MNA Calendar

**FEBRUARY**
- 3: Nominations open for the 2020 Montana Newspaper Hall of Fame, Master Editor/Publisher Award and Dick Crockford Distinguished Service Awards
- 12: 2020 MNA Better Newspaper Contest entries closed
- 17: Federal Holiday: Presidents' Day

**MARCH**
- 15: National Sunshine Week
- 27: University of Montana School of Journalism job fair
- 27: Nomination deadline, 2020 Montana Newspaper Hall of Fame, Master Editor/Publisher Award and Distinguished Service Awards

**APRIL**
- 12: Easter Sunday
- 15: Montana Corporation Annual Report filing deadline with the Montana Secretary of State
- 24: MNA and MNAS Board of Directors meeting - Missoula

**MAY**
- 25: Federal holiday: Memorial Day
- 25: MNA office will be closed for the Memorial Day holiday

**JUNE**
- 11: MNA and MNAS Board of Directors Meeting - Kalispell
- 11, 12, 13: MNA office will be closed for the annual convention
- 12, 13: 135th MNA Annual Convention - Kalispell
- 13: 2020 MNA Better Newspaper Contest Award Banquet - Kalispell

MNA admits two online publications

The Montana Newspaper Association has embraced electronic news publishing by admitting two online-only publications as professional members. The board of directors voted in January to approve membership applications from the Havre Herald and Montana Free Press as professional members, making them the first two websites to join the association as full professional members.

The MNA amended its bylaws in 2017 to welcome websites as professional members, and the Free Press and the Herald have finally broken the ice.

Montana Free Press, founded in 2016, describes itself as an independent, nonprofit source for in-depth Montana news, information, and analysis. “MTFP seeks to uncover the truth and bring to light essential news stories by studying arcane bureaucratic processes, seeking out dark corners of major institutions, digging deep into data and documents, and holding those in power accountable to the people,” the publication says on its site.

The Havre Herald is an independent digital-only news organization that publishes news about Montana’s Hi-Line region. Launched in 2018 by Paul Dragu and Teresa Webber Dragu, the Herald says it focuses on relevant local stories that often require a deeper dive than the average news story.

“Our audience has grown and we’ve become a go-to source in the area. We average about 7,000 unique users a week and between 1,500 and 2,500 views a day,” Dragu wrote in the site’s membership application.

The primary benefits of professional membership are voting privileges within the association, eligibility for its annual contests, and participation in its advertising programs.

MNAS launches quarter-page advertising opportunity

The Montana Newspaper Advertising Service board of directors voted this month to launch an ambitious new statewide, quarter-page display advertising program. Called SQD (squid), the program will complement the SDAP, SCAN and SOAP programs and help sustain the Montana Newspaper Association as the news publishing industry evolves.

The plan endorsed by the MNAS board calls for the SQD program to begin a 90-day trial run on April 1. After the trial, the board will evaluate the success of the program and determine whether to continue it.

“The MNAS is excited to offer this new advertising program to both our members and customers” said MNAS President Jeff Martinsen of the Choteau Acantha. “We think there is untapped potential for the sale of quarter-page ads through the Statewide Display Advertising Program. We are encouraging all our member newspapers to talk to their advertisers and see whether this would be a good fit and a great opportunity for them to get their message out to a broader cross-section of Montana readers.”

Almost half of the MNAS’s operating revenue comes from the MNAS advertising services. Dues make up the bulk of the remainder. By participating in the statewide advertising programs, MNA members help support the association and avoid dramatic dues increases. Without the statewide advertising programs, the MNA would not be able to sustain all of its activities.

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Tough decisions by MNA and MNAS boards will strengthen association

By Matt Gibson

The Montana Newspaper Association and Montana Newspaper Advertising Service took some dramatic steps in January to position the MNA for success in 2020, launching a new statewide advertising program and shoring up the association’s finances.

Over the last two years, the MNAs, which provides almost half of the operating revenue for the MNA, has become heavily dependent on political advertising. Those ads helped us to a good year in 2018. But in the nonelection year of 2019, the association suffered. Revenue from our SDAP and SCAN programs declined dramatically, and the MNA significantly depleted its operating reserves.

To stanch the flow and help replenish our savings, the MNAs board decided at its Jan. 17 meeting to create a new statewide, quarter-page advertising program. The SQD (or squid) program will start a 90-day trial run on April 1, and offers significant revenue potential. Detailed information about SQD, including signup instructions, pricing and sales materials, will become available over the next several weeks. For more information about SQD, including signup instructions, pricing and sales materials, will become available over the next several weeks. For more on SQD, see the article on page one of this Press Pass newsletter.

The MNA and MNAS boards also took the unusual but not unprecedented step of suspending dividends from the statewide advertising programs for third quarter of 2019. Unfortunately, members that participate in SCAN, SDAP and SOAP will not receive their anticipated dividend checks at this time. The boards made an even bolder move and passed a budget that anticipates dividend payments will not be made at all this year, saving the association an estimated $20,000.

That’s tough medicine. But the news may not be as grim as it sounds. SDAP revenues have rebounded spectacularly in just the last several days, and 11 weeks of the year, including the entire month of May, have already sold out. If things go as well as hoped, the MNA and MNAS boards will have opportunities to reexamine the dividend payments later this year.

In the meantime, a finance committee has formed to help assess the MNAs’ footing and make strategic recommendations for the future, establishing reserve targets and solidifying our accounting practices.

And there’s more encouraging news! The MNA’s heavy reliance on advertising revenue helps keep dues from increasing. The MNA board approved a minimal cost of living increase of 1.7 percent to base dues for the coming year. Look for an email from me early next month detailing dues and assessments for each member newspaper.

We’ll get through this rough patch. We’ve got some work to do fortifying our advertising revenue in nonelection years and replenishing our operating reserves. But we’ll come out of it as a stronger association with a clearer understanding of our priorities and the values that bind our members together. I’m optimistic about the future and eager to help lead the way there.

Matt Gibson is the executive director of the Montana Newspaper Association.

Get involved!

The Montana Newspaper Advertising Service has a board vacancy.

Montana newspaper publishers or sales leaders interested in serving on a statewide industry board may apply to fill the remainder of a three-year term, expiring 2022. Applicants must be employed by a professional member of the Montana Newspaper Association.

Contact MNA Executive Director Matt Gibson at mgibson@mtnewspapers.com with your qualifications.

The base price for a SQD ad has been set at $2,995, and members that sell SQDs will receive a 50 percent commission, creating a $19,000 revenue opportunity for active sellers during the trial period. Participants will be in line to receive a 15 percent dividend on all sales. The MNAs will keep up to 85 percent of SQD sales made by the office, and up to 35 percent of member sales.

Look for more details to emerge in the coming weeks, including specific dimensions, signup instructions and sales materials.
135th ANNUAL CONVENTION
June 12-13, 2020

Hilton Garden Inn
Kalispell, Montana
Business Networking • Cocktails
Awards Banquet • Training • Professional Development
Plus all the fun the Flathead valley has to offer!
The Montana Newspaper Foundation is pleased to announce the awarding of three $1,500 grants to partially defray the expense of a paid intern at member newspapers during 2020.

- Bethany Monroe DeBorde, publisher, Fort Benton River Press
  Internship program: News reporting and photography

- Keith Hammonds, publisher, Boulder Monitor
  Internship program: Reporting

- Ashley Wise, managing editor, Miles City Star
  Internship program: Reporting

Internships offer great opportunities for students with a passion for the newspaper industry and our Montana Newspaper Association professional members. Students gain relevant firsthand experience and use their internship experience to secure good jobs and our MNA members build relationships that may lead to job candidates.

Congratulations to the winners!

The Montana Newspaper Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization governed by a board of directors for the express purpose of supporting education and professional development in the field of newspaper publishing.

The key to the success of the SQD program will be broad participation by member newspapers. Publishers with questions or concerns can reach out to MNA Executive Director Matt Gibson at (406) 443-2850 or via email at mgibson@mtnewspapers.com to learn more.

NEW Gold Level Associate Member

NEW Bronze Level Associate Members
For decades, the U.S. government used antitrust laws to limit and constrain the news business. Believe it or not, it actually stopped the sale of the Orange County Register in 2016 out of fears of a “monopoly over newspaper sales.” But enforcement in media goes only one way, and Big Tech has been allowed to strangle journalism in violation of long-standing antitrust principles.

Since the 1970s, antitrust law has been focused on the “consumer welfare standard.” This is the idea that business concentration doesn’t matter as long as consumers aren’t harmed. But under this standard, too much attention has been paid to monetary costs, and not enough to the other kinds of harms that result from a lack of competition.

Take privacy. Dominant services like Google and Facebook claim to deliver high consumer value because they are “free.” And while it’s true that they don’t require a monetary exchange, they do demand that consumers provide something often more valuable — information. These tech platforms remain opaque about what data is collected and how it is traded and monetized. As a result, anyone who uses Google or Facebook actually has no idea what they are paying for the service.

Another important, non-monetary cost is the lack of choice and innovation. When conduct by dominant companies deprives consumers of options in a market, they are immediately harmed. Look at local news. More than 1,800 news publishers have disappeared over the last 15 years, and it is estimated that there are at least 2,000 “news deserts” across the country — communities without a single local newspaper. And that’s just the beginning. Unless we change the digital marketplace for journalism, we are going to see huge areas of the country — including many major cities — without local reporters very soon. For people who want to read quality information about local politics or schools, the market’s answer will be, “You’re out of luck.” No choice.

News publishers are innovating like crazy and rushing to emphasize things like subscriptions, philanthropy and other forms of direct reader payment. That is all helpful but will also lead to a world in which communities that can pay for quality journalism will get it. Those that can’t, won’t. The challenges for underserved communities will be particularly severe.

Some argue for direct government funding for local news. Government support for networks like NPR, PBS and BBC is great, but nowhere (outside of a few authoritarian regimes) does government pay for a whole local news ecosystem. And I, for one, am not comfortable with the Fourth Estate being on a government payroll. According to a recent Knight Foundation report, at least 60% of Americans would oppose any government support for news publishing.

So that brings us back to the dominant tech giants. Most news consumption is digital and the primary way that readers get to reporting is through Google and Facebook. Those companies create no content themselves, but because of their digital dominance, they get the vast majority of the monetary and data benefit from journalism. This is the No. 1 reason readers are increasingly facing a lack of choice in local news.

So, why shouldn't tech companies deliver more value back to local journalism — particularly when the decline in local news is so urgent? That is a core idea behind the Journalism Competition & Preservation Act that has been introduced in both the House and the Senate. This bill would give news publishers the ability to collectively negotiate with the platforms for a better, more sustainable deal for local news. It would be a high-impact, low-cost way for the government to really help the news consumer now. A few backward-looking naysayers have complained that the bill could create a new “cartel” for local news. In the face of the market power of Google and Facebook and the extreme harm from a lack of consumer choice in local journalism, that stands as one of the most ridiculous and ironic counter-arguments of all time. Some people are just offended by the idea of anyone standing up to Big Tech.

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Big Tech  
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Losing choice in local journalism is a clear harm from digital consolidation. We need a collective response that restores that choice. The alternative is a future where Big Tech decides the news for all of us.

David Chavern is the president and CEO of News Media Alliance. This guest opinion appears courtesy of the Deseret News, which originally published it.

2020 MNA Better Newspaper Contest has opened for entries  
Deadline for submissions is February 12

The 2020 Montana Newspaper Association Better Newspaper Contest has opened for entries. The contest provides a great opportunity for professional members of the MNA to foster excellence in their newsrooms and earn recognition for the fine work they’ve done during the year.

Publishers have until Wednesday, February 12, 2020 to get their submissions completed. Full rules and instructions are available on the MNA website.

Colleagues in Wyoming have agreed to handle the judging. Winners will be announced on Saturday, June 13, during the 2020 MNA Annual Convention at the Kalispell Hilton Garden Inn.

We are using the Better BNC platform again to administer the contest, and each newspaper needs login credentials to submit entries. If the person handling contest entries for your newspaper has changed, or if you’ve lost your login information, please send an email to MNA Executive Director Matt Gibson, and he’ll get you set up with a username and password.

Montana Newspaper Association Press ID cards

The Montana Newspaper Association provides Press ID cards (credentials) as a no-cost service to our Professional Members.

To order a Press ID, please contact: Ryan, Member Relations, at 443-2850 or member@mtnewspapers.com

1. Press IDs are for newspaper journalists, photographers, newsroom staff, correspondents, reporters
2. Allow four days for processing and mailing
3. Electronic IDs are available same day
4. Press IDs expire three years from date of issue/renewal

When placing an order, please e-mail the following:
1. Email a current JPEG photo as an attachment and please ID the person in the photo (Beth - red sweater, etc.) if you are requesting multiple passes
2. Include the job title

Guidelines for picture content
1. The picture should be a close-up showing your head and shoulders
2. Pay attention to the background and setting…a solid color background works best
3. The Press ID is a photo identification: remove hats, sunglasses and be sure to look straight on
Local papers need press associations more than ever

By Peter Wagner

“By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall,” wrote Pennsylvanian activist John Dickinson in 1768.

Those words held true for the American colonies then and hold true for our free and paid paper industry today.

The newspaper and shopper business is often difficult today. One out-of-state publisher friend sent me a discouraging Christmas message this year. He wrote “with the economy hovering near a depression, and our farmers saved only by a bumper crop two years in a row, business has been tough. We’ve downsized our operation again and again and both my wife and I have taken outside jobs part of the time.”

But if times are tough with press associations, how would our business be without them?

Trade groups have always banded together to create a bigger voice in Washington and provide better opportunities at home. Our state and national press associations have lobbied for better postal rates, a greater understanding of the need for legal notices, more transparent open meetings, improved independent contractor laws and most importantly, among many other issues, “Freedom of the Press.”

Many state associations, and at least one national press association, have regularly made an expert available to offer specific advice on how to handle problems with local postal officials.

Others in that same national association have time and again traveled to Washington to testify before post office hearings in regard to mailing costs, on-time delivery and difficult, sometime unnecessary, postal regulations.

Additionally, paid and free paper press associations have helped both young and experienced editors and publishers find needed staff members, connect with professors and administrators at nearby journalism schools and obtain unbiased information regarding new ideas in management and changes in publishing equipment.

Without press associations, many papers would find it difficult to purchase libel insurance, afford a reliable attorney who understands newspaper issues, embark on industry-organized international tours or benefit from organizational sales of regional, state or national advertising sales.

Most importantly, without press associations many current and future independent publishers would find themselves without the value of volunteer one-on-one peer mentoring, the sharing of much-needed new revenue ideas, the joy of receiving publishing profession awards and recognition and the enduring social and professional relationships so important to us all.

Unfortunately, press associations are an endangered species. The nation’s large publishing chains are often no longer joining state and even national press associations. Others, when they do join, are requiring membership fees at greatly reduced per-publication rates.

“We have our own training, legal and lobbying departments,” the large groups say. “We can’t justify paying for the same services twice. Besides, we want our people at home, at work, and not off at some convention or conference.”

Smaller papers, too, are also not renewing their membership in local associations. “We just can’t afford it,” they claim.

But the truth is, “You cannot save yourself into success.” Publishers, like all businesses, need to invest in their knowledge and expand their connections to grow and profit. Press associations still provide solid roads to exceptional profit.

Having worked with almost all the press associations in America and Canada over the last two decades, I am worried about the future of press associations. I often tell participants at my seminars ”when I make any paper better, I increase the value and longevity of my publications.”

In a time when so many metro papers are declining and even disappearing, I see a good future for smaller, home-owned papers. Those publications, with a continued investment in providing local, credible information not available anywhere else, will still be desired and needed for a long time.

And with the growth of local digital publishing, combined with traditional printed papers, that positive future can extend far beyond anyone’s speculation or expectation.

Even the strongest independent publisher cannot stand alone. We need, and will continue to need, our press associations to be the united “grassroots” voice in our communities, state legislatures and in Washington, DC.

Encourage your friends and neighboring publishers currently wavering on the sidelines to join in and support the future of the “free press.” Let’s keep our press associations healthy and effective.

Want more information and motivation to help you tell your publication’s story? Experience more GET REAL straight talk from one of America's leading newspaper and shopper publishers and sales trainers. Contact Peter Wagner at pww@iowainformation.com or CELL 712-348-3550. Or contact him direct for proven sales training for your staff.

Peter W. Wagner
Creative House Print Media Consultant
pww@iowainformation.com
Cell: 712-348-3550

THE PRINTED PAPER IS STILL A PUBLISHERS BEST ASSET!
Seven tips for maintaining a cohesive work family

By Bob Berting

At a publication seminar I conducted, attendees talked about internal company friction and how staff members didn't seem to have respect for each other. Enmeshed in this problem is a list of demands on staff: deadlines, dealing with other departments, dealing with other co-workers, and pleasing management.

Although most of them thought of themselves as likeable, good personality, warm smile, etc, they were still having problems in their relationships with others. What is the answer to this situation? What has to be done to create a proper atmosphere of trust, understanding, respect and just plain courtesy?

The answer is to realign your vocabulary. It's not just a smile or a simple “how are you?” that gets an office aligned. Rather it's about understanding how simple expressions can help human relations.

Hers are 7 points that will change things in inter-office relations:

1. “I admit I made a mistake”
   How many times have you honestly made a mistake and were afraid to admit it—to a customer or co-worker? People are usually amazed to hear a comment like this and have a great deal of respect for someone who has the proper attitude and courage to say those important words.

2. “You did a good job”
   Salespeople need encouragement and praise. These simple words can have a big impact on the emotions of people you deal with.
   Isn't it nice to be recognized for what you do?

3. “What is your opinion?”
   Asking someone’s opinion is the mark of a great team player who truly respects others, and can be very helpful in brainstorming sessions. This action increases ownership to new ideas.

4. “Would you please...?”
   This simple phrase is very appropriate in stressful situations and can be effective also in dealing with customers.
   The word “please” costs nothing to use, yet it buys so much.

5. “Thank you”
   How many times do we forget to say those two words? We would have a better work environment as well as building better relationships with our co-workers.

6. “We”
   The most important word. This key word is the foundation of team effort. It is effective in giving presentations to major account prospects, including media buyers.

7. “I”
   The least important word. This is a word that, unfortunately, dominates our conversation and can cause bad vibrations if used too often. This word is good for taking responsibility but not when discussing a positive team effort. How many sports professionals would be successful if they said, “I won the ball game?”

In closing…
   Think about these words and the impact they have on employee relations—and customer relations. Think about these appropriate words and use them during your workday for the situations that cause any friction between you and your co-workers.

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Bob Berting is a professional speaker, advertising sales trainer, publisher marketing consultant, and leading columnist in many national and regional newspaper trade association publications. He is the author of 3 best-selling e-books for the newspaper industry: “Dynamic Sales and Image Power”—“Advanced Selling Skills For The Advertising Sales Pro”—and his latest e-book “Power Selling Tools For The Advertising Sales Consultant.” He can be reached at 317-849-5408 or bob@bobberting.com. Bob’s 3 e-books can be ordered from his website, bobberting.com.
Three rules to follow to become a super salesperson

By John Foust

Jim was a super salesperson. He was so good that he broke all kinds of records at the publishing company where he worked. He consistently brought in more new business than anyone else on the advertising staff. And his numbers always ranked at the top of the weekly and monthly sales reports.

Karen, Jim’s former manager, told me that he was the most disciplined team member they had ever had. “Jim was sell-sell-sell all the time. He came to the office every morning at seven o’clock, so he could leave voice mail messages on his prospects’ office phones. Then throughout the day, he followed a routine of prospecting and writing proposed media schedules. Everything he did was geared toward closing the deal, so he could move on to the next prospect. If he lost a sale, it didn’t slow him down at all. He just brushed it off and kept going.

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“Jim generated a lot of revenue, but the picture wasn’t as rosy as it sounds,” Karen explained. “After he made a sale, he left everything else in the creative department’s hands. . . .”

“Jim generated a lot of revenue, but the picture wasn’t as rosy as it sounds,” Karen explained. “After he made a sale, he left everything else in the creative department’s hands. He was the one who had direct contact with his accounts, but he never developed any kind of strategic guidelines to follow. The creatives were on their own, because there was nothing specific to help them differentiate Advertiser A from Advertiser B. As a result, a lot of those ads didn’t work — and advertisers didn’t renew their contracts. That put Jim in a position where he had to prospect and sell even harder to make up the lost revenue. It was constant churn.”

After a year or so, Jim left for a job in another industry and Karen started insisting on three steps for her team to incorporate in the sales process.

1. Set realistic expectations. “It all starts here,” she said. “If people think that putting just any kind of ad in our paper — or on our web site — will automatically bring new customers, they are wrong. It’s the sales person’s job to establish the right expectations. An ad with a photo, a slogan and a logo will take many repetitions to create brand awareness. But an ad which promotes a timely offer or seasonal sale will be more likely to create immediate results.”

2. Get the right kind of information. “Most advertisers know enough to help us put together workable ad campaigns,” she said. “We just need to ask the right questions and make the effort to understand their businesses.”

The questions should be simple and open-ended. What kind of results did they get from previous campaigns? What worked? What didn’t work? How are they different from their competitors? How can people benefit from using their products and services? That’s the kind of information that helps a creative department produce strong ads.

3. Monitor results. “It’s common sense to follow up frequently to see how the ads are working,” Karen said. “If something needs to change, it’s best to find out before contract renewal time.”

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. E-mail for information: john@johnfoust.com. Copyright 2019 by John Foust. All rights reserved.