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COMING NEXT MONTH

The December issue of *Publish* will take a look at where to find networking opportunities in the community publishing industry and how they can provide value to your business.

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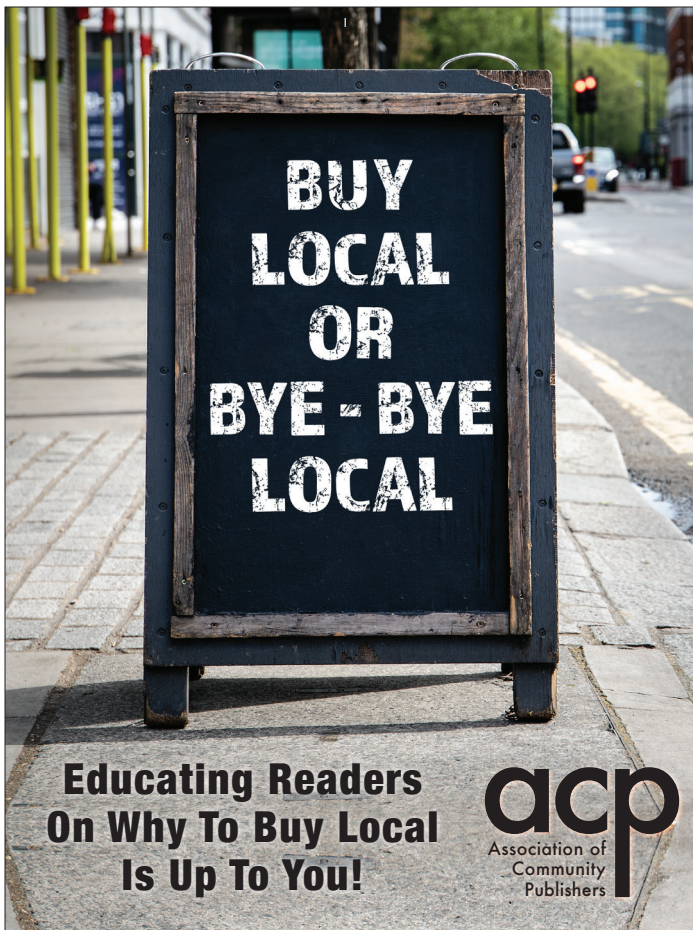


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2026-2027 ACP AT-LARGE DIRECTOR ELECTION RESULTS

- ✓ **Heather Eller** – Nickel's Worth, Coeur d'Alene, ID
- ✓ **Jocelyn Engle** – Engle Printing & Publishing Co., Lancaster, PA
- ✓ **Scott Greene** – Reminder Publishing, East Longmeadow, MA
- ✓ **Carol Toomey** – Action Unlimited, Concord, MA
- ✓ **Michael VanStry** – Coastal View News, Carpinteria, CA

The above nominees were presented to the ACP Membership for the open ACP At-Large Board of Director positions whose 2-year terms will commence on January 1, 2026. The official results of the election overwhelmingly in favor of accepting the slate of nominees as presented by over 90% of the voting membership.



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BY JOYCE FRERICKS

WHAT AM I THANKFUL FOR?

One of our editor's sent me a list of questions a few days ago about what I am thankful for both personally and professionally. No way! We can't be working on the last issue before Thanksgiving. What happened to summer?

Every spring, I have big plans for my summer: trips with our family, a big garden and lots of canning. Once again, summer got away from me and fall has arrived without the trip. I had the garden, but we had too much rain this summer, thus most of the garden was stunted. I did get to enjoy picking tomatoes with our 3-year old granddaughter a few days ago — the last picking before frost. She had so much fun running around looking for red tomatoes and tossing them into the bucket. It was fun for both of us!

My work year is kind of like my summer at home. I make big plans for the coming year in November and December.

Then November arrives again, and I am disappointed I didn't get it all done.

I was listening to a podcast today that suggested we be thankful for the things that we did get done rather than dwelling on the things we didn't accomplish. After all, if they were extremely important, we would have carried out those tasks.

Now is the time to decide if the things we didn't get done this year should go on next year's list or maybe not be done at all. Or, maybe, we could delegate them to someone else.

Back to Thanksgiving. Personally, I am very thankful for our family. We now have four grandchildren. My kids often tease me and say that I have been waiting to be a grandma since the day our oldest child was born. I can't disagree. I just love them!

Professionally? I am thankful we have an awesome team of people to publish our papers every week — colleagues and vendors. I'm just as thankful for our advertisers and readers.

Last week, I was working at a trade expo where our company had a booth. Several of our advertisers stopped by to tell us how much they appreciate the publication and everything we do for them. We also had many readers stop by to tell us how

“ I am thankful we have an awesome team of people to publish our papers every week — colleagues and vendors. I'm just as thankful for our advertisers and readers.

much they enjoy reading the publication. I am so thankful people appreciate our printed publication and want to read it.

This Thanksgiving, I hope all of you can send your pages to the printer a little early and then spend a few days with your family and friends. Happy Thanksgiving! ■

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COME JOIN US AT THE REVENUE SUMMIT... YOU CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO!



BY CASSEY RECORE

As I write this, I'm sitting on a plane headed to the NNA Conference in Minneapolis, MN. The schedule is packed with sessions over the next few days, and I plan to take full advantage by attending as many as I can.

Last month, I wrote about the importance of never stopping learning and I truly believe that to my core. I'm always eager to discover the next "big thing" in our industry or find fresh ideas I can bring back to share with our members. I love meeting new industry suppliers and listening to speakers discuss topics that impact not only our field but business in general - because so many lessons apply across the board. I also enjoy connecting with potential new members and hearing what other publications across the country are doing. What challenges are they facing? What's working for them? What products, services, or revenue streams are they finding success with?

Of course, not every conference hits it out of the park. There have been times when I've attended sessions and thought, well, that wasn't exactly groundbreaking. But when I reflect on those experiences as a whole, I always realize I still walked away with something valuable -

something you just can't get without attending in person.

The number one takeaway? **Networking.**

We all learned during COVID that while virtual communication tools were a lifesaver, nothing replaces face-to-face connection. The conversations you have over coffee, at lunch, or in the hallway often end up being the most insightful and inspiring part of the entire event.

When I talk to members about why they don't attend in-person events, I often hear, "Things are tight. I can't afford it," or, "I can't be out of the office that long." And while I completely understand those concerns, my immediate thought is always, you can't afford not to attend.

That's why I want to personally encourage you to join us for the **Revenue Summit this February**. This event is your opportunity to learn, network, and grow - not just professionally, but financially. Look at it as an investment in your publication's future: a chance to uncover new revenue opportunities, identify cost-saving strategies, and connect with peers who face the same challenges you do.

You'll also meet industry suppliers with solutions that can help you streamline operations or expand your business. And let's be honest, escaping the winter chill for a few days in

a warmer climate doesn't hurt either! (As someone who lives in the Northeast, I know how long February can feel when there's still snow on the ground.)

The Revenue Summit will be **jam-packed** with sessions, roundtable discussions, proven case studies, and idea exchanges, all designed to help you make or save money. Our goal is simple: that every attendee leaves with practical, revenue-generating takeaways.

Visit our website to check out the full schedule and session lineup. **Registration is now open**, and space is limited so reserve your spot today.

And if you're an industry supplier, we'd love for you to be part of this event. Give us a call to learn more about sponsorship opportunities and how you can showcase your products or services to industry leaders ready to grow.

Let's keep learning, connecting, and moving our industry forward together. ■

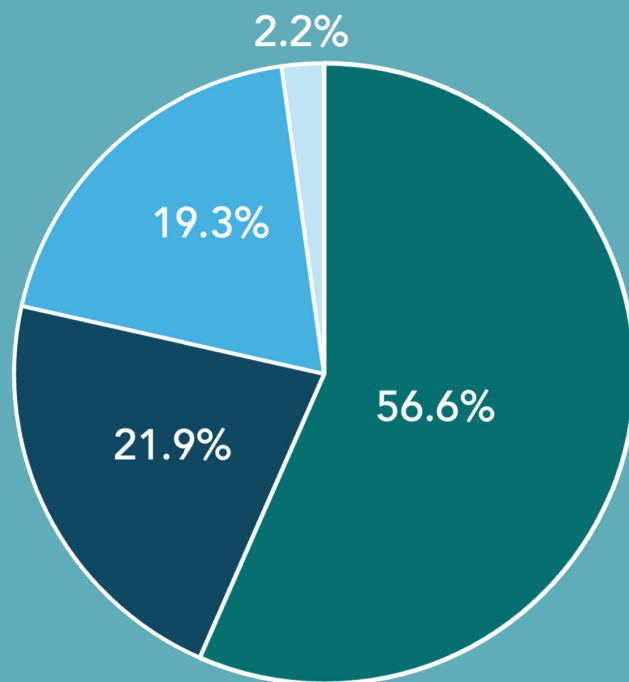




WHO ARE WE?

What Publication Type Are Typical ACP Members?

■ Community Newspapers ■ Shopper Publications
■ Magazines ■ Ethnic Publications



Breakdown based on the 228 member publications audited by CVC.



BY LOREN COLBURN

Another birthday successfully in the books. This one was the 72nd version of my birthday and as always, unique from any of the previous celebrations. It always amazes me when I get birthday greetings from people I have gotten to know over the years, who are so much better at remembering dates that are important to others than I am. Each of those thoughtful text messages, emails or Facebook messages conjured up a moment in time, a smile and a brief trip down memory lane of my experiences with that person.

Here's where it gets interesting, of the over 100 greetings I got yesterday, they were split relatively evenly. About 1/3 came from family members; 1/3 from neighbors, former co-workers and childhood friends; and 1/3 from friends I've made through my experiences with this association! That really put into perspective just how big a part of my life this organization has been over the years.

When I walked back through those 40+ acquaintances who took the time to acknowledge my birthday based solely on my getting to know them through ACP (formerly AFCP, IFPA, NAAP), the picture got even more amazing. The geographic dispersion was across the country. The demographic dispersion was from MUCH younger to a bit older and

everything in between. They all had become part of my circle of friends because we had two very important things in common in our lives.

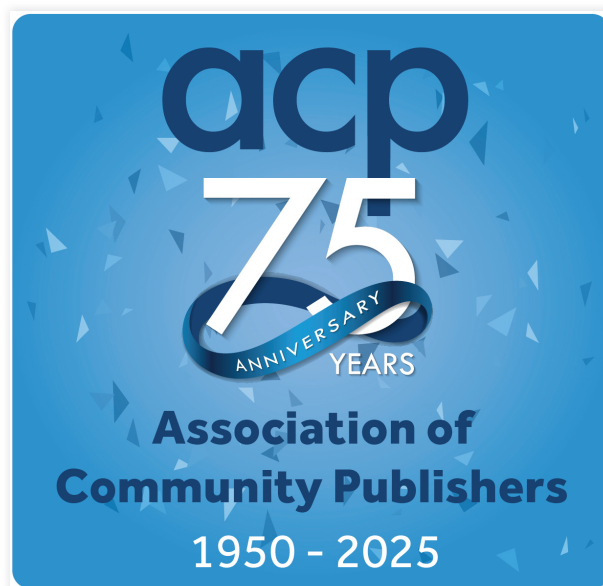
First – they all were connected to the community paper industry in some fashion over the years. They were publishers, sales managers, Rising Stars or conference attendees from my many years of being part of ACP. Some are still in the business, some have moved on to other industries and some happily retired from having successfully concluded their community publishing careers. All of them impacted by their appreciation for what it's like to be involved in the community publication industry.

Second – and most important, they were all members of this association during their involvement with community publishing. I got introduced to and was able to develop friendships with each of them through experiences generated by this organization. This exercise made me realize the amount of connections ACP has provided me over the years. Connections that brought both invaluable professional support as well as much valued friendships that were based on hours of shared conversations and experiences. Without ACP, my circle of friends would have been not only smaller, but a whole lot less interesting!

If you're reading this and not involved with the association, you have no idea what you are missing out on. But the

good news is, it's not too late! Join ACP and start attending our in-person events. You will make some fantastic friends, share some amazing experiences and bring home some ideas that will help improve your business – repeatedly! Not sure how you can pass on that offer.

As I begin my next trip around the sun, I need to promise to be more like those people that reached out to acknowledge my birthday. Their simple act of kindness helped me appreciate how blessed my life has been and I need to share that experience with them as well. Actually, let me start my skill improvement right now, since ACP celebrates its 75th birthday this fall! Let me publicly express a sincere “happy birthday” to ACP and thank it for being such an important part of so many lives. ACP's contribution to each of us and to the community publishing industry is well worth celebrating. To honor this contribution, don't be shy about telling everyone, “Print's not dead... it's READ!” ■



Ever been to a newspaper conference and felt out of place?



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10 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR BUDGETING & FORECASTING

BY DENNIS NAJJAR – CO-FOUNDER, ACCOUNTINGDEPARTMENT.COM

Budgeting and forecasting allow a business to plan accurately for its fiscal year. Below are 10 ways to improve these processes to create a strategic plan that meets your business's financial goals.

1. KEEP BUDGETING AND FORECASTING FLEXIBLE

Rigid forecasts and budgets aren't very useful. Things change as the year progresses, and you need to be able to factor in those changes and how they will affect your business. Continuing to base decisions on the best guesses made months prior can lead to faulty and costly decisions. In addition, holding employees to metrics based on out-of-date information is counterproductive and frustrating. Building flexibility into your budgeting and forecasting will allow for more accuracy and better results in your business.

2. IMPLEMENT ROLLING FORECASTS AND BUDGETS

You can update rolling forecasts and budgets based on present results, not on what a manager thought may happen several months ago. With this process, forecasting is done for the next quarter and not the entire year. Each quarter the forecasts are broader since they too will be updated again. Rolling forecasts allow you to better align your budget with your stated plan while improving the accuracy of your projections.

3. BUDGET TO YOUR PLAN

Have a plan in place and meld your budget to it. Budgeting to your plan "requires that spending decisions be made based on actual revenue, rather than on opportunities that such spending might (or might not) lead to." Instead of spending and dealing with it later, budgeting to your plan forces you to deal with the potential impact any expenditures will have on the business. Implementing this method of handling your budget is really helpful in addressing opportunities that weren't a part of the original budget.

4. COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN

As the forecasting and budgeting affects all aspects of the business, you want to keep an open line of communication with all departments throughout the entire process to help minimize issues and to ensure alignment between your company's operational and organizational strategies.

5. INVOLVE YOUR ENTIRE TEAM

Budgeting and forecasting should be a team effort so that departments and units have a clearer understanding of their needs. As well as the people in your finance department, having people with their pulse on the various departments can give you the data you need to make accurate pre-

dictions and set realistic budgets. Moreover, using your entire team allows you to have multiple perspectives on where your business is now and where it could be in the future.

6. BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR GOALS

The purpose of forecasting is to predict your company's financial future. Forecasting aids in the making of business decisions and in understanding their impact before you implement them. If you aren't clear on the overall goals of the company, then your ability to accurately forecast your business's financial future falters. Therefore, you should have a clear understanding of what's driving your forecasting predictions; otherwise, they are just random guesses not grounded in the goals of your company.

7. PLAN FOR VARIOUS SCENARIOS

You can't plan for everything, but you can have an idea of some of the obstacles that could affect your initial forecast and budget. Review external market and economic trends that may negatively impact your company. A rolling forecast is helpful for staying on top of any changes, negative or positive, that could have a serious impact on your business. Rolling forecasts also allow you to pivot as needed based on any new data presented so all decisions are based on what's happening now and not on what happened the previous year.

BUDGETING TIPS

8. TRACK EVERYTHING

Everything needs to be accounted for when budgeting and forecasting for the upcoming fiscal year, whether it's the potential buyout of a competitor or just of the office supplies. Don't underestimate the importance of seemingly minor details and their ability to affect the company's financial health. Once a budget is in place, allow for forecasting that looks at the many potential scenarios that may occur. Keep eyes and ears on market trends, client behaviors, and what the competition is up to as the business forecast is being finalized.

9. INCLUDE PROFIT AND CASH FLOW GOALS

Author Gene Siciliano says, "Every budget should have profit targets and cash flow targets because the two bottom line measures are very different, and they require different kinds of attention to control them." If you're not keeping track of these two important metrics of your business, how useful and accurate will your budget be? To keep your company from missing its financial goals, set realistic targets for both your cash and profit flow.

MONITOR ALL ACTIVITIES

Don't rely on Excel or other spreadsheet software to do your

budgets and forecasts. Planning software can go a long way in making the process easier and less time consuming. Cloud-based systems have quickly become the standard for all areas of finance, not just bookkeeping services. When implemented, they allow for more flexibility, as well as better security and cost savings, than manual options. They allow you to generate accurate predictions and budgets quickly and with minimal errors. ■

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Original article: <https://www.accountingdepartment.com/blog/ten-ways-to-improve-your-budgeting-forecasting>

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HOW TO CREATE A 12-MONTH FORECAST WITHOUT A 2026 BUDGET

BY SCOTT CRAWFORD – PARTNER, PREFERRED CFO

As a financial professional, you understand the critical role that forecasting plays in strategic planning, cash flow management, and investor confidence. But what happens when your organization hasn't yet finalized its 2026 budget? Without an approved budget, creating a reliable 12-month forecast that extends into 2026 may seem challenging—but it's far from impossible.

In this article, we'll explore practical strategies to develop a data-driven, defensible forecast even in the absence of a formal budget. By leveraging historical trends, operational inputs, and scenario planning, you can produce a forecast that supports decision-making while maintaining financial discipline.

WHY FORECASTING WITHOUT A BUDGET IS NECESSARY

Before diving into the methodology, it's important to recognize why a forecast is still valuable without a budget:

1. STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING – Executives and department heads need visibility into future financial performance to make informed decisions on hiring, capital expenditures, and growth initiatives.

2. INVESTOR & STAKEHOLDER CONFIDENCE – Lenders, investors, and board members expect forward-looking insights, even if exact budget figures aren't yet available.

3. RISK MITIGATION – A well-structured forecast helps identify potential cash flow gaps or profitability risks before they materialize.

4. BUDGET DEVELOPMENT – A forecast can serve as a foundational document that later evolves into the official budget once assumptions are validated.

Now, let's explore how to build this forecast effectively.

STEP 1: Leverage Historical Trends & Run-Rate Analysis

When a budget isn't available, historical financial data becomes your best friend. Here's how to use it:

A. Analyze Past Performance

- **Review income statements, balance sheets, and cash flow statements** for the past 2–3 years.
- **Identify seasonality patterns, revenue growth rates, and expense trends.**
- **Adjust for known one-time events** (e.g., a major client loss, pandemic impacts, or restructuring costs).

B. Calculate Run-Rate Projections

- **Revenue:** If your business has stable growth, apply the trailing 12-month (TTM) ^[1] growth rate to project forward.
- **Expenses:** Use the average monthly operating expenses, adjusting for inflation (typically 2–3%) and known cost changes (e.g., rent increases, new hires).
- **Working Capital:** Estimate future receivables, payables, and inventory needs based on historical turnover ratios.

Example: If Q4 2025 revenue was \$10M

[1] <https://www.wallstreetprep.com/knowledge/ttm-trailing-twelve-months/>

with a 5% quarterly growth trend, Q1 2026 could be projected at \$10.5M, assuming no major market shifts.

STEP 2: Incorporate Operational Inputs & Departmental Estimates

Since budgets often come from top-down targets, a forecast without one should take a **bottom-up approach** by engaging department leaders.

Key Questions to Ask Business Units:

- **Sales Team:** What's the pipeline for 2026? Are there new contracts or market expansions?
- **Operations:** Are there planned efficiency improvements or cost-saving initiatives?
- **HR:** Will headcount change? Are salary adjustments or hiring freezes expected?
- **IT & CapEx:** Are there major technology upgrades or facility expansions planned?

Even without formal budget approval, department heads often have insight into upcoming changes that should factor into the forecast.

STEP 3: Apply Scenario Planning (Best Case, Base Case, Worst Case)

Since a forecast without a budget carries more uncertainty, **scenario modeling** is essential.

How to Use Scenarios:

- **Present all three** to leadership to set realistic expectations.
- **Stress-test cash flow** under the worst-case scenario to ensure liquidity.

FORECASTING

Scenario	Revenue Assumption	Expense Assumption	Use Case
Base Case	Historical growth continues	Moderate cost inflation	Most likely outcome
Optimistic	New product launch succeeds, +15% growth	Expenses rise only 2%	Used for expansion planning
Pessimistic	Economic downturn, -10% revenue	Cost-cutting measures enacted	Risk mitigation planning

- **Update quarterly** as new data emerges.

STEP 4: Align with Known Business Drivers & Market Conditions

Even without a budget, external and internal factors will influence 2026 performance. Consider:

A. Macroeconomic Factors

- Interest rate trends (impact on borrowing costs)
- Inflation (supply chain and labor costs)
- Industry-specific trends (e.g., regulatory changes, commodity prices)

B. Company-Specific Changes

- New product launches
- Expansion into new markets
- Mergers & acquisitions (even if not finalized, model potential impacts)

Example: If the Fed signals rate cuts in 2026, factor in lower interest expenses if your company carries variable-rate debt.

STEP 5: Use Rolling Forecasts to Stay Agile

Instead of treating the forecast as a static document, adopt a rolling 12-month forecast ^[2] that updates monthly or quarterly.

Benefits of Rolling Forecasts:

- Adjust for actual performance (e.g., if Q1 2026 sales exceed projections, revise Q2–Q4).
- Incorporate budget numbers once they're approved.

[2] <https://preferredco.com/insights/secret-profits-financial-control>

- Reduce reliance on fixed annual targets, which may become outdated.

STEP 6: Document Assumptions & Maintain Transparency

Since this forecast isn't backed by an official budget, clear documentation is critical.

What to Document:

- Growth rate assumptions (e.g., "Revenue projected at 6% based on 3-year CAGR ^[3]").
- Key risks (e.g., "If Supplier X raises prices by 10%, COGS increases by \$2M").
- Dependencies (e.g., "Forecast assumes no recession in 2026").

This ensures stakeholders understand the forecast's limitations and can challenge or refine assumptions as needed.

Conclusion: A Forecast Without a Budget Is Still Powerful

While operating without a 2026 budget isn't ideal, it doesn't mean you're flying blind. By:

1. **Using historical trends** to establish a baseline,
2. **Gathering operational insights** from department heads,
3. **Modeling multiple scenarios** to prepare for uncertainty,
4. **Adjusting for market conditions**, and
5. **Implementing rolling forecasts**,

You can create a **practical, actionable 12-month forecast** that guides decision-making until the official budget is approved.

[3] <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/cagr.asp>

FAQ: FORECASTING WITHOUT A BUDGET

1. Why should we create a forecast if we don't have a budget yet?

A forecast provides a forward-looking financial perspective, helping leadership make informed decisions even before the budget is finalized. It ensures continuity in planning, risk assessment, and stakeholder communication.

2. How accurate can a forecast be without a budget?

While a forecast without a budget relies more on estimates than approved figures, it can still be highly reliable if based on:

- Historical trends
- Operational insights from department heads
- Market and economic data
- Scenario planning

Accuracy improves as more actual data becomes available and the forecast is updated regularly.

3. What's the difference between a budget and a forecast?

- **Budget:** An approved financial plan with fixed targets for revenue, expenses, and investments.
- **Forecast:** A dynamic, data-driven projection that adjusts based on real-time performance and changing conditions.

4. How often should we update the forecast?

Best practice is a rolling 12-month forecast, updated quarterly (or monthly for volatile industries). This ensures the projections stay relevant as new data emerges.

5. What if department heads don't have clarity on 2026 plans?

Use historical trends as a baseline and apply conservative growth assumptions. You can also:

- Interview leaders on potential initiatives (e.g., hiring, expansion).
- Incorporate industry benchmarks if internal data is limited.

6. Should we present a single forecast or multiple scenarios?

Multiple scenarios (Base, Optimistic, Pessimistic) are recommended when a budget isn't set. This helps leadership:

- Understand potential risks and opportunities.
- Prepare contingency plans.

7. How do we handle major unknowns (e.g., economic downturn, M&A)?

- Flag these variables as **key assumptions** in the forecast.
- Model their potential impact separately (e.g., "If inflation rises to 5%, expenses increase by X%").
- Revisit the forecast if conditions change.

8. Can we use this forecast to secure financing or investor buy-in?

Yes, but transparency is critical.

Clearly document:

- The basis of assumptions (e.g., "Revenue growth based on 3-year historical CAGR").
- Risks and dependencies.

Investors and lenders appreciate a well-reasoned forecast, even if it's not tied to a final budget.

9. What happens when the 2026 budget is approved?

Reconcile the forecast with the budget to:

- Identify variances and adjust future projections.
- Refine assumptions for the next forecast cycle.

10. Do we need special software to build this forecast?

Not necessarily. Excel works for basic models, but FP&A software (e.g., Adaptive Insights, Anaplan)

can automate data integration and scenario testing.

FINAL TIPS:

Once the 2026 budget is finalized, reconcile it with your forecast to identify gaps and refine future projections. This ensures a seamless transition from forecast to budget execution.

By following these steps, financial officers can maintain fiscal discipline, support leadership decisions, and navigate uncertainty with confidence—even in the absence of a formal budget. ■

Need help with forecasting, budgeting, or other financial issues? Consider using the services of a fractional CFO. Contact Preferred CFO today to learn more!

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Original article: <https://preferredcfo.com/insights/how-to-create-a-12-month-forecast-without-a-2026-budget>*

ACP CONFERENCE TESTIMONIAL

When asked, "What did you like most the Phoenix Leadership Retreat?"



Interactions with others in a close setting. Info sharing amongst the group and not solely relied upon by the presenter. Liked the social time and the outing at the ball game provided good interaction time to talk to others about the topics and others as well.



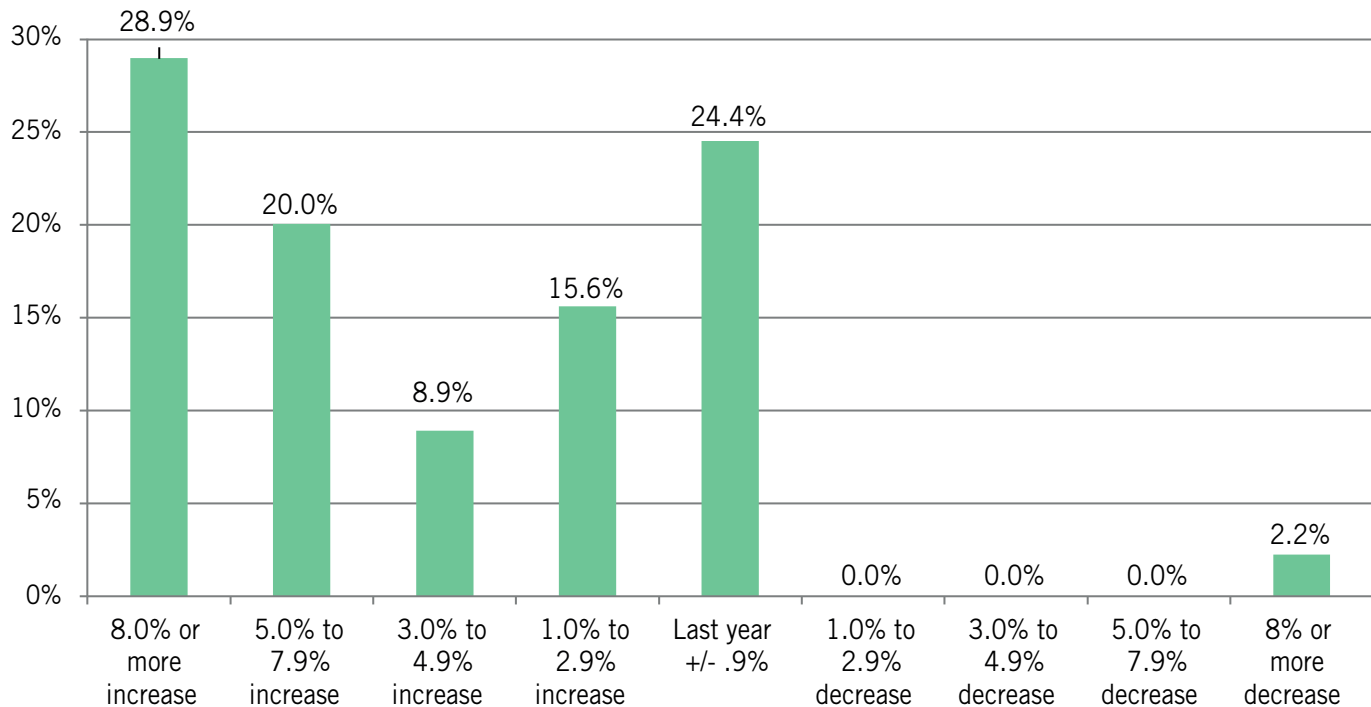
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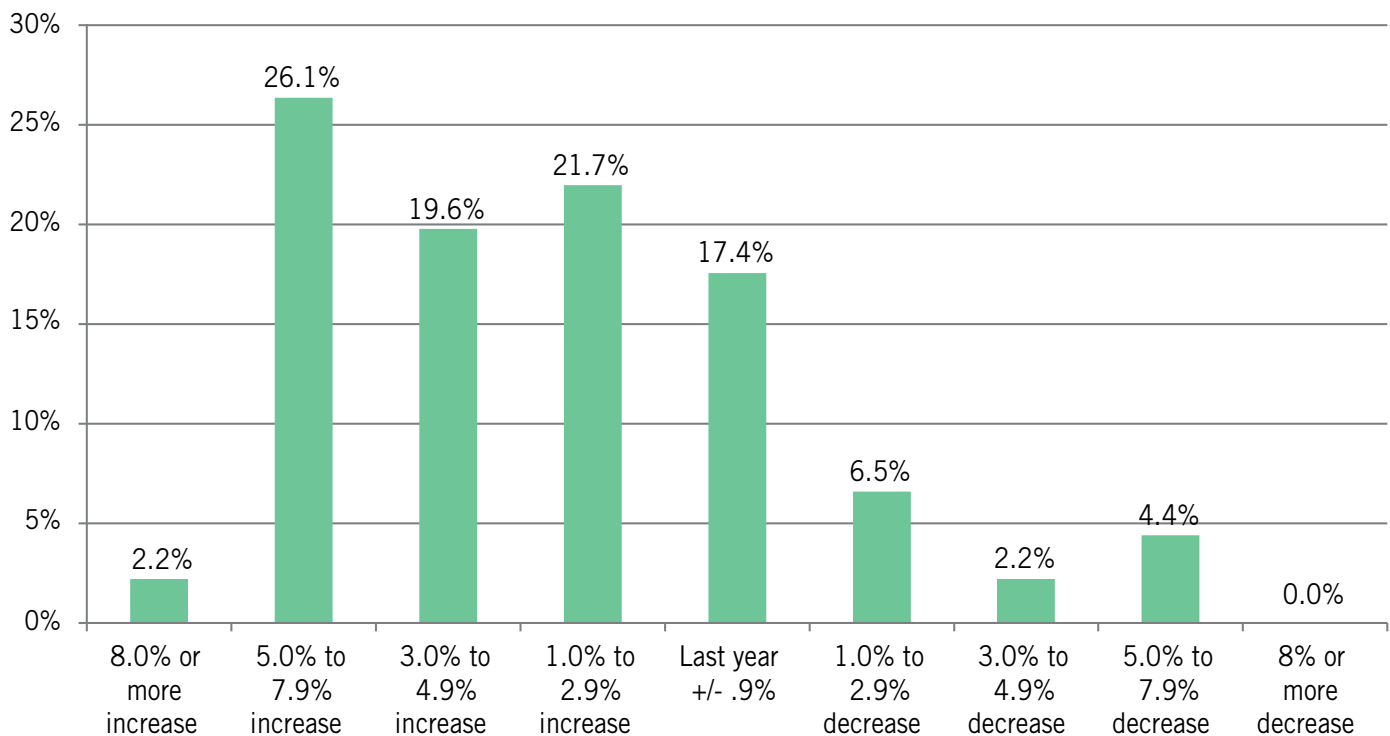
THE SURVEY SAYS...



What is your forecast for digital products sales growth in 2026?



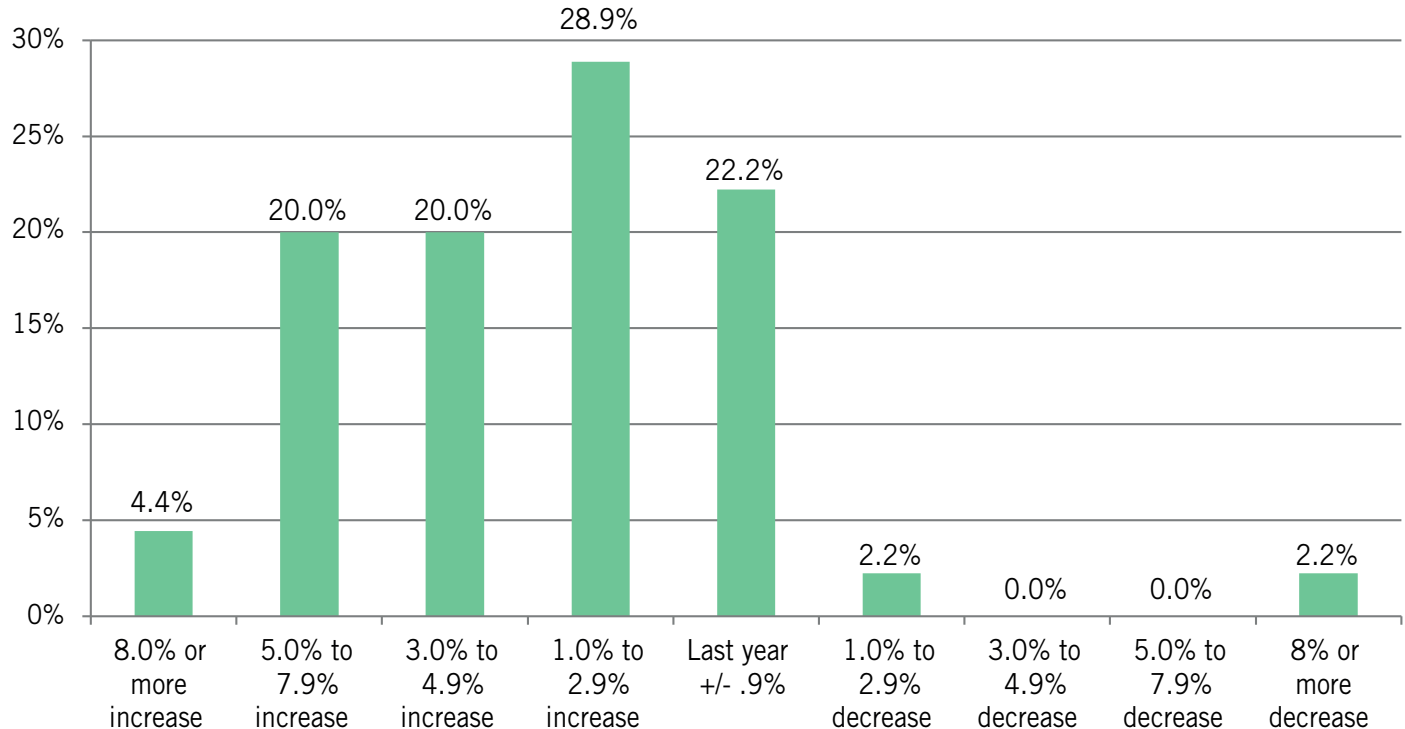
What is your forecast for display sales growth in 2026?



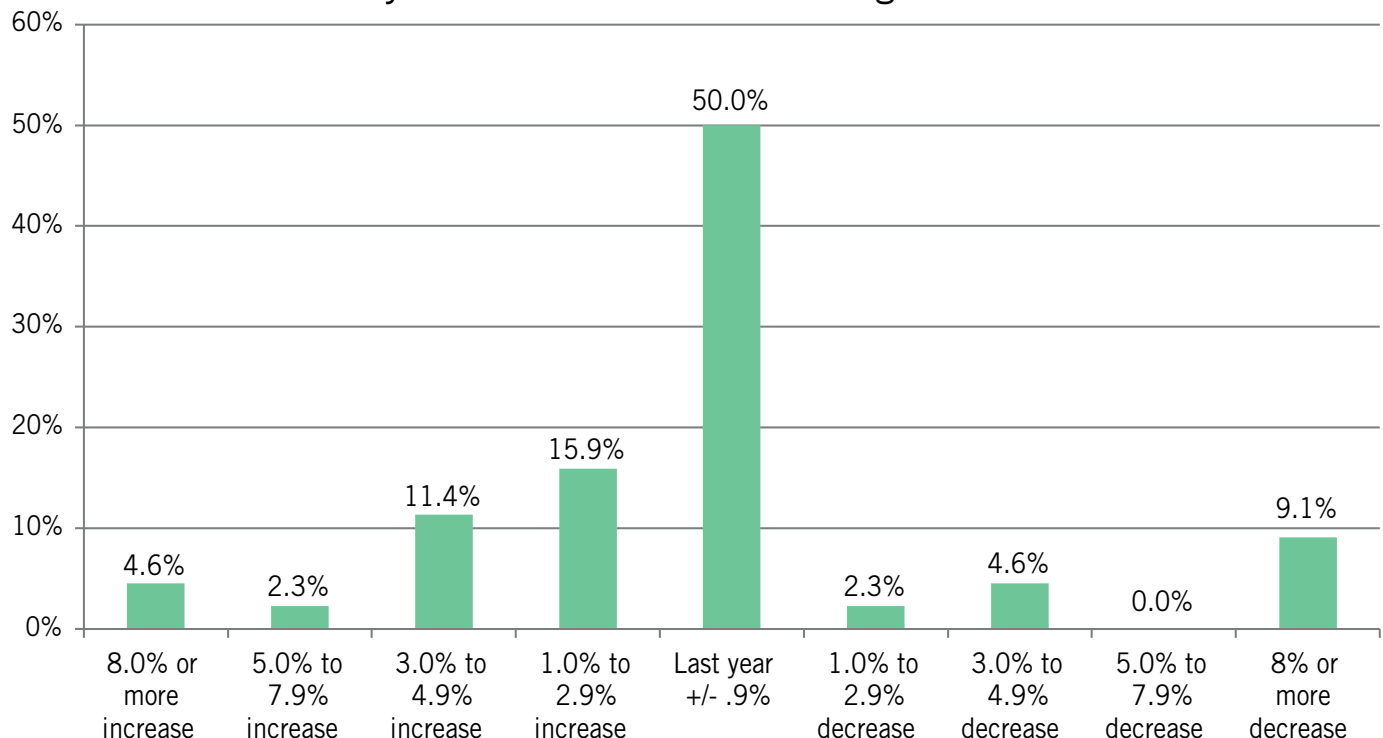
THE SURVEY SAYS...



What is your forecast for special promotions sales growth in 2026?



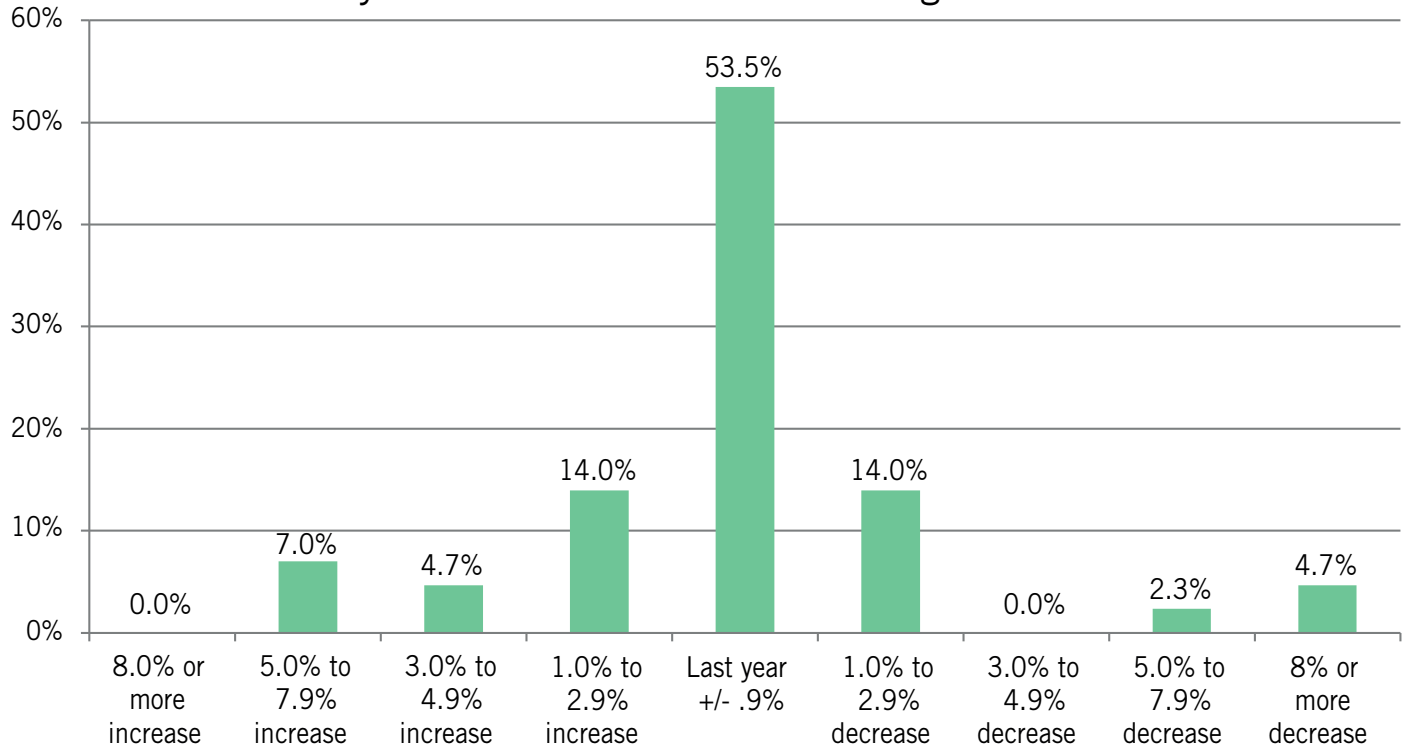
What is your forecast for insert sales growth in 2026?



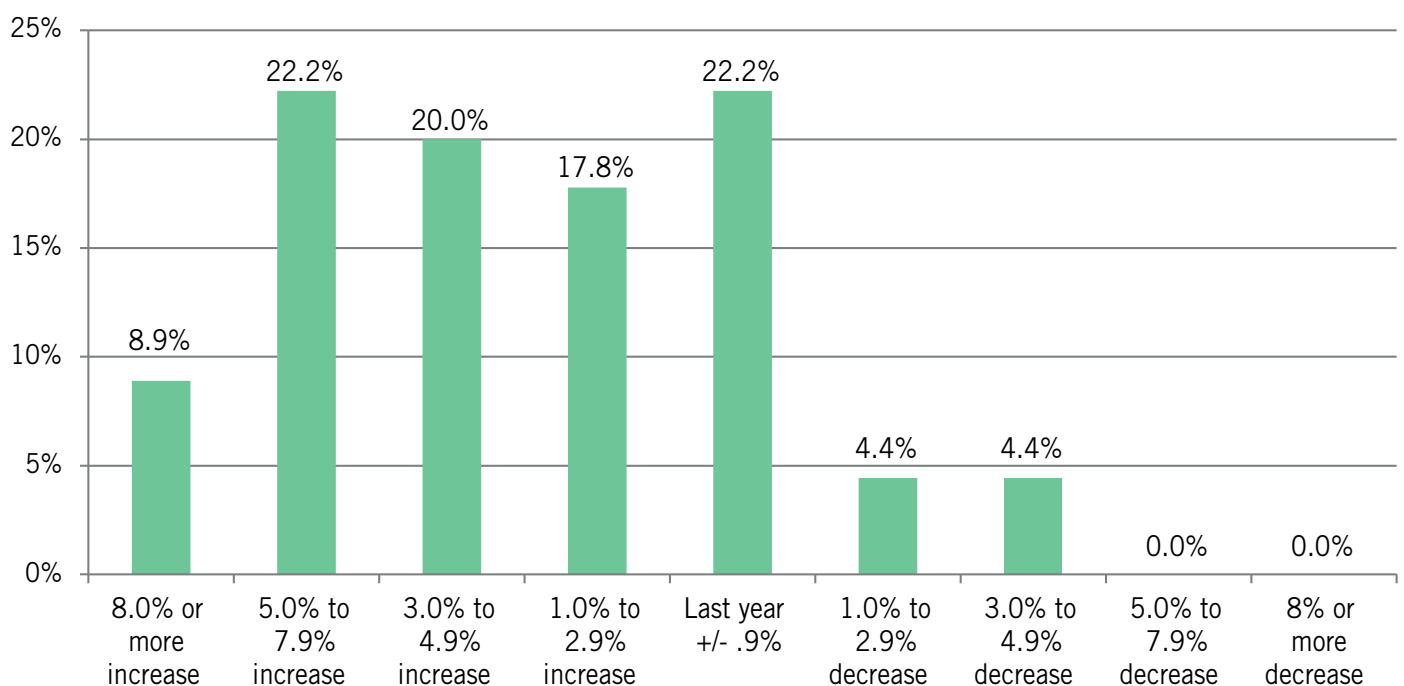
THE SURVEY SAYS...



What is your forecast for classified sales growth in 2026?



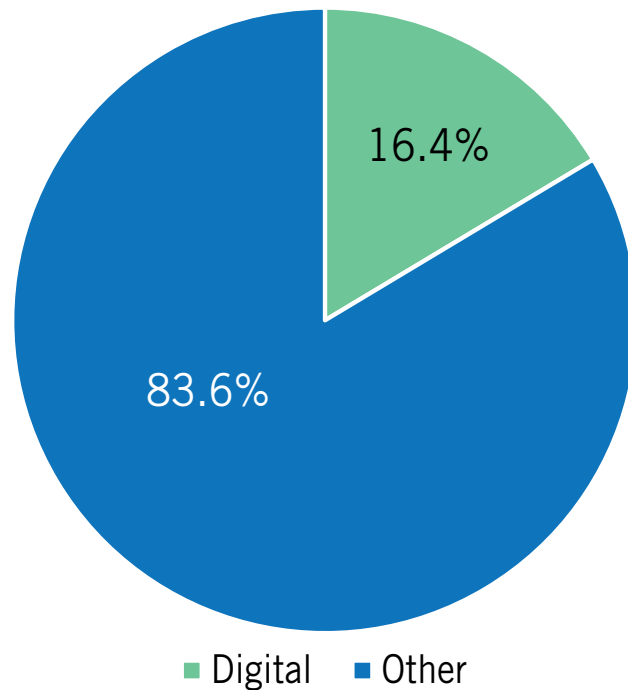
What is your forecast for overall publications sales growth in 2026?



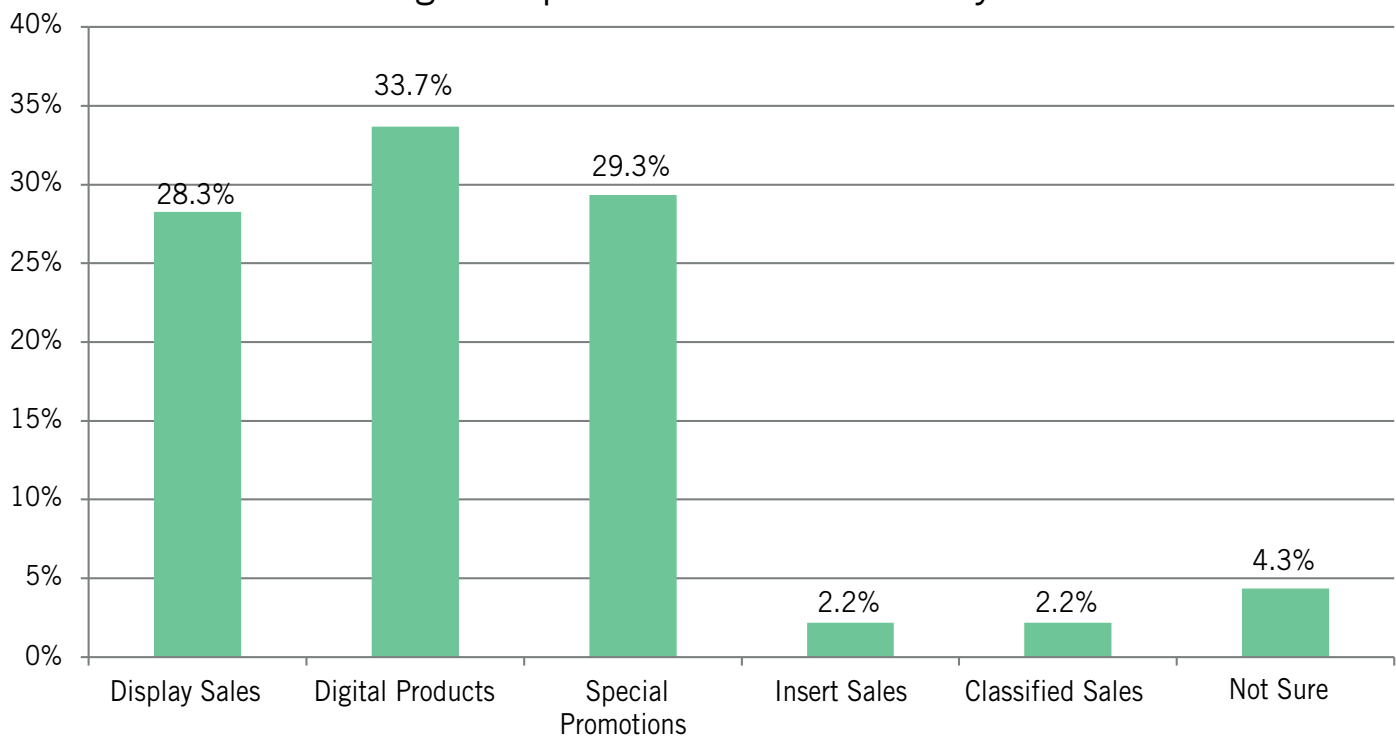
THE SURVEY SAYS...



Average % of publication sales anticipated for digital sales in 2026



What area of publication sales do you see having the most growth potential over the next 3 years?



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ONE GEN Z PERSPECTIVE ON GENERATIVE A.I.



BY EVELYN SPENCE

While this month's edition of Publish largely centers on budgets and metrics, my job at Coastal View News — located in the southern tip of Santa Barbara County, California — has nothing to do with that. I spend my 8–5ish writing, editing and interviewing. So instead of budgeting tips, I offer you this for your November reading: a healthy dose of generative artificial intelligence (A.I.) skepticism from a member of the so-called digital generation.

There's a strong split here: members of Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) who graduated high school and entered university before the Covid-19 pandemic officially hit the U.S., and those who were caught in the widespread net of school shutdowns, the loss of childhood traditions and devastating isolation.

I graduated college with the class of 2021, a little more than a year before OpenAI rolled out ChatGPT in Fall 2022. While I spent the latter part of my junior year and most of my senior year navigating online classes and assignments, professors

who struggled to use Zoom and a remote student newsroom, my ideas were my own.

Sometimes I wonder. If I was born just a few years later, in 2003 instead of 1999, would I have used ChatGPT to write my essays? I can see the appeal. I was a full-time college student, but I also spent 30+ hours a week working for pennies for my student newspaper. Much to my 26-year-old self's regret, my academics, at times, took a backseat to my journalistic ambitions.

But I — and others in my small circle — have heavy doubts about generative A.I. tools. I've read the articles from the New York Times, Associated Press, Reuters and beyond from reporters and writers who have a greater understanding of this ever-evolving technology than I do.

Electricity bills are up for residents and small businesses as A.I. technology companies continue to build their data centers, the New York Times reported in August. Those same data centers are draining water from areas that desperately need it, a

Bloomberg Technology investigation found in May.

There are concerns about widespread academic cheating. In May, *Intelligencer* features writer James D. Walsh's piece, "Everyone Is Cheating Their Way Through College," shook my X (the social media platform formerly known as Twitter) timeline with the tale of a Columbia University student who said he "doesn't know a single student at the school who isn't using AI to cheat." In an Associated Press article from September, high school and college professors said in the age of generative A.I., simply assigning writing "out of the classroom is like asking students to cheat."

Generative A.I. chatbots have endorsed wild conspiracy theories, distorting reality and causing real-life harm, the New York Times found in June. The bots can "hallucinate, generating ideas that weren't true but sounded plausible," which some users aren't aware of, reporter Kashmir Hill found in "They Asked an A.I. Chatbot Questions. The Answers Sent Them Spiraling."



RIISING STAR ARTICLE

It might be making us dumber, an early MIT study of 54 subjects published in June found. And it's even "blowing up marriages," Futurism writer Maggie Harrison Dupré wrote in September, exploring, through several couples, how ChatGPT destroyed their relationships.

Their relationships were never perfect, the couples all admit, but the bot created a feedback loop, Dupré said. One person became convinced they were right and their partner was the villain because the bot was only being fed one side of a story.

These articles have stayed with me over the past year. So I remain wary, despite the flood of generative A.I. content I see online.

I watched six months ago as people turned themselves into Studio Ghibli characters, cheapening a gorgeous art style. Relatives send me A.I.-generated social media posts and videos and ask if they are real; others use generative A.I. to craft

everyday emails. Social media posts reference generative A.I. as a source over local newspapers of record, even though that information often summarized by A.I. is coming from real reporters' articles.

And after Charlie Kirk's assassination in early September, I saw more than one social media post linking to a song supposedly by singer Ed Sheeran about Kirk's life. Though it was clearly created using generative A.I. and posted by a random YouTube account, it gained millions of views and thousands of comments from users who thought it was sung and released by Sheeran.

But who am I to say that something is "clearly" generative A.I. or not? I, like most of my generation, grew up with the Internet and social media. I also work in media. My "A.I.-generated" meter is more finely tuned than folks who aren't as handy at navigating online spaces. We need the tools to help Internet users clearly distinguish

between generative A.I. and "real" content — tools I fully recognize I cannot build, but I plead someone to.

My anti-generative A.I. perspective is not a new one, but it's not popular. ChatGPT has 700 million weekly users, OpenAI announced in August. People use generative A.I. chatbots to seek comfort and help them in their day-to-day lives. It's an alluring concept. Connection and help without the fear of human judgment or rejection.

But my own thoughts, for now, remain — why should I bother to engage with something an actual person didn't bother to write? Own up to your graphic design missteps; flaunt your typos. Learn from them. They are proof that we are flawed, and to be human is to be flawed.

As Merriam-Webster so boldly announced in a satirical social media post for its "new language learning model" (hint: an actual dictionary) in September: "There's artificial intelligence, and there's actual intelligence." ■

About ACP rising stars

The ACP Rising Stars program is designed to honor individuals under the age of 36 who are emerging leaders in the publishing industry. This annual program will recognize up to 7 individuals who represent the best of our up and coming industry professionals. These individuals exemplify good character, leadership, and professionalism not only at work, but in the communities they serve.

Nominee qualifications

These individuals should show the promise of and a commitment to impacting their publication and the industry in a positive manner through

professional achievement. Nominees must also show they not only perform their jobs to a high standard, but they also have a commitment to furthering their knowledge and abilities. Nominees must actively work in the community publishing industry for a member or associate of ACP and are required to have been employed for more than a year. Nominees must not be 36 prior to December 31st of nomination year.

Recognition program

Award recipients will be recognized in *Publish Magazine*, the official publication of ACP.

An awards presentation program will be conducted during the next national in-person conference celebrating the participants and their contributions to the program. All of the individuals participating are awarded free room,

registration, meal plan, specialized training sessions and up to \$500 in travel reimbursements to the next in-person conference.

Ongoing Opportunity

The ACP Rising Stars program does not end with the recognition program. Rising Stars will be asked to assist the various initiatives of the association on an ongoing basis for up to three years. ACP recognizes that we have much to learn from these talented young people and desires to use their skills to help us lead the publishing industry. In return for participation in regularly scheduled conference calls and for volunteering some time to assist with ACP initiatives, ACP will provide additional leadership development opportunities and the opportunity to attend future conferences for even more training.

For more information about the ACP Rising Star program, go to:
<https://www.communitypublishers.com/rising-stars>

CLIMBING THE CUSTOMER SERVICE PYRAMID

BY JAMES A. BAKER FOUNDER – BAKER COMMUNICATIONS

By now there is almost universal agreement in the business community that excellent customer service is the key to holding on to customers, which, in turn, is the key to sustaining long-term profitability. After all, it costs almost 10 times as much to sell a customer the first time as it does to sell to him the second time. You do the math. So the million dollar question here is, “How can your company build stellar customer loyalty?” The answer is, gradually and professionally. And it all comes by gaining an understanding of the customer service pyramid.

Before you can deliver excellent customer service – the kind that leads to long-term customer loyalty – you need to make sure you understand how excellent customer service looks from the customer point of view. Companies spend a lot of time designing elaborate systems that they think will be helpful to customers, only to discover customers aren’t impressed at all. Generally, customers are looking for a few simple, practical value items when they do business with you. These items build on one another, which is why it is called the Customer Service Pyramid.

1. BASIC PERFORMANCE LEVEL –

This level has to do with those standard items that customers just assume they will receive from a good customer service experience. This would include things like a courteous, quick, professional attitude from whoever speaks with

them. You don’t earn extra points for delivering this, because customers require this. But it will really cost you if you fail here!

2. FULFILLMENT LEVEL –

At this level, the customer actually expresses a particular problem, need or request to you. He knows that if he doesn’t express the need to you, it won’t be met. This is where a lot of good customer service programs sink or swim. If you are able to adequately address the need, or at least provide some service or relief that demonstrates good faith on your part, the customer will have his basic need fulfilled and trust you with more of his business. Failing to fulfill this need increases the likelihood that he will shop around a little more next time.

Levels one and two represent the stopping point for most customer service programs. You have fulfilled your duty, and delivered it professionally. What more could a customer want? The answer is, a lot,

and even if they don’t always expect more, they are always very impressed when they get more anyway.

3. BONUS LEVEL –

Often a customer may be envisioning his “perfect solution,” say, receiving a new unit since his non-functional one is still under warranty, rather than simply getting free shipping and free repair from your shop in another state. They may not really expect to get such preferential treatment, but they may ask anyhow. Anytime you are able to provide this extra bonus service – giving them something they are not really entitled to at little or no cost to them – it provides a super boost to the customer’s opinion of you and your company. This can translate into many big customer loyalty points.

4. THE JACKPOT LEVEL –

Sometimes you, as a CSR are aware of options, opportunities and benefits which the customer might highly value, if only he knew they existed. Sometimes companies create prod-



MANAGEMENT TIP

ucts or services which are so new the customer is not aware of them. Or maybe the company recently adjusted its policies to open up premium options to a broader customer base. In any event, a CSR can send customer loyalty through the roof by spending just a few moments getting to know the customer's needs or history a little better. Some of this information will be in your database, and the rest of it can be collected by asking a few polite, probing questions. Once you are sure you have something that the customer would be excited to receive, simply offer it to him. "Mr. Brown, we have just instituted a VIP program that will allow you to order this unit at half the advertised price, as long as you subscribe to the premium support package for a year. Would that interest you?" Everyone likes to be treated like a VIP. Companies who treat their customers like VIPs end up with lots of VLCs – Very Loyal Customers.

CUSTOMER SERVICE QUICK TIP OF THE MONTH – DON'T FORGET D.A.V.E.

To provide customer service that will grow loyal customers year after year, just remember DAVE.

D – Dependability. Don't promise what you can't deliver; always deliver what you promise.

A – Assurance. Keep all your customer dealings at the highest level of integrity. This builds trust and puts the customer at ease with you and your company.

V – Value. Of course, the bottom line is that the customer wants a product or service that meets his needs and performs at level that meets or exceeds his expectations. You can't keep good customers by selling bad products.

E – Empathy. In all his dealings with you, the customer wants to see ample evidence that you care about his situation, understand his problem, and respect his right to be heard and well-served.

Follow DAVE's lead and your customers will follow you, too. ■

Baker Communications offers leading edge time management and personal productivity solutions that will help you address the goals and achieve the outcomes addressed in this article. For more information about how your organization can achieve immediate and lasting behavior change that will help your team members consistently achieve their high value goals while eliminating time wasted on interruptions and distractions, go to: <https://www.bakercommunications.com/index.html>

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ADVERTISING'S BLAST FROM THE PAST



BY JOHN FOUST
GREENSBORO, NC

In order to look ahead to a new advertising idea, sometimes it helps to take a look at the past. When an advertiser has been in business for a number of years, there are plenty of possibilities.

Let's take a look at a few idea-starters. Although there's some natural overlap, it helps to examine each one separately:

1. YEARS OF EXPERIENCE:

This is a good starting point. You can either talk about the number of years the company has been in operation, or you can emphasize the cumulative years key members have been on the team. For example, "We have been in business for 75 years," or "Our service team has a total of 312 years of experience."

By themselves, these facts don't mean much – and in fact, could indicate that the company is outdated and out of touch with today's consumers. The secret is to connect

an age-related statistic to a specific benefit: "Our service team has 312 years of overall experience. This means we have encountered – and successfully diagnosed – just about every plumbing problem."

This kind of information could become the main subject of an image ad campaign – or be shortened to be used as a tagline throughout that company's marketing.

2. BUSINESS ANNIVERSARY:

Of course, any business can celebrate an anniversary, even if it's for one year in operation. An anniversary just means more when it's an impressive number.

“We have been in business for 75 years,” or “Our service team has a total of 312 years of experience.”

Your advertiser could throw a party to celebrate the anniversary of when they opened their doors. They could invite customers to drop by for a slice of birthday cake or have a sale featuring “throwback prices” on selected products.

3. ARCHIVES:

You advertisers may have a wealth of inspiration in their files. Anything that documents the start and growth of a business can spark ideas. Photos can illustrate the construction of branch offices, the history of relationships with existing customers, or the evolution of flagship products.

You might be surprised at what you find: internal newsletters, early brochures on products that became

best sellers, maybe even old copies of ads that announced special events.

4. PROFILE OF FOUNDER(S):

A conversation with – or about – the people who started the company can uncover some fascinating facts. Could one of these tidbits become the theme of an ad?

5. THEN AND NOW (WHAT'S CHANGED, WHAT HASN'T?):

Think of the “New look, same great taste” label we see on so many packaged goods.

When a company has been around for a long time, change is a consideration. Obviously, some older things have been good enough to keep and some things are newer and better. Those things – both old and new – can be selling points.

Have the advertiser's product lines expanded since the beginning? Are there new locations? New hours?

Does the company still have the customer service focus it had in the beginning? Is that philosophy in a frame – and can it be photographed?

It adds up to this: sometimes, a blast from the past is just what the idea process needs. ■

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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

GETTING IT RIGHT: Image Resolution Guidelines for Every Use

Whether you're preparing a brochure, posting online, or editing video, one design truth always applies: **image resolution matters.** The right resolution makes your work look crisp and professional, while the wrong one can make even the best design appear blurry or pixelated.

Let's break down what resolution really means – and how to choose the right settings for every project.

Understanding Image Resolution

Resolution refers to the amount of detail contained in an image.

- In **print**, it's measured in **DPI (dots per inch)** - the density of ink dots on paper.
- In digital formats, it's measured in **PPI (pixels per inch)** – the number of pixels displayed on a screen.

The goal is balance: high enough for clarity, but not so high that it slows down production or file delivery.

Print Projects: Quality Starts Here

For print, resolution directly affects sharpness and legibility. A low-resolution image might look fine on screen but will appear fuzzy when printed.

Here are the general guidelines:

- **High-quality photo prints, magazines, and brochures:** 300 DPI at final size. This is the professional standard for sharp, detailed output.
- **Newspapers and newsletters:** 200–250 DPI. Lower resolution is acceptable because of the paper texture and printing process.
- **Large posters or banners:** 150

DPI, or sometimes as low as 100 DPI for very large pieces. These are viewed from a distance, so fine detail isn't as critical.

- **Business cards or letterhead:** 300–350 DPI. Because of their small size, every detail matters.
- **Billboards:** 30–100 DPI. Designed to be viewed from a great distance, so even low resolution appears crisp.

Tip: Check your image size at print dimensions. For example, an image that's 2400 by 3000 pixels prints at 8 by 10 inches at 300 DPI.

Digital and Web Projects

For online and screen use, pixel dimensions matter more than DPI. Digital images need to look sharp while loading quickly – especially on mobile devices.

Here's how to optimize for different uses:

- **Web or online display:** 72 to 96 PPI. Standard for most screens.
- **Website banners or hero images:** Around 1920 pixels wide. Fits full HD screens.
- **Social media posts:**
 - ✓ Instagram: 1080 by 1080 pixels
 - ✓ Facebook: 1200 by 630 pixels

Follow the recommended sizes for each platform to avoid distortion.

- **Email newsletters:** 72 to 96 PPI, with a maximum width of 600 to 800 pixels for faster load times.
- **Presentations (PowerPoint, Keynote):** 150 PPI or 1920 by 1080 pixels for clear, full-screen visuals.

Video and Screen Graphics

For video, resolution is defined by total pixel dimensions and aspect ratio.

- **HD video:** 1920 by 1080 pixels (16:9 ratio)
- **4K video:** 3840 by 2160 pixels (16:9 ratio)
- **Vertical social media video:** 1080 by 1920 pixels (9:16 ratio)

Choose your format carefully - upscaling video can create blur or visual artifacts.

Best Practices for Every Project

- Always start with the **highest-resolution version** of an image. You can scale down, but scaling up causes pixelation.
- Use **vector graphics** (such as SVG, EPS, or PDF) for logos and illustrations – they can be resized infinitely without quality loss.
- Save in the appropriate file format:
 - ✓ For print: TIFF, PSD, or high-quality PDF
 - ✓ For web: JPEG, PNG, or WebP
- Avoid over-compression. Excessive JPEG compression can cause visible artifacts.
- Always **preview your work** at the intended print or display size to confirm clarity and color accuracy.

The Takeaway

Image resolution isn't just a technical detail – it's a **cornerstone of visual quality**. By understanding how resolution affects print, web, and video projects, you can ensure your visuals always look sharp, professional, and perfectly suited to their purpose. ■

This article was produced through the use of OpenAI. (2025) ChatGPT-5

Resolution Quick Reference Chart					
For Printing (CMYK file)		For Digital / Web (RGB file)		For Video / Screen Graphics (RGB file)	
Business Cards / Letterhead	300 - 350 DPI	Presentations (PowerPoint, Keynote, etc.)	150 DPI (or 1920 X 1080)	Social Media Video (vertical)	1080 X 1920 px
High-quality photos & printing (brochures, magazines, ect.)	300 DPI	Website Banner or Hero Image	1920 px wide	Basic Hi-Def for small screens or small file size	720 p
Newspapers / Newsletters	250 - 300 DPI	Email / Digital Newsletters or Web / Online Display	72 - 96 DPI	Standard Hi-Def for most online content	1080 p
Large Posters / Banners	150 DPI	Social Media Posts	1080 px wide	QHD for high-end monitors and some smartphones	1440 p
Billboards	50 - 100 DPI	Facebook Link Previews	1200 X 630 px	UHD for large screens, professional video, streaming	4k (3840 X 2160 p)

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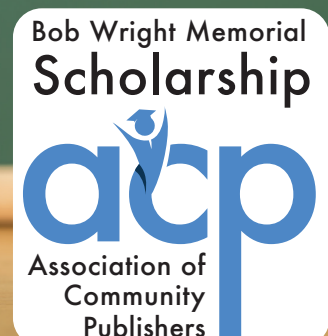
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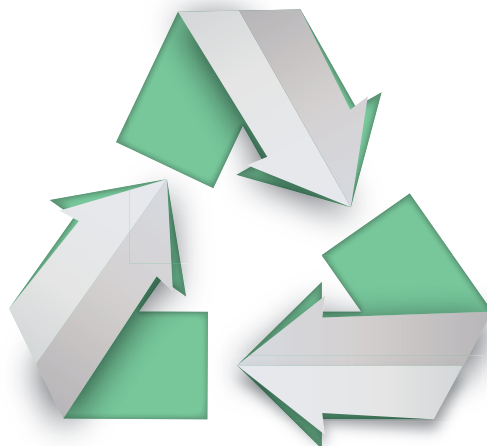
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The background of the lower half of the image is a vibrant yellow and orange gradient, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. Silhouettes of several palm trees are scattered across the background, adding a tropical feel. The text 'acp' is in a large, white, sans-serif font with a black outline. Below it, the words 'REVENUE' and '\$UMMIT' are in a large, bold, green, sans-serif font with a white outline. The word 'REVENUE' is on the same line as 'acp', and '\$UMMIT' is on the line below it.

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