

Best Feature Photo

Division 2

2015 Better Newspaper Contest

By Roger Dey, Blackfoot Valley Dispatch, Lincoln



Titled: Striking Stonewall

It was a cold, foggy morning, but the sunrise broke through the clouds and lit up the mountain. The sun hitting the mountain and the fog covering the valley floor created a striking contrast between the warm, pastel pinks and cool blue/grays.

Ironically, the only reason it ran was because I miscalculated my content and had to fill a rather large space. Pretty glad I did that now.

I made the image shooting handheld, using my Nikon D300 and my Sigma 70-200 f2.8. My IS was set at 800 and the exposure was 1/100 at f6.3.

Judge's comments: This is a truly beautiful shot - hard to get. You have colors, contrast, and great illumination of the clouds... And all crisp. Amazing.

MNA Calendar

December

- 24 Christmas Eve - MNA office closed
- 25 Christmas Day - MNA office closed
- 31 New Year's Eve - MNA office closed

January

- 1 New Year's Day - MNA office closed
- 6 2016 MNA Better Newspaper Contest opens for entries
- 15 Deadline to submit articles for the January Press Pass
- 22 MNA & MNAS Board of Directors' meeting, Helena

February

- 8 Begin accepting nominations for the 2016 Hall of Fame and Master Editor/Publisher Awards
- 19 Deadline to submit articles for the February Press Pass
- 22 2016 MNA Better Newspaper Contest closes to entries at midnight
- 26 Deadline for print entries for the 2015 Better Newspaper Contest to arrive at the MNA office

2016 MNA Better Newspaper Contest is open for your entries on January 6

We are looking forward to another great competition to showcase the very best the Montana newspaper industry produced this past year. The contest entry website opens on January 6, 2016.

A few items of interest for the 2016 contest:

- The 2016 MNA Better Newspaper Contest Rules can be found at:
<http://www.mtnewspapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2016-MNA-BNC-Rules.docx>
- The 2016 MNA Better Newspaper Contest Online Entry Instructions can be found at:
<http://www.mtnewspapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2016-MNA-BNC-Online-Entry-Instructions-Members.docx>
- Our 2016 contest will be judged by the West Virginia Press Association
- The entry deadline is February 22, 2016
- If you have questions, please contact Jim Rickman at 443-2850 or jim@mtnewspapers.com



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OUR MISSION:

To advance and sustain the news publishing industry in Montana.

825 Great Northern Blvd., Ste. 202
Helena, MT 59601
Phone 406-443-2850
Fax 406-443-2860

Jim Rickman, Executive Director | jim@mtnewspapers.com
Kevann Campbell, Business Development Manager | campbell@mtnewspapers.com
mtnewspapers.com

MEMBER PROFILE

MICHAEL & VICTORIA HOWELL

Publishers/Owners, Bitterroot Star, Stevensville

Personal Stats:

Born (year & place):

Michael: 1951, Mississippi; Victoria: 1953, California

First newspaper job:

Missoula Senior Citizen Voice, established 1985

Family:

Two daughters: Rosalee (PA-C, married, four children) and Aubrey (social work major, UM)

Education:

Michael - Masters in Philosophy, UM



Michael & Victoria Howell

Community involvement and diversions:

Michael is the founder of the non-profit Bitterroot River Protection Association, which was ultimately successful in a 10-year-long battle to prove that the famous Mitchell Slough is a branch of the Bitterroot River and, therefore, part of Montana's publicly-owned and protected waterways. Michael is still active in that group. Also, Michael and Victoria created the Bitterroot Free Press Foundation to help raise funds to protect the public's right to know and participate in government and other First Amendment issues. Victoria serves on the boards of North Valley Public Library, Stevensville Main Street Association, Bitterroot Valley Chamber of Commerce and Stevensville School Advisory Committee.

How did your career lead you to where you are now?

To condense a long story, in 1985 we were traveling back to Montana from New Mexico in a school bus with our two children when we picked up a hitchhiker who happened to be a retired newspaperman. He had a business model for starting newspapers, which he shared with us over donuts. With his help, we decided to give it a try, and the rest, as they say, is history. In this case, a 30-plus year history. Needless to say, that guy is long gone, but we will always remember him with great fondness, and gratitude (I think).

What's the most important thing you learned along the way that prepared you for your current role?

Listen carefully.

What aspect of the job do you find the most rewarding?

Being part of a community, and sometimes even making the community a better place through the work of the newspaper.

What aspect of the job do you find the most challenging?

Covering all the stories that deserve coverage.

What have you done to enhance the brand of your newspaper in your area?

Our brand is "The Best At Local!" and that is working well for us. We have focused on the "100% local" aspect, including only news from our valley, where virtually all our readers are located. We also publish ALL the local items our readers submit, using the rationale that if it's important to them, it's important to us. We also publish ALL letters to the editor with very few exceptions. In this regard, we sometimes receive letters that are personally offensive to us, and sometimes even letters that attack the paper, or are racist or bigoted, or they are ridiculously long. Nevertheless, we print them all!

What is your digital strategy right now?

We have a website that gets lots of views, probably the second most-viewed website in our area (Bitterroot Valley), but generating very little revenue. So our strategy is to change that, as soon as possible!

What is your print strategy right now?

Based on a model we saw firsthand in the Washington, DC, suburbs, we transitioned to a free paper in 2008 and it was the best thing we could have done. Our readership shot through the roof and ad sales revenue has been steadily climbing, presumably because our business clients are reaping the benefits of this increased readership. However, our costs are climbing too, so it's kind of a tightrope we're walking. At this point, we will continue doing what we're doing. We are currently having our best sales year ever, and we hope to continue that trend into next year through competitive pricing and responsiveness to our readers and our advertisers, always keeping an eye out for trends.

How does the MNA serve you and your newspaper?

It has been good to be part of a community of peers. Though we haven't had time to be active in MNA, we do appreciate the services it provides, especially the statewide advertising programs and the FOI Hotline. Thank you!

PEOPLE and PAPERS

Happy Holidays

To all our members, friends and associates across the state...may you enjoy the holidays! Thank you for your patronage and comradery. We wish you well in the New Year and look forward to serving you all.



Montana

Happy NEWS Year!

Montana Newspaper Association | mtnewspapers.com | 406.443.2850

Thanks.....

To those who volunteered their time to judge the Kentucky Press Association newspaper contest:

Amelia Murphy	Livingston Enterprise
Barb Stratman	Independent-Observer
Brenda Ahearn	Daily Inter Lake
Brian Anderson	Dillon Tribune
Cindy Sease	Bozeman Daily Chronicle
Darrell Ehrlick	Billings Gazette Communications
David Latham	Montanian
David McCumber	Montana Standard
Deb Hill	Lewistown News-Argus
Dick Crockford	Dillon Tribune
Ersin Ozer	Explore Big Sky
Greg Lemon	Independent Record
Heidi Desch	Whitefish Pilot
Holly Kopeikin	Great Falls Tribune
Hunter D'Antuono	Livingston Enterprise
Jacques Rutten	Lewistown News-Argus
James Wisniewski	Anaconda Leader
Jeanne Salle Kujawa	Montana Standard
Jenn Rowell	Great Falls Tribune
Jennifer Sorenson	Great Falls Tribune
Jim Durfey	Livingston Enterprise
Jim Rickman	MNA
John Kelleher	Havre Daily News
John T. Cribb	Cribb, Greene & Cope
Judy Killen	Yellowstone County News
Justin Post	Livingston Enterprise
Kev Campbell	MNA
Kristen Cates	Great Falls Tribune
Kristen Inbody	Great Falls Tribune
Kristy Geiser	Daily Inter Lake
Lindsey Kroskob	Big Timber Pioneer
Liz Kearney	Livingston Enterprise
Lynne Foland	Missoula Independent
Matt Baldwin	Whitefish Pilot
Michael Stafford	Silver State Post
Phil Drake	Great Falls Tribune
Roger Dey	Blackfoot Valley Dispatch
Skylar Browning	Missoula Independent
Summer Goddard	Valley Journal
Terry Oyhamburu	Great Falls Tribune
Tiffany Aldinger	Great Falls Tribune

PEOPLE and PAPERS

2016 Internship Grant Program winners

The Montana Newspaper Foundation is very pleased to announce the winners in the 2016 Internship Grant Program:

David Keyes, Publisher, Laurel Outlook (Laurel). Internship Program: Digital and in print reporting, photography

Lindsey Erin Kroskob, Managing Editor, Big Timber Pioneer (Big Timber). Internship Program: Reporter

Mark Hebert, Publisher, Phillips County News (Malta). Internship Program: Reporter and columnist

Congratulations to the winners!

The Montana Newspaper Foundation is a 501 C 3 organization, governed by a board of trustees, whose purpose is to raise, accumulate and disperse funds in support of annual scholarships, internships and for member education.

To make an investment in the Montana Newspaper Foundation, please contact Jim Rickman at (406) 443-2850 or jim@mtnewspapers.com.

Internet commenters should have the same rules

Sanders County Ledger, December 3, 2015

Kudos to the Montana Standard of Butte for its change in policy regarding online comments to articles posted on its website.

In the past, when a reader wanted to comment on a story online, the reader just made up a “handle” (in CB radio parlance) and railed on the subject without anyone knowing who he or she was.

While allowing comments in itself is a good policy and a good way to engage readers, and, ostensibly, the newspaper’s webmaster was making sure that the comments were sane and legitimate, those of us who read these comments find they are generally anything but that.

Hiding behind an alias gave folks a license to write anything and everything, with little expectation that they would be outed.

Now, wrote the Standard, anyone wishing to comment online must reveal his or her true name, and any comments registered in the past months will be updated with true names unless the individual expressly asks the Standard to delete his or her posts.

The Butte daily wrote it was consistently encountering posts that “exceeded the bounds of civil discourse” and that many readers have written that abusive comments discouraged them from participation in the online discussion.

We would agree.

In the Ledger’s recent history, our online poll once allowed comments unbeknownst to us. We were surprised and somewhat taken back at the comments expressed and the approach of the discussion. It seems our discussion board, too, was fair game as long as readers didn’t have to divulge their identity.

And we feel an anonymity policy presents a double standard.

We, and other newspapers, wouldn’t allow the publication of anonymous letters to the editor or letters of a defamatory nature. In fact, in the industry, we could be setting ourselves up for a lawsuit if we knowingly allowed such discourse.

But in anonymous posts, there seemed to be no bounds.

We’ve frequently looked at comments posted after stories presented in other daily papers and been appalled at some of the comments and how they would appear to be acceptable.

In our view, the Standard is doing the right thing, although it has received many, many anonymous comments about the change. The online forum feels the newspaper is taking their rights away.

We disagree, and feel the same standards for posting comments in a print edition should be applied to comments posted online.

The nation’s founding fathers wanted to assure a free press and free speech, but they intended that right to carry with it responsibility.

But just as that precious right would stop short of allowing one to yell “fire” in a crowded theater, it shouldn’t mean that yelling “fire” in that situation is alright as long as long as you don’t let anyone know who you are.

PEOPLE and PAPERS



Photo by M. Scott Brauer

M. Scott Brauer shooting photographs around the world

By Rich Ecke, Great Falls Tribune

With less than a year to go before the 2016 presidential election, still photographer M. Scott Brauer of Boston is in the midst of covering an exciting Republican race for the nomination.

"It's just so colorful," Brauer said. In nearby New Hampshire, he has photographed all the major candidates for president, including Donald Trump.

"He's even more interesting in person, I can tell you that," Brauer said of Trump. The real estate developer and television personality drew big crowds to Laconia, N.H., several months ago.

"I heard two people say, 'His hair's not that bad,'" the 33-year-old Brauer said with a chuckle. Brauer also has irritated handlers for another GOP candidate, Marco Rubio, for using a strong flash, and he got booted from Rubio events.

Candidates are swarming about New Hampshire, a key early primary state, each visiting dozens of times.

"New Hampshire is absolutely crazy," Brauer said in an interview last week.

At 6 feet 5 inches tall, Brauer seemingly has an

advantage in being able to shoot over the top of big crowds. Yet in many situations, where he tries to get intimate shots, the reverse is true.

"I'm on the ground a lot," he said.

A 2000 graduate of C.M. Russell High School in Great Falls, Brauer is a study in contrasts.

"I almost always work alone," Brauer says.

At least that's from his side of his Canon camera lens. On the other side are amazing scenes and remarkable people across the world, captured at 1/100th or 1/1,000th of a second.

He has lived in Boston since 2011, after working in the photography mecca of New York City, in the heavily-populated Eastern Seaboard. Yet he grew up in Montana, one of the least-populated states in the country.

The successful freelance photographer attended the University of Washington in Seattle, where in 2005 he earned dual bachelor's degrees in philosophy and in Russian literature, language and culture. Yet now he gets paid for taking photographs.

What's up with that?

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PEOPLE and PAPERS

Brauer *Continued from Page 6*

Photography “is just kind of a hobby that turned into something more,” Brauer explained. “I got seriously interested in photography after inheriting my grandfather’s camera in high school.”

He worked for the Russell High School newspaper, the Stampede, and “really fell in love with the darkroom,” where he made photo prints by hand. Brauer took a break from photography during his early college years as a Husky, but he was drawn back to his hobby. He worked at an independent college newspaper, and also as photo editor at the official UW student newspaper. After college, he landed internships with the Black Star and VII (seven) photo agencies in New York City, and while in the Big Apple he freelanced for the New York Times. Then came internships at newspapers in the Midwest: a suburban Chicago paper, the Northwest Herald and the Flint Journal in Michigan.

In a change of scenery, he spent three years in China, and he has done photography projects in Russia. He freelances for A-list print media publications such as the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Time Magazine, Le Monde’s weekend magazine, New York Magazine’s Daily Intelligencer, and even the Massachusetts Institute of Technology News, plus other international media.

Freelance photography isn’t the easiest field to break into, Brauer conceded. “The first few years, this was definitely a struggle,” said Brauer, son of Harold and Connie Brauer of Great Falls. “I think for a long time they just shook their heads.”

At least Brauer rarely shoots wars or violence. “I don’t think any picture’s worth my life,” Brauer said. “It’s just not for me.”

However, in 2005, Brauer went on an assignment to Haiti, a country in great turmoil. Brauer assisted war photographer Antonin Kratochvil, who advised him on how to make his mark as a freelancer. “He said, ‘Just stay in the game as long as you can,’” Brauer recalled.

Brauer doesn’t claim to be at the top of his field yet, but a freelance photographer can make a good living with the requisite skills, plus some business sense and tact.

“The big secret is work hard and be friendly,” Brauer said. “There are a million photographers out there that are trying to get work.”

He loves taking still shots.

“It lets you linger on a moment,” Brauer explained. “It’s like poetry on the page. It captures it all.”

In 2012, Brauer took part in a U.S.-Russia Young Media Professionals Exchange, in which 12 American journalists and 12 Russian journalists traveled to the opposite country and worked in a newsroom for about a month. Brauer’s assignment was at TASS Photo, the oldest photo wire service in Russia, which began in 1926. Brauer has returned to Russia and China recently to work on projects.

Not that Brauer is attracted especially to authoritarian regimes. In high school, “I fell in love with Russian literature,” he said. Plus, “When you’re out in Siberia, it looks a lot like northcentral Montana.”

Beginning in 2007, he spent three years in China with his then-girlfriend and now-wife, Heidi Wickersham of Washington state, also a UW graduate.

“She speaks Chinese fluently,” Brauer said. “She wanted to live abroad.” Brauer was fascinated by China, but couldn’t find any stores with size 13 shoes, so he had to import them.

“I kind of stand out anywhere I go, especially in China,” he added.

To see 10 of Brauer’s photos on the Tribune’s website, courtesy of the photographer, go to Brauer’s official website, www.mscottbrauer.com, or follow him @mscottbrauer on Instagram. And thanks to Dominick Reuter for his photo of Brauer at work in New Hampshire.

Brauer enjoys his regular assignments, as well as documentary still photography. He is not sure exactly what the future holds. “I’ve already worked for a lot of publications that I’ve dreamed about working for,” Brauer said.

The condition of Brauer’s cameras reflects the pounding the devices have taken over the years; they typically last two years. Brauer estimated he has taken 500,000 photographs during the last six years alone. So does that mean he has already reached the milestone of shooting 1 million photographs in his lifetime? “It could be,” Brauer said.

Richard Ecke writes a weekly column on city life.

PEOPLE and PAPERS

SHERRY DEVLIN: My heartfelt thanks to you all

Sherry Devlin of the Missoulian, November 30, 2015



Sherry Devlin

From the first day I walked into the Missoulian newsroom in September 1979, I have been in awe of the incredible reporters, photographers and editors who have written the story of western Montana for this newspaper.

I have been honored to work alongside them, and am proud of all that we've accomplished over the years.

Our newsroom has been courageous in shining a light on those who violate the public trust, undaunted in exploring this crazy big state of ours, and joyous in sharing the successes of our neighbors.

We've had a hand in bringing about real and meaningful change. Our air and rivers are cleaner today. Our governments and leaders are more accountable. There are more bald eagles, grizzly bears and wolves. Drunken drivers are on notice that their selfish and deadly behavior will not be tolerated. The same goes for bullies and abusers.

We've celebrated the lives of so many truly remarkable Montanans: our children and their teachers, our veterans and fallen heroes, the athletes and mathletes and superheroes of kindness. We've put a human face on the news of each day, and given voice to those who live on the margins of our society.

The work, and all the rigors it entails, has been a joy.

That first day in the newsroom, I wrote a story about a summer rainstorm that washed so much mine waste into the upper Clark Fork that the river ran red. A year later, Atlantic Richfield Co. stunned the state by announcing the closure of its smelters in Anaconda and Great Falls. Another year later, arsenic was detected in Milltown's tap water, and the resulting cleanup extended the full length of the upper river and brought down Milltown Dam.

That first winter, I ventured out across the National Bison Range with wildlife biologists and students from the University of Montana who hoped to capture a few mountain goats. They gave me one assignment: When the helicopter herded the goats into a net held aloft by the students, I was to push pieces of garden hose onto their horns – a chore I did not truly appreciate until the first goat crested the ridge, panic stricken

and headed our way.

The adventures of a journalist's workday are unmatched. What other profession so routinely, even nonchalantly, provides its practitioners with such a vantage to history in the making?

I'm proud of how the Missoulian has always made our presence, and the expertise of our beat reporters, a priority. Our reporters were the first to expose over-cutting on the national forests, and later the over-cutting of corporate forests. On these pages, we provided the first in-depth reports on the consequences of a national policy that sought to extinguish all wild-fires.

Here, too, we showed the shortcomings, and tragic consequences, of our community's flawed response to reports of sexual assault, then dug into the ongoing efforts to improve. We have gone after thieves and cheats and crooked politicians and anyone who believes in conducting the public's business behind closed doors.

There is no greater responsibility for this or any newspaper.

As a newsroom, we have been bound together by these shared experiences. We've raised our families here, in good times and in heartbroken ones. We've relied on one another, and trusted one another, as co-workers and friends and fellow citizens. No one ever truly leaves the Missoulian newsroom family, although many have left the newspaper for other pursuits over the years.

Monday was my last day at the Missoulian. Thus, this thank-you note, not only to my co-workers but to the countless readers and sources who I've had the honor of working with over the years, and to the friends and family who have supported me at every step along the way.

I cannot begin to name here the many reporters, photographers and editors who I've had the pleasure and honor of working with over the years. But over the next few weeks, I intend to find each of you, individually, to say thanks. I have learned so much from you all, about courage and commitment, about the power and beauty of words and photographs, about the necessity of what we do. It's been a blast. I've never laughed so much, worked so hard, or felt such immense satisfaction as I have working with you. I look forward to my next adventure in journalism, whatever that may be, and to yours as well.

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PEOPLE and PAPERS

Devlin *Continued from Page 8*

And the sources: My heartfelt thanks to those of you who gave so generously of your time and expertise over the years. It takes much more courage to be a source in a newspaper story than to write the story. You've taken risks. You've understood why the public needs to know, and how that knowledge keeps our democracy strong. You've hung in there with us, even when the going got rough. I am going to track you all down, too, and say my thanks in person.

And the readers: You are a delight. Whether coming into the newspaper, or calling or emailing, whether you're here to praise or complain, I respect how much you truly care. The real joy of working at the Missoulian is the intensity with which western Montanans confront

the issues of the day – and, oftentimes, those who report on the issues of the day. We are all better because you demand no less than our best. Don't ever stop.

Most importantly, I want to thank my children, Conor and Kelly, for their love and encouragement and support over all these years. They literally grew up in the Missoulian newsroom. It couldn't have been easy, given the unpredictable nature of a reporter's day. Dinner was late, more times than not. Mornings were a footrace. Visits to school meant running into someone with a story idea, or a complaint, or a question about coverage. Through it all, you were rocks, not only enduring but encouraging me to keep going – and I will never be able to thank you enough. I love you, and am so proud to be your mom.

Montana gets a D for government accountability, transparency

By Tom Lutey, November 11, 2015

Montana government accountability and transparency is lacking according to a report released Monday by the Center for Public Integrity.

The Center, which spent a year measuring government accountability and disclosure in all states, gave Montana a D grade, down from the D+ the state got in 2012.

Half the states received similar grades. Although Montana's grade slid, other states also slid, giving Montana a No. 21 ranking comparably better than in 2012.

Issues plaguing the government, according to the report, included an overworked and understaffed state Political Practices office, and a costly public records system forcing citizens to sue the government when public employees refuse to release documents that by law should be public.

Campaign finance regulation took a hit for the size of the staff in the Commissioner of Political Practices office, where seven people processed more than 100 cases last election cycle. The report notes that a 2015 legislative budget committee tried to cut the salary of Political Practice's only staff attorney.

However, the state ranked 15th for political financing accountability and 17th for electoral oversight. Montana ranked 8th for legislative accountability.

Commissioner of Political Practices Jonathan Motl said the state deserved a much higher ranking. "I disagree with the political finance and electoral oversight rankings, even though we're rated 15th and 17th,"

Motl said. "I think we're No 1."

Motl said campaign accountability will improve this election cycle as political action committees and candidates begin reporting their finances electronically. It will be the first time candidates will know exactly how much money from PACs is at play in their races.

The worst marks came for public access to information, in which Montana received an F. The failing mark was generally balanced with praise for laws that on paper promised accountability, but lacked bite in practice, which is what Melody Martinsen, chairwoman of the Montana Freedom of Information Resources suspected.

"I would suspect that it's because our laws don't have teeth in them," Martinsen said. "In other words, it's up to the persons who believe they haven't received the data they need or access to the meeting they want to attend. The onus is on them."

State law doesn't impose damages for governments denying access to public records. Consequently, there's little incentive for the governments to comply with public records laws, said Martinsen, who has published a weekly newspaper in Choteau for more than 20 years.

Montana's open records law grants people the right to inspect any public writings, except when an individual's right to privacy exceeds the public's right to know.

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PEOPLE and PAPERS

Transparency *Continued from Page 9*

Typically, it's government agencies, not the individuals that cite privacy concerns when refusing to release public documents.

This year, when The Gazette inquired about the mishandling of public money at the Billings landfill, the city government not only denied the newspaper's public records request on privacy grounds, but also sued the newspaper. The city argued that releasing public documents would be a privacy violation.

A District Court judge ruled the city of Billings illegally withheld public documents and wrongly sued The Gazette. From start to finish, it took The Gazette nearly a year to get the public records it requested. The

city paid the newspaper's \$12,000 legal bill.

In 2012, the city of Billings cited individual privacy in denying The Billings Gazette the names of five city workers surfing sex websites on government computers. The Gazette sued and won. Ultimately, the city had to pay the newspaper's legal expenses.

Grades were issued before last week's revelation that Montana state agencies have been classifying government documents on a scale from public to top secret for the past two months.

Proponents for government transparency said the rating system gives the government a rubber stamp to close files it doesn't want the public to see.

ADVICE from the EXPERTS

You want to stay relevant? Be accessible

By Jim Pumarlo



Jim Pumarlo

A newspaper's credibility is directly linked to its ability to identify, collect and report the relevant community news. Then why do so many newspapers make it so difficult for readers to connect with reporters?

Let me explain. I'm passionate in my belief that community newspapers still can claim a stronghold in today's fractured media landscape – if they stick to the basics. That

means owning the franchise for aggressive reporting of local news. That will occur only if readers have a direct pipeline to editors and reporters.

Yes, I understand the important and necessary role of social media – both in collecting and reporting the news – in connecting with readers. Social media is integral in my day job directing communications and media relations for a statewide business advocacy organization.

But nothing replaces direct, one-on-one conversation. It's truly amazing the barriers that so many newspapers place between themselves and their readers – their news sources.

A few tips from someone who has sat on both

sides of the editor's desk:

- Post your contact information – prominently – on the home page of your website. Include phone numbers as well as e-mail addresses.
- Provide the direct phone numbers and individual e-mail addresses for staff, if available. Readers have no assurance that a general voice mail or e-mail boxes are regularly monitored and messages forwarded to appropriate staff.
- Keep contact information current. If you have voice mail, change your recording daily so readers know whether you are in the office and whether you are monitoring messages. Ditto for e-mail; use your "out of office" message when applicable.
- Avoid using automated phone answering services during regular business hours. If you must, callers still should have an opportunity to connect to a "live voice."
- Be responsive to customers. Be prompt in returning phone or e-mail inquiries.

I recently tried to submit a news item about a former resident to his hometown newspaper – the type of "people" items that remain the lifeblood of community newspapers. I searched the newspaper's website for at least 10 minutes for a list of reporters and contact information. I finally called the 800 number; the recording only gave me options to reach someone in the circulation department. I turned to Google, matching the newspaper's name with "e-mail addresses." It didn't surprise

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ADVICE from the EXPERTS

Relevant? *Continued from Page 10*

me, but it should concern the newspaper, when the search produced a website with the declaration that this newspaper “does not offer e-mail support.” Among the reasons: “few readers have wanted it.” Not exactly a ringing endorsement for the newspaper’s community connections.

I also vividly recall an instance years ago when telephones were the primary – the only – way to communicate. I called a fellow editor to ask a question. The receptionist politely responded that he did not accept any phone calls until after noon – not just that day, but any day – because he was on deadline in the morning. I always wondered: What if I had been a reader calling in with a breaking news tip?

I appreciate the frenzied pace of newspapers, no matter your department. Punching your DND button on

the phone or deferring to e-mail communication certainly minimizes your interruptions. Be careful though; it can backfire.

Remember, those interruptions can translate to opportunities – to resolve a delivery issue, to accept an ad, to explore a potential news story. Those are the connections that keep you relevant to your communities.

Jim Pumarlo writes, speaks and provides training on community newsroom success strategies. He is author of “Journalism Primer: A Guide to Community News Coverage,” “Votes and Quotes: A Guide to Outstanding Election Coverage” and “Bad News and Good Judgment: A Guide to Reporting on Sensitive Issues in Small-Town Newspapers.” He can be reached at www.pumarlo.com and welcomes comments and questions at jim@pumarlo.com.

Identify super PACs spending money in your market

Hundreds of independent expenditure-only committees, or so-called super PACs, have registered with the Federal Election Commission. These super PACs can spend unlimited amounts of money in support of political candidates or to advance a particular political issue, and they are already reserving broadcast air time in local markets in key states and congressional districts.

You can find contact information for super PACs and the planned broadcast spend in your market by going to a Federal Communications Commission hosted database that has this information in “political files” for full-power and Class A broadcast TV stations. (Note: Currently, radio stations and cable operators are not required to post their political files online, but they are required to make the information available and will do so if approached in person at the local station level).

How to access this information in a station’s political file:

- Go to the Federal Communications Commission website — <https://stations.fcc.gov/> — for TV Station Profiles and Public Information Files.
- Search for the station’s call sign under “Find a Station” or just enter the station’s call letters in the box.
- Click on the “Political Files” icon. (In the middle of the icons, has the “star” in it.)

While the information available about a broadcast political advertisement varies, you can find the planned schedule or time purchased, the rates charged, the name of the candidate, and contact information for the candidate or person purchasing the time for a super PAC.

When you check the file for a station, you’ll probably find a list of 2012 to 2016 and the number of files contained for each year. Don’t get excited about finding “2” in a station’s file for the 2016 (presidential year) races. For NBC stations, the “2” references appearances by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump on Saturday Night Live. Yes, that’s another part of the FCC requirements.

ADVICE from the EXPERTS

Want impact? Use a dominant visual

By Ed Henninger, Henninger Consulting

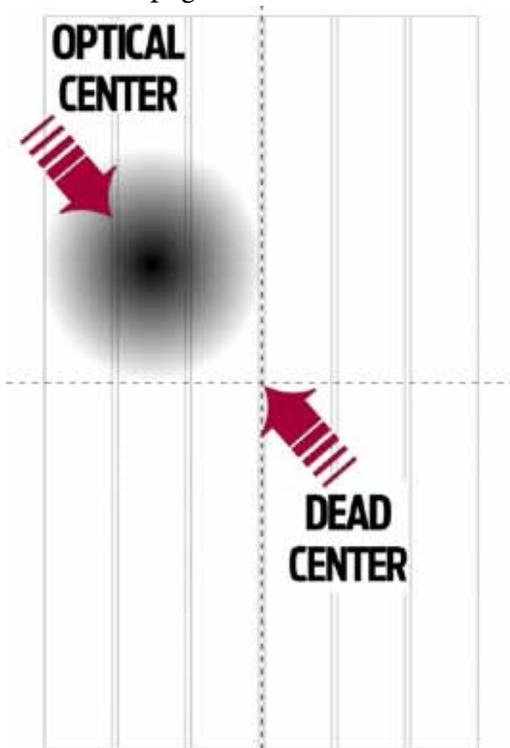


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Want to make your page—especially your front page—more compelling? Give it more impact? Get more readers to give it a close look?

Use a dominant visual.

Best to place your dominant visual over optical center of the page.



Most times, that will be a photo. But, occasionally, it may be a grouping of smaller pix or a graphic or illustration.

Whatever that visual may be, there's one quality it must have to make it work. That quality? Size. If your visual isn't large enough to dominate the page, then it isn't a dominant visual.

How big? My guideline has always been 3 columns wide by 8 inches deep, 4 columns wide by 6 inches deep—as a minimum. Again, that's a minimum. And, yes, those figures apply to tabloid pages as well. If your visual isn't big, it hasn't got the impact and pull you need to bring readers into the page.

You want readers to look forward to the content and impact of your pages—especially your front page and section fronts. One of the best ways you can do that is by offering them a dominant visual.

Other points:

RELATIVE SIZE: One of the ways you can guarantee the dominant size of your key visual is to take care that no other visual elements compete with it for attention. You can do this by making sure that other elements are no larger than half the size of your dominant visual.

OPTICAL CENTER: As indicated in the illustration, optical center is an area of the page that's above and left of dead center. Precisely how far above...and how far left? No one's been able to determine that, but we do know that optical center is an area of the page where the reader's eye naturally falls first. And that's where we want to place the dominant visual element.

THE FOLD: Does your dominant visual have to be above the fold? Well, on the front page, the answer is usually "yes." If you place the visual over the optical center, it goes without saying that it's also above the fold.

GROUPING: Instead of one visual element, it's OK to package a few together. This can work well, for example, if you have a group of photos taken at the same event.

CONTENT: Select an element with compelling content for your dominant visual. Check-passing photos and grip-and-grin shots certainly have their place in community newspapers, but they lack the interest needed to give the key visual strong reader appeal. If it's a photo, look for action and strong color.

CROPPING: Give the element even greater impact by removing unimportant or extraneous content. A photo of a car/truck crash, for example, need not show yards of pavement at the bottom and miles of sky at top.

WANT A FREE evaluation of your newspaper's design? Just contact Ed: edh@henningerconsulting.com 803-327-3322.