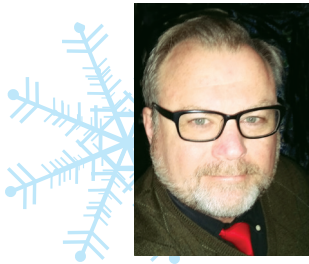


January 2024
INFORMER



**Community
Papers of
Michigan**



From The Executive Director, Don Rush

Happy 2024, Membership.

Here's wishing you a successful year in all your endeavors!

As you can see, after many years the Community Papers of Michigan has a new Executive Director – namely, me. I have been tasked with filling the large shoes of **Jack Guza**. Jack was Executive Director from December of 2008 to December of 2023 – 15 years! He served on CPM's Board of Directors from 1999 to 2008, having served as President of the board from 2004 to 2008. He has spent his entire adult career, over 40 years, in the community paper business. His wealth of knowledge helped this trade association and publications across the state and will be hard to replace. His mission will be my mission: to help the association and help its member publications. I wish him well in his much-deserved retirement. I call him "Boss," however he's really been a friend and mentor.

And, yes, his shoes are large.

A little (very little) about your new Executive Director: I have been in the community paper business since May of 1985. I worked most of those years, over 37, with Sherman Publications, Inc., based in Oxford. I worked as a reporter, editor, photographer, dark-room tech, printer's devil, paper stuffer, news rack filler-upper/fixer, snow shoveler, garbage taker-outer, ad salesman, ad manager and award-winning columnist. As the late Jim Sherman, Sr. said when he created a new position for me in 1989 called Assistant Publisher, "Your job is to get a quality paper out the door, on time, at a profit. How you do it is your problem!"

Oh, and prior to being hired as Executive Director, I served on CPM's board of directors since about 2010, the last six years as President.

So, I got that going for me.

In the month I worked with Jack, I figured

out his job had many more facets than just sitting back in a big leather chair, smoking a fat cigar and making deals with the "bigwigs." He worked hard every day ensuring CPM stayed solvent by being an excellent administrator and by being an ad manager: by planning, designing and placing display advertising in member publications; by working with state-wide small businesses to market with CPM and member publications with those display ads, inserts and classifieds.

Words on Productivity

from Seth Gordon

In an economy built on skill, knowledge, and attitude, the single most powerful way to improve your productivity is to learn something.

You put in the effort once and it pays off for decades.

There are more ways for an adult to learn now than at any time in our history, and all of it is self-driven. When you're ready to level up, the door is open.

Speaking of classifieds, one of the ways CPM stays afloat is by the association's statewide classified network, MegaMarket. Members who run the weekly MegaMarket ads receive Publisher's Rebates at the end of the year. These classified ads are the lifeblood of CPM as the largest income generator the association has. Thank you to all the member publications who run MegaMarket. And, to those publications who currently do not, please reach out

to me and let's see how we can benefit both your publication and your trade association by growing our MegaMarket network!

I have reached out via email to all member publications requesting 2024 rate cards and circulation numbers. If you have not yet emailed my way, please do so as this will help me sell into your publications (hopefully in the near future).

The new CPM Board President is **Marty Bennett** of Community Shoppers Guide in Otsego. The new Secretary/Treasurer is **Jon Jacobs** from the Buyers Guide in Lowell. Jon replaced his father, **Fred Jacobs** (J-Ads Graphics, Hastings) as Secretary/Treasurer. The board is rounded out by directors **George Moses** (The Marketeer, Brighton), **Wes Smith** (View Newspaper Group, Lapeer), **Kara DeChalk** (Salesman Publications, Concord) and **Jeff Demers** (C&G Newspapers, Warren). In March the board will get a new director, **Cindy Gaedert-Gearhart** (The County Journal and Flashes, Charlotte)

Have you ever wanted to give back to the industry that we all love? Ever want to see what happens at a Community Papers of Michigan Board of Directors meeting? Do you like a free lunch? The board, made up of volunteers from across our membership, meets quarterly to discuss CPM business, share concerns and more importantly share money making ideas. And, board members get a free lunch. If you wanna' check them out, send me an email and I will save you a seat at our table.

One last thing before I sign off for the month, if you have awesome, money-making ideas, special sections, or feature pages please share them! All member publications could use a good idea or two as we move through 2024.

Beginning 2024 Right

Headlines from the past remind me that 2024 could be a great year

By Kevin Slimp

Making bold predictions is easy. This year, I've paid close attention to forecasts by respected sportswriters in national print and online publications to see how my football bowl predictions match up against their predictions. Some of you probably did the same thing.

I was surprised that I correctly predicted the winners of the bowl games at a much higher rate than any of the national sportswriters I followed. There are still a few games remaining in the bowl season, so that could change. For now, however, I'm feeling pretty good about myself.

I think it's probably easier for someone like me to make predictions like these because I have nothing on the line. I can pick Missouri over Ohio State because I don't feel any pressure to pick the favorite. Let's face it: if I'm a respected sportswriter considering picking Ole Miss to beat Penn State, I know I will get hammered if my underdog pick loses. The safe bet is to choose the favorite. Then, if the favorite loses, most readers will understand because they picked the favorite, too.

I've made a career out of making good bets on the newspaper business. More times than not, my bets were not popular among "experts," but I somehow kept picking the right team.

My first bet was long ago, in the early 1990s. I was betting against big players like Adobe and others who were adamant that designing a newspaper in one location and then magically sending it to another location to print using a new technology called a PDF file was a crazy idea. For a lot of reasons, the idea couldn't work. Thankfully, a few folks placed their bet on my idea, and before long, the PDF file was the standard for printing newspapers and everything else. A few years later, the CEO of Adobe wrote to me, thanking me for possibly saving his company.

Fast-forward a few years, and I found myself once again making

unpopular wagers. Most noted "experts" were convinced the printed newspaper was within just a few years of extinction. Even newspaper experts predicted the quick end of the printed word. Many leading journalism schools led the way by proclaiming the newspaper business "dead." I kept hearing the year 2018 knocked about as the year the final newspaper would turn off its press. I wonder when someone will print a tee shirt with "Kevin was right!" on the back.

A quick Google search just now – searching for headlines from the past week – uncovers a windfall of gloomy predictions, including:

Inroads: The Canadian Journal of Opinion

The Near-Death of Local News

Politico

No Stopping the Newspaper Death Spiral

Whenever I read headlines similar to those, I remember other headlines like this one from 2006:

The Economist

Who Killed the Newspaper?

I'm also reminded of this one from 2009:

Business Insider

The Year the Newspaper Died

Or this one from 2011:

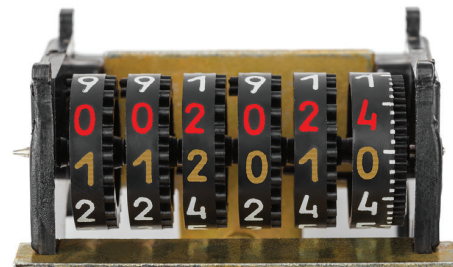
The Guardian

British Newspaper to Die in 2019

Many of you are familiar with the *Newspaper Extinction Timeline* by Australian-based futurist Ross Dawson. I found the timeline from 2010, predicting that newspapers in the United States would be "insignificant" by 2017. According to the timeline, most other nations' papers wouldn't face extinction for another decade or two.

I'm not picking on Dawson or anyone else. Dawson has since backtracked on the extinction date in the U.S. and admitted it was much too early. That doesn't, however, undo the damage that was done to newspapers who had to explain to their readers and advertisers that they weren't dying.

Like football bowl predictions, it's



safer to agree with popular opinion than to make unpopular predictions. I suspect it also leads to more invitations to speak at conferences. I get it.

By now, you might be wondering if I will ever get to my point. Get ready. It's coming now: It is the beginning of a new year. What if we agreed to pay less attention to experts declaring our demise and spend a little more time appreciating what we've created and investing in growing our newspapers?

I hear from publishers daily who are investing in the future of their newspapers. They're investing in staff training, new designs, hardware & software, and marketing. They have not only not given up; they are investing in their futures.

If I were an expert who had predicted the death of newspapers a dozen years ago, I'd probably be saying something like, "I didn't hit the exact date, but I was right. I was just a few years off."

That seems like the safest way to keep getting speaking gigs. Thankfully, I'm not too concerned about that these days. So let me suggest you give my idea some consideration. It just might make for a much more enjoyable – as well as profitable – 2024.



Kevin Slimp is a popular consultant, advisor and trainer in the newspaper industry. From 1997-2018, Kevin directed The Newspaper Institute of The University of Tennessee. He currently serves as CEO of Market Square Publishing and Chief Guru at NewspaperAcademy.com.

Kevin Slimp, "The News Guru"

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Last Fall I attended a Virtual Learning Session on “Print Design Tips,” hosted by the ACP (Association of Community Publishers) and I thought I’d share my thoughts regarding the use of print other than publishing...

Ad Talk

with Ellen Hanrahan

Print Options

There were two presenters who would alternate with their “tips.” The session was very interesting, but about half way through the session, one presenter referred to something called “Funeral Boards” — and I was immediately engrossed!

I did not realize that was a “thing,” because I can remember doing a few of these as far back as 2001 (24”x36” size, because we had a large format printer, although they were a lot more time-consuming to create back then). I also created some “Wedding Boards” for my daughter and son-in-law in 2004! I was going to go back and show examples, but as I was “researching,” I found a number of other printed samples (also, still looking for some “Funeral Board” examples). So as we start this New Year, I thought I should present a few examples of other printed materials that could increase revenue— plus with the technology that we have today, they are definitely easier to create.

Calendars

Although customer advertising was our focus, we also did other types of support materials. In 2010 and 2011 we created a fund-raising campaign for a local high school’s cheer leading squad (once the format was developed it was just a matter of getting the right photos).

We also created calendars for the general public— but with a more limited amount of images (below). This is when I began to really rely on “libraries” to save art that I would use over and over!



You’ll never know when a simple comment can get you searching for the most unusual items!
 While we used a large scale printer, smaller sizes could be used and placed on stands throughout a room. Create “theme” mini-boards.

Posters/Signage

Again, the fact that we had a large format printer in the early 2000s helped us create advertising without the expensive process of printing. Mounting the poster on a foam board made it stable on an easel.



Wedding Board

While I didn’t find Funeral Boards, I did run across the board for my daughter’s wedding in 2004.

The plus-side is the fact that you can size the photos (and maybe even touch-up the image); the down-side is that it’s slightly more time-consuming ... although, again, with the technology we have today it is easier (although I still recommend the use of libraries!)



Funeral Cards

Even back-in-the day, families were looking for a more personal way to remember loved ones.



Our Father which art in heaven,
 Hallowed be Thy name,
 Thy kingdom come.
 Thy will be done
 on earth, as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread,
 And forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those
 who trespass against us,
 And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil:
 For Thine in the kingdom,
 and the power,
 and the glory, forever. Amen.

Labels/Placemats

We even did “Syrup Labels” for a local group of avid (and maybe a bit crazy) folks who liked to spend their time sitting around a campfire during Feb–March... and you just might need a placemat to serve pancakes and waffles loaded with that syrup.

Restaurants have placemats with advertising... why not create a placemat for a community event and include advertisers.



Final thoughts...

I am still going to look for samples of the Funeral Boards, but I now know that I have a bit more cleaning up to do of my files— so will probably spend 2024 deleting old files that will never work with my software.

Plus, there are still a lot of changes that have happened in the publishing world, so I guess I will have to look into that as well.

In the meantime, I am still purging the “possessions” I’ve accrued—downsizing!

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:
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YOU'D BETTER SHOP AROUND:

Worldwide internet 'big guys' won't rule the ad world forever

We all realize digital advertising & marketing platforms are eating the ad dollars everyone else covets. But history reminds us they won't be around forever. What can (and will) take their places?

In the 1910 to 1940s era, small-town and big-city advertising dollars flowed mostly to their local newspapers. Print was definitely the king of advertising, mostly since there was little direct competition.

When radio news and entertainment swelled in the 1940s and '50s, some media predictions said the audio medium would dominate — and defeat — local printed news. Some said America's growing obsession with national topics delivered instantly would truly kill that old-fashioned printed news.

PRINT AD SALES had even greater competition in the 1950s and beyond, when television screens brought words and moving pictures into American living rooms. Surely TV would put papers out to pasture for once and for all, wouldn't they?

But the 1960s-90s were actually some of the golden years for print — and that's when shopping guides, free community papers and direct mail carved out their share of ad marketing dollars, even though traditional print, radio and even TV were getting their share.

NO ONE PREDICTED that an unseen, intensely personal advertising style involving something called the internet would so quickly come to dominate the marketing world. And things have only gotten less positive for local print products, along with local radio and TV stations, too.

In 2023, **67% of all advertising dollars were spent digitally**. Finally, is this darn internet the sole media format that truly will kill all traditional ones — and in barely one generation?

It would be ground-breaking right now if I could announce that 2024 will be the year more national and local advertisers have changed their minds. Big consumer products companies have finally realized that advertising tech heavyweights like Alphabet and Meta are losing ground with the public.

"They're just too big" and "they're making us pay for information they gather and use for their own good, but never share," the public is realizing. **BOTTOM LINE: The public doesn't trust those internet giants.**

Well, part of this is true. Consumer good giants such as Unilever, Procter & Gamble and others have slashed their ad spending as a percentage of total revenues in recent years.

GROWTH AT ALPHABET actually slowed, and Meta revenue shrank, according to a 2024 forecast by Bloomberg Technology. Reporter Alex Webb says trends favoring the big online guys have been shrinking, which could be great news for the legacy and traditional media companies we know (and love) so well.

And during 2023, it seemed the tech industry was realizing that: **Advertising remains a pretty darn appealing business.**

Of course, Alphabet and Meta are growing rapidly again, so we don't have to worry about their survival. But maybe there will be a little more scrutiny of putting all ad dollars into just a few tiny (but massive) national social media companies... leaving more funds for the brave local store owners, retailers and franchisees who work in the trenches every day, close to home.

AS THESE BIG companies try expanding their subscription base, they are getting much resistance because people don't like to pay for something we formerly got for free. And that reminds us that:

It's often easier to raise ad rates than subscription fees.

One supposed internet guru has made decisions that have cut his ad and subscription

revenue forecasts in half. Elon Musk and his "X" platform (formerly known as Twitter) will likely earn about \$3.4 billion this year. But, by bad-mouthing his advertisers, firing half his staff and otherwise thumbing his nose at consumers, that \$3.4 billion is barely half of the \$7.5 billion the previous management team had expected to earn in 2024. Musk didn't learn the message: **Ignore advertising at your own peril.**

There is only one true way for community papers and local ad products to survive this year, and it's the same answer we all faced last year: Every day, in every sales call, we must offer our best and strongest reason to spend some of their ad dollars with us.

THAT'S WHAT OUR predecessors in the community news business had to do every day, and we've got to learn from them. Alphabet and Meta together will likely attract about **\$300 billion in digital ad spending this year**. That doesn't leave much for everybody else. But the next advertising format will eat their lunch, too, someday. It's happened too often in the past to ignore.

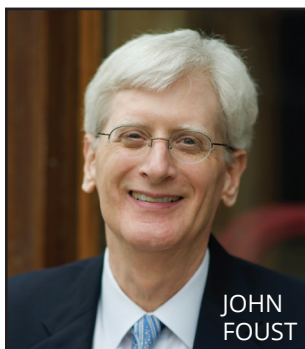


Ad - Libs

BY JOHN FOUST



Advertising's Slippery Slope



JOHN
FOUST

I remember taking a day-long ski trip to Virginia. The charter bus was filled with skiers who had different levels of experience: a few were pretty good, most were average, and some were novices like me.

After a morning on the beginners' slope, I took a break to have a sandwich on the deck of the lodge. From my perch atop a picnic table, I could watch skiers on the trail in front of me. The ski lift lowered at a couple of places along the way, from which skiers could exit. The higher up the mountain the lift went, the steeper the slope. The last exit (which I never saw) was meant for expert skiers only.

As I munched on my turkey sandwich, I noticed a couple of dots way up on the mountain. Instead of gracefully zigzagging their way down like the others, they were

travelling in a straight line. As they got closer, I could tell that they had fallen. All I could distinguish were two snow-covered lumps sliding down the mountain, elbows flying and skis dragging behind. As they got closer, one of the lumps shouted, "I can't stooooooop!"

Eventually – within about 30 seconds of each other – the lumps slid up against the deck, right in front of me. When they stood up, they looked like snow monsters, covered from head to toe with thick coatings of ice and snow. As they talked, it was obvious that neither had been skiing before. They had driven to the slope that morning, parked their car, rented skis, gotten into the first lift line they saw, rode it to the top, and immediately fell down. They didn't stand up again until they stopped at the bottom. One enthusiastically asked, "You gonna do it again?" His buddy shook his head and said, "No, I'll wait in the car."

We can easily agree that they were fortunate to escape injury, especially since – according to another spectator – they had traveled maybe a mile on their backsides. It was obvious that they needed some knowledge before they jumped into that lift line.

We're all guilty of that same thing. In our eagerness – or impatience – we've jumped

into things that required more information than we were willing to seek. Like the old saying, "Sometimes, we don't know what we don't know."

In the advertising business, lack of information is a sales killer. When my wife was a communications director, a salesperson called on her to talk about promotional services. Talking is all he did. When his spiel was over, he asked, "So, what does this company do?" Only when he ran out of things to say did he express any interest in his prospect.

And what about salespeople who present spec ad ideas, before learning about their prospects' marketing needs? I've seen that happen too many times to count – usually with disastrous results. That's falling at the top of the mountain.

Knowledge is power. And lack of knowledge is a slippery slope.

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3 Positive Culture Cures for Customer

RAGE

By Dr. Joey Faucette



According to a survey conducted by Arizona State University's W.P. Carey School of Business, about half of all American households experience customer service-related problems. Over two-thirds of those customers were "very" or "extremely upset" about the company response when they complained. Over one-third reacted by yelling at the rep while the number of consumers cursing nearly doubled to 13%.

If we surveyed your customers, how would they rate their culture experience with you?

Our team had the opportunity to experience customer care after some purchases. We discovered three positive culture cures for customer rage that create exceptional experiences.

Ask Great Questions

While it's easy to just "get started" with what you know, the companies our team liked best first asked great questions. They began at 30,000 feet, i.e., big questions about our dreams and desires, frustrations and fears.

Then they drilled down to specific ways to accomplish our goals with the least amount of frustration in implementation. They helped us put it in place and taught us how to do it independently.

What great question will you ask a customer today as you give exceptional customer care? Such questions reveal a

culture of interest and active listening.

Listen and Then Answer

After asking great questions, these companies listened to our team's responses.

Really listened.

What a gift! No FAQ list. No anticipation or presupposition.

They employed the active listening technique of accurate empathy. They let us know they were listening by using some of our words in their response. Empathy lowered the learning curve for us and made the process more manageable.

How will you listen first and then answer with empathy today as you give exceptional customer care?

Give Respect

Our team had the sense that the reps were walking up the steep learning curve with us. That they could see from

our perspective. They wanted to help us understand. They desired to serve us without making us feel ignorant at best and stupid at worst.

They respected us.

Every phone call and email was their "pleasure," "why we're here," and "please let me know what I can do for you."

One even asked for an update to see how she could help without our asking! How will your customers know you respect them today? Respect lessens rage every time.

Sure, it's a busy season for everyone.

And yet what a wonderful opportunity to create an outstanding customer experience for those who expect to get angry.

Give exceptional customer care today as you ask great questions, listen and then answer with empathy, and give respect.

Dr. Joey Faucette is an executive coach, culture architect, and host of the Work Positive podcast. His best-selling book, *Work Positive in a Negative World: Team Edition*, is the manifesto for developing your positive work culture.



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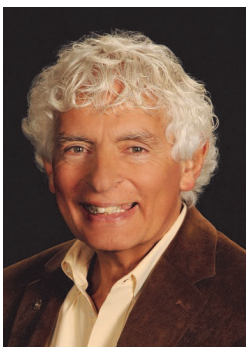
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