 J-Ad Graphics  
 1351 North M-43 Highway  
 Hastings, MI 49058-0188 Phone:  
 (269)945-9554  
 Fax: 269-945-5522  
 Cell: 269-838-0881  
[fred@j-adgraphics.com](mailto:fred@j-adgraphics.com)



Jeff Demers  
 Director  
 C&G Newspapers  
 13650 11 Mile Road  
 Warren, MI 48089  
 Cell: 586-291-1874  
 Fax: 586-498-9631  
[jdemers@candgnews.com](mailto:jdemers@candgnews.com)



Jack Guza, Executive Director  
[jackguza@cpapersmi.com](mailto:jackguza@cpapersmi.com)



Phone/Fax: (800)783-0267  
[mifreeads.com](http://mifreeads.com)



Dana Risner, Business Manager  
[danarisner@cpapersmi.com](mailto:danarisner@cpapersmi.com)