

*January* **2025**  
**INFORMER**

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**Community  
Papers of  
Michigan**





# A New Year, A New Beginning: For Sales Success

*From The Executive Director, Don Rush*



I wanted to write this month's column on the new year – things salesfolk can do for a successful 2025. We all know if our sales teams are successful, so are our publications. So, I started down the search engine rabbit hole, looking for articles, sales tips, etc. Then, I had a “brilliant” idea – see what AI says about the subject.

I typed in, 400 words on sales tips for the new year, then hit the “Enter” key on my keyboard. I held my breath and in about 3.2 nanoseconds the following popped up. Read it and then let me know what you think. Are these good points to make or is something more nuanced missing.

Drum roll, please, I give you the artificial intelligence article . . .

## **A New Year, a New Beginning: For Sales Success.**

The calendar may have flipped a page, but the pursuit of sales excellence is an evergreen endeavor. As we embark on this new year, let's shed the baggage of the past and embrace fresh strategies and renewed vigor.

This year let's prioritize **deep customer understanding**. Move beyond surface-level interactions. Truly listen to their pain points, their aspirations, and their unique needs. This empathy will not only build stronger relationships but also guide you towards solutions that truly resonate.

**Continuous learning** is paramount. The sales landscape is constantly evolving. Embrace new technologies, explore innovative sales methodologies, and stay abreast of industry trends. Attend webinars, read industry publications, and engage in peer-to-peer learning.

**Master the art of storytelling.** Your product or service is not just a collection of features;

it's a solution to a problem. Craft compelling narratives that showcase the value you bring to your customers. Paint vivid pictures of how your offerings can transform their businesses and achieve their goals.

**Build a robust pipeline.** Consistent prospecting is the lifeblood of any sales organization. Dedicate time each day to identify and qualify potential leads. Leverage tools like LinkedIn Sales Navigator and CRM systems to streamline your outreach and track your progress.

**Embrace technology.** From CRM systems and sales automation tools to video conferencing and social selling platforms, technology can significantly enhance your sales productivity. Explore and implement tools that align with your sales process and empower you to work smarter, not harder.

**Celebrate your wins.** Acknowledge and appreciate your successes, both big and small. Recognize your colleagues' achievements as well. Positive reinforcement fosters a motivated and engaged team.

Finally, remember that **resilience is key**. Sales is a challenging profession. There will be setbacks and disappointments along the way. Learn from your mistakes, stay positive, and never give up on your goals.

This year, let's commit to exceeding expectations, building lasting relationships, and achieving unparalleled sales success. Happy new year!

On a final note, thank you Ellen Hanrahan for your “Ad Talk” column. Thirteen years is a good run. Happy trails to you and yours!

**There you go. Send your sales tips to [DonRush@CPapersMi.com](mailto:DonRush@CPapersMi.com)**

## LOOKING FOR BOARD MEMBERS

Want to know what goes on behind the scenes at Community Papers of Michigan? Get involved! CPM needs a couple of publishers or managers to become board of director members. Again, it isn't that hard of a commitment: four meetings a year (quarterly), which last between two and three hours each. That's it – and in return board members received a mileage check and, more importantly, the opportunity to discuss issues with other board members. Our board members often report back they enjoy the idea-exchange at these meetings and asking other board members how they have dealt with issues like distribution, ad sales or even credit card processing fees.

## **A quick wrap on 2024**

Last year CPM earned \$337,369.29 through the sale of MegaMarket classifieds, ROP Display ads, Pre-Print insert orders and membership dues. From those sales, \$216,719.81 was returned to member publications as sales revenue. CPM staff works as your sales staff. My ask of you, please run our weekly MegaMarket classifieds. MegaMarket is the engine which drives the CPM train.

Some publications weave our liners into their classified sections, others dedicate space for us as display classified (usually a 2 column by five or six inches). The more publications run these classifieds, the more response our customers will receive, the stronger CPM will be.

*Thanks, and here's to a healthy and prosperous New year!*



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## **YOU'D BETTER SHOP AROUND:**

# **The top 3 challenges facing community papers as 2025 begins**

**Congratulations!** If you are still here and able to read these words, you have apparently lived through another change of year, as we begin to write (and type) 2025 instead of the old 2024.

Somehow, we've all survived last year's never-ending existence of budget-cutting, falling revenues, too much grief and too little quality time in our industry.

But, history tells us we are the lucky ones — we're still here and functioning. The older we get, the more we realize that's actually true... and we must try to recall the good visits, hugs and interactions we likely received from friends and family during the recent holiday period.

And now, it's back to work... and hopefully we've all recharged our personal batteries to compensate for all the changes facing our world, nation and our own communities.

**Let's consider** what difficulties are facing our industry in general in these next 12 months, although we all know the future will be more of the same. So, we asked Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) this question:

### **In 150 words, What are three primary challenges facing community papers and shopping guides in Michigan during 2025 and beyond?**

Three primary challenges facing community newspapers and shopping guides in Michigan during 2025 and beyond include:

**Declining ad revenue:** With the rise of online advertising platforms like Google and social media, businesses are shifting their budgets away from traditional print media, significantly impacting the revenue streams of local publications.

**Shifting consumer habits:** Many readers now rely on online sources for news and information,



including social media, news aggregators, and online-only publications. This shift in consumer behavior poses a significant threat to print circulation and readership.

### **Competition from online platforms:**

Online platforms offer a wider range of information and services, including local news, event listings, and online shopping, directly competing with the core functions of community newspapers and shopping guides.

These challenges require innovative solutions, such as developing strong online presences, diversifying revenue streams, and providing unique, high-quality content that cannot be easily replicated online.

**So, here's the** bottom line: we all should expect 2025 to be more of the same as 2024. Why wouldn't it be? We only changed one page on a calendar. But, we all can try to make it our Best. Year. Ever, can't we?!



I started writing for *Informer* in 2012 on a limited basis, but in 2016 it became a monthly commitment. I've never been big on New Year's Resolutions but I've been at this for a long time and maybe it's time to better "organize" my time, so on to...

## New Challenges

One of my favorite songs is from a group called **The Byrds**, an American rock band of the mid 1960s, called **Turn! Turn! Turn!**

*To everything turn, turn, turn*

*There is a season turn, turn, turn*

*And a time to every purpose under Heaven*

Now, I am not going to go through all the lyrics, but the general theme is change, and I have come to that point in my life where I will be making some changes—both easy and hard.

This is a hard article for me to write because one of the changes that I will be doing is stepping away from doing my monthly design articles. I only started doing articles for the *Informer* in March of 2012, but before that I was contacted by Robert Munn about doing articles for the *Independent Publisher (Independent Free Papers of America (IFPA))*, in 1995.

In 2010, Douglas Fry from **SAPA (Southeastern Advertising Publisher's Association)** contacted me and I wrote monthly articles from 2010–2018 for *SAPAtoday*; and finally I had a monthly article for *Informer*, a Michigan publication from 2012 until January of 2025. I believe that Jack Guza and I discussed this at an airport—while we were waiting for our delayed flights to open up.

All of this is to say that I have many articles on file and as Douglas Fry pointed out in the October 2024 issue of *Publish*, it's to "Leave Instructions." So if you need a refresher or a past article, my email is the same.

I am still relatively healthy for an older person, but, gosh darn, steps just seem to be getting steeper, so a one-story residence seems ideal and I am falling way behind on my *Ancestry* information—so will keep busy in a different way.

## Our Industry Has Changed

As I look back at some of the articles I have written in the past I would like to share some of my resolutions from just a few years ago (I've been in this industry for decades!). A lot has changed in the past few years... we've experienced new working norms, become more dependent on online experiences and seen many changes in the tools and the ways that we conduct our business.

When I started as a Graphic Designer in the 1980s, we were just at the beginning of seeing how our industry was changing.... and I also saw the reincarnation of our jobs as we relied more on technology and saw massive changes in information distribution.

Although, to be sure, there will still be challenges, triumphs and renewals, these past years have changed us, how we live, how we work and perhaps more profoundly, a respect for family, friends and connections we've made.

## A Few Resolutions

I'm grateful for "Zoom," because we're still able to connect, albeit virtually. However, now it appears to be a more convenient way to stay in touch (in

my opinion, especially since night driving has become more of a challenge).

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 (read that as giant steps in AI and new Adobe programs!). The following were my takes on some of 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 had seriously considered getting *Affinity Designer/Affinity Publisher* (and I did get the programs, just haven't tried them since I purchased them!).

I do a newsletter for our Camera Club and this seemed to be a better option—it is way less expensive and it can open InDesign documents. So this is very doable... but still haven't done it!

**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 and there are other programs that can help create web pages, ebooks that are less intensive.

Plus I believe that there are other Adobe programs that can achieve this effect. That's on my to-do list for the coming year.

**Adobe Photoshop/Illustrator:** I've put both programs together because there have been a slew of advancements for both. Let's put it this way, it's been difficult to stay current with all the new options in both of these programs.

However, I am most interested in learning the programs for the iPad! That was an undertaking for 2021... and now 2025.

... and a few new programs:

**Adobe Fresco** is worth a look as well as finally getting around to looking at AI that is becoming a part of Photoshop as well as some plug-ins (**ON1**, **Topaz Studio** and **Nik Filters**).

I'm a former art teacher & graphic designer—for info, PDFs of articles e-mail: [hanrahan.in@att.net](mailto:hanrahan.in@att.net)  
Ellen Hanrahan ©01/2025

## Final Thoughts

As we know from our industry, change is inevitable. So too is this point in my life. I will be turning to other endeavors in the future, and unfortunately preparation of these articles is taking time from things that I really need to do—such as "downsizing" as my husband and I think about our future. We plan to move next year (this year?) and with all the changes that are developing with the software and other tools I use, it's just becoming more complicated... and time-consuming. I can't even imagine what the next couple of years will bring.

My own journey has been interesting. I started as an art teacher and made the transition into graphic design when digital was becoming a "thing," and programs were definitely not as streamlined or easy as they are today.

I've also come a long way since Robert W. Munn contacted me about doing an article (sort of teaching in a different way) for the *Independent Free Papers of America (IFPA)*, in 1995.

I have so many people to thank... Vic Jose and Gary Rudy from IFPA; Douglas Fry from SAPA; Jack Guza and Don Rush from Michigan; and Loren Colburn and Douglas Fry for exposing me to all the members of the publishing industry... as well as numerous individuals who have encouraged me these last 29 years.

Most of all, I owe a debt of gratitude to all the readers. I am grateful for all the years I have hopefully helped anyone in understanding the design process, and I am thankful for all those in the publishing industry who have read some of the advice I have given, and by the way, I am still available for past articles—email is still the same.

Saying goodbye isn't easy, but it's a necessary part of the journey... and I hope it's not goodbye; it's just 'see you later!' God Bless...





# Ad-Libs

BY JOHN FOUST

## Don't Ghost Your Clients

Eric is an advertiser who has dealt with a number of media salespeople. "In all of my years of placing advertising, I have only one pet peeve," he told me. "I don't like it when salespeople ghost me."

Although "ghosting" is most frequently associated with personal relationships, it also occurs in business relationships. Eric is as cheerful as any advertiser you'll meet, but it bothers him when a salesperson ignores him after an important appointment, after his store has featured a big sale, or after a new campaign starts. At those crucial times, he may need to discuss tweaks to the ad schedule or new offers to generate more interest. "I'm definitely not high-maintenance, but not promptly returning phone calls or not replying to emails and texts is wrong. That tells me they are disorganized, they are procrastinating or they are deliberately ignoring me."

Poet Maya Angelou famously wrote: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

How do you think Eric's ghosters make him feel? Whether their inaction is intentional or not, he may feel that – after he becomes a regular advertiser – they don't see him as worth their time any more.

Is that the way you want your clients to see you? Your answer should be a resounding "no." The solution is to make it a standard practice to follow up regularly with every single one of

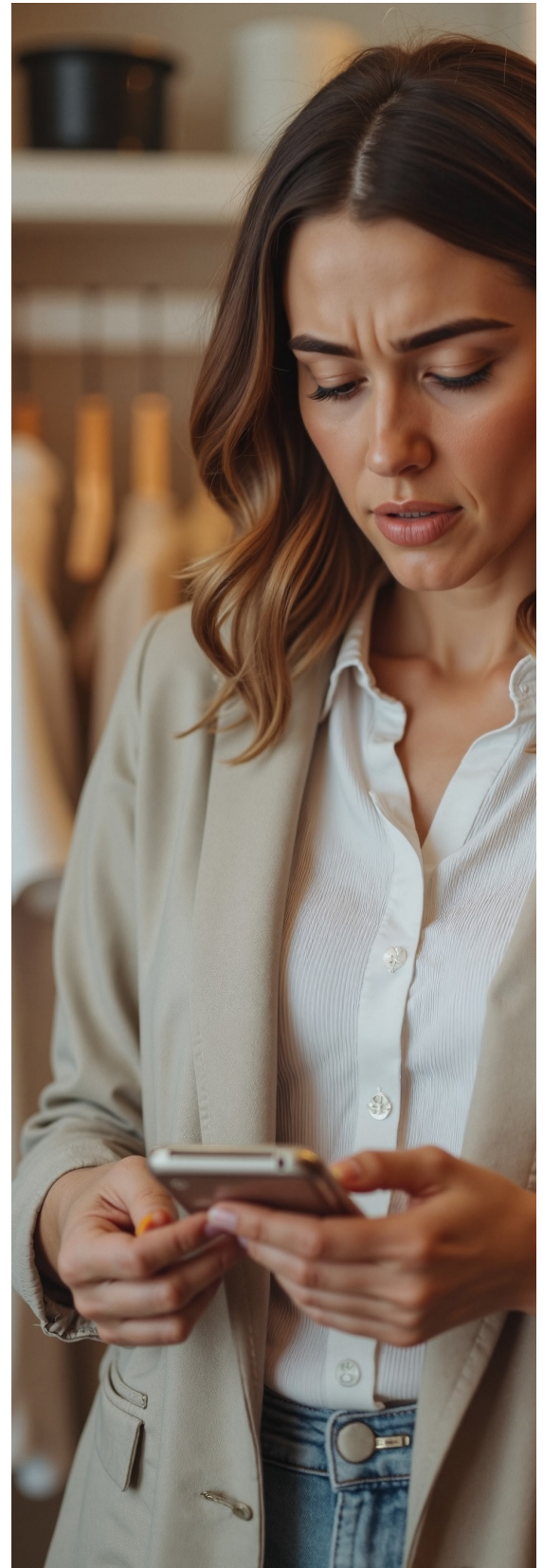
your advertisers. Eric has a few words of advice:

**1. Use the right method.** "Some people like emails, some like texts, some like phone calls. While it's human nature to use the form of communication that we prefer, things are different in the world of sales. When you're dealing with prospects and customers, think about their likes and dislikes. Reach out to each individual the way they want to be contacted. In fact, they'll appreciate it if you ask about their preference."

**2. When you say you're going to do something, do it.** "Nobody likes broken promises. If you tell me you'll send a proposal or an ad proof by next Tuesday, please do it. If something unexpected happens and you can't deliver on time, please let me know as soon as you find out. I understand that delays happen, and I'll respect you more for keeping me informed. For goodness' sakes, don't avoid me and make me call to ask what's taking so long."

**3. Don't always be in sales-mode.** "If someone contacts me only when they want me to buy something, their calls become an annoyance. In my business, I work to build relationships with my customers, so I appreciate it when salespeople do the same thing with me. My best piece of advice is: Show your customers that you care about them and their businesses. When they know you care, they'll be more likely to trust you and they'll be more likely to invest in what you're selling."

That advice is hard to ignore.



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# A few words about AI

## and skipping the parts you already know about

By Kevin Slimp

After over 30 years of writing columns for journalists, I'm flabbergasted that anyone is interested in what I have to say. But it seems there are few of you left, so I'll spend a little time this Saturday evening sharing my thoughts about artificial intelligence (AI) and its use by those of us in the news business.

Those who know me well know I'm not one to fall for the latest "gadgets" and "get rich quick" ideas. This probably comes from speaking at thousands of conferences over the years and seeing more "next big things" than I could count with a calculator. I remember being at a convention in Texas more than a decade ago when a publisher asked about a product being promoted by a "hot" vendor. I told the publisher, "They won't be in business a year from now," and they weren't.

So please don't lose patience when you don't see me getting overly excited about anything, including artificial intelligence. That doesn't mean I don't see incredible potential in using AI or that I don't think it's a major force right now. It only means I try not to let emotions get the best of me regarding new technology. Let's face it: I've spent most of

my adult life developing, testing, using, and writing about technology. There was a time when my office looked like a computer store because of all the free software and hardware I received almost daily from companies hoping I would promote their products.

Yet here I am. Writing about artificial intelligence. I've even made a decent living – well, part of my living – speaking at conferences and leading workshops and webinars on the topic of AI. I acquiesced when universities and press associations began asking me to discuss artificial intelligence with publishers and university faculty. Let's face it: it's fun being considered an expert by professors who make a living from being experts.

When I speak with groups about AI, I generally break it down like this:

- The history of AI dating back to the 1940s
- Developments over the past 20 years that have sped up AI capabilities
- "Machine Learning" and how it forms the backbone of artificial intelligence
- Why artificial intelligence gets so much wrong
- Use of AI in the current business world
- Practical AI tools for possible use in

**"You really shouldn't be afraid of AI. Just like the internet (when it was new), we knew it could do good things and we knew it could do bad things. There's no need to be afraid of it. We can't stop it. So we might as well figure out what parts of AI to use and what parts of AI to leave alone."**

communications and journalism

- Ethical considerations
- Creating an AI ethics policy

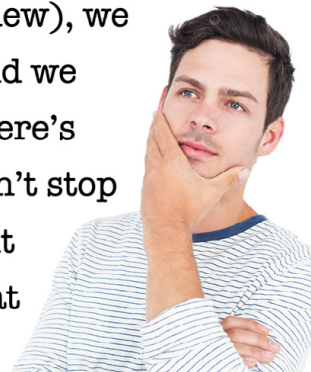
You probably have noticed I haven't spent time promoting particular AI software or tools. It's not because there aren't great AI tools available for newspapers and other media types. It's just that plenty of folks are writing and talking about these tools and how to use them. And remember, it's Saturday night while I'm writing this, so I have no desire to get wordy.

Listen, I've used Grammarly since it first came to the market. I wouldn't even think of letting one of my writers or editors send me their work without using Grammarly to go through it with a fine-tooth comb. I receive book manuscripts almost daily from authors, hoping I'll consider publishing their books. And yes, I often use ChatGPT

to create an outline and summary of the manuscripts to help me decide whether or not I want to take the time to read 40,000 words. I admit it: I've used Downsub to transcribe videos and create outlines of meetings. I've even used the AI tools in Photoshop to create additional content for an image to be used in an ad.

I once asked my brother – a leader in the world of computer science, including AI – for a quote I could share with audiences concerning AI. He did a good job summarizing my thoughts when he said, "You really shouldn't be afraid of AI. Just like the internet (when it was new), we knew it could do good things, and we knew it could do bad things. There's no need to be afraid of it. We can't stop it. So, we might as well figure out what parts of AI to use and what parts of AI to leave alone."

I don't need to tell you never to use AI



to write newspaper stories. You already know that. I don't need to remind you that stories about high school ballgames written with AI almost always sound like a computer wrote them (and often get the details wrong). You know that.

I'll just give you a pat on the back for sticking to your ethics and, in my brother's words, "(figuring) out what parts of AI to use and what parts of AI to leave alone."

That's 800 words. It seems my work is done.



**Kevin Slimp**

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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.



# D.R.I.V.E. Into the New Year: Sales Success Strategies for 2025

Media Sales Coach  
Ryan Dohrn



As we ring in the new year, many sales professionals find themselves eager to hit the ground running but unsure how to fine-tune their strategies for the road ahead. Much like winning the Daytona 500, achieving sales greatness requires more than speed—it demands a detailed plan.

Auto racing isn't just about going fast; it's about precision. Tire pressure, driver skill, air temperature, and track conditions all play a role in crossing the finish line first. The same applies to your sales game. Without a strategy, you risk spinning your wheels in circles and losing deal after deal. To help you jumpstart your year, let's use the acronym D.R.I.V.E. as a roadmap for sales success.

## D Differentiate

Your first task is to differentiate yourself and your product quickly. In a crowded marketplace, price becomes the deciding factor when two options appear similar. You need to create a clear distinction between your product and the competition.

Showcase unique advantages during prospecting, sales calls, and closing. Establish an “apples-to-steak” comparison to ensure your product stands out. Whether it's better ROI, innovative features, or unmatched customer support, make your differentiation unmistakable.

## R Run

In today's fast-paced environment, you need to run—not walk. Advertisers value their time, and you must demonstrate respect for it by being prepared and concise. Forget the traditional, drawn-out sales call. Bring actionable ideas to your first meeting and adapt them in real-time.

This doesn't mean skipping relationship-building; it means compressing timelines. Be ready to present well-researched ideas that resonate. By moving quickly and efficiently, you'll gain an edge over competitors who are still “walking” through their pitches.

## I Invest

Preparation is the key to a winning sales call. Start by researching your prospects using tools like LinkedIn or industry-specific databases. Come to meetings armed with three tailored ideas or scenarios. This approach not only demonstrates your commitment but also positions you as a problem-solver.

Forget the outdated practice of using the first meeting solely for information-gathering. Instead, invent and tweak proposals on the spot. Use technology or even a simple notebook to co-create solutions with your client in real time.

## V Value

Value is the cornerstone of every successful sale. Ask yourself: What does your product do to save time, save money, or make money for your client? Focus on the value proposition, not just the features.

Think like a teacher. Break down complex concepts into simple points, and emphasize ROI. Whether it's efficiency gains, cost savings, or environmental benefits, ensure your client sees the full picture of what you're offering.

## E Endgame

Finally, establish a clear follow-up protocol—your endgame. When a prospect says they need time to think or consult with their team, don't leave the ball in their court. Instead, set a follow-up meeting within the “Magic 48-Hour Sales Window™.” This crucial timeframe keeps your proposal top-of-mind and increases the likelihood of closing the deal.

Validate the client's interest, schedule the next step immediately, and follow through as promised. Avoid pitching new proposals on Fridays, as they often lose momentum over the weekend.

**As you kick off the new year, remember: Any plan is better than no plan. Use the D.R.I.V.E. framework to differentiate, run, invest, emphasize value, and execute your endgame. Success in 2025 starts with intentional action and a commitment to improvement.**

**Never forget... if sales was an easy job, everyone would be doing it.**

Your coach – Ryan

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Ryan Dohrn is the creator of the 360 Ad Sales Training system and is a globally recognized media revenue consultant. Ryan actively sells print, digital, broadcast, event sponsorships, exhibit space and radio.

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