

AlaPressa

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA PRESS ASSOCIATION

JANUARY 2021

Important Dates

Thurs.-Fri., Feb. 11-12

[Virtual Winter Media Summit](#)

[Register today!](#)

America's Newspapers Webinars

Tues., Feb. 16, 2 p.m.

[Medill Subscriber Engagement](#)
[Index Informational Meeting](#)

This webinar will cover the topics of best practices in subscriber acquisition, engagement and retention, and will detail how the MSEI project's data exploration tool will drive actionable insights.

[Archived Webinars](#)

Remember these webinars are free to APA members.

Time to register for the 2021 APA Virtual Media Summit

Change in subscriptions for APA dues

Daily Mountain Eagle moves from five to three print days

How to improve media literacy in the age of misinformation

Newspaper Association Managers launch nationwide public notice website

DOL ruling allows for reporters and photographers to be treated as salaried employees

Are you ready to win?

Editorial Deadline : March 8, 2021

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Time to register for the 2021 APA Virtual Media Summit

The 2021 APA Media Summit is just around the corner: Feb. 11-12. Registration for this virtual event is free, but members are required to register to participate. Click [HERE](#) to register.

Programs begin Thursday, Feb. 11 at 1 p.m. with Jim Pumarlo, a newspaper consultant and frequent columnist in AlaPressa. He will talk about how the coronavirus pandemic is dominating headlines and reshaped daily routines. Business news from all aspects deserves extra attention during these extraordinary times. This is also an opportunity to think about expanded business coverage during ordinary times. Stories about employers and employees also have a big impact on communities.

At 3 p.m. publishers will have the opportunity to visit via Zoom with students from journalism programs throughout the state. This is always a popular program during our in-person meetings.

On Friday, Feb. 12, the programs begin at 10 a.m. with Russell Viers discussing the alternatives to Adobe's Creative Cloud. As the cost of upgrading

Adobe's subscription models continues to increase, newspapers are struggling to find cost-effective solutions.

Russell is a trainer of Illustrator, InDesign, Photoshop and Acrobat/PDF, so bring your questions for discussion.

At 12:30 p.m., we will have a membership meeting and installation of new officers. In normal times, we would recognize the Lifetime Achievement and Emerging Journalist recipients at this event. The recipients will be announced in the convention publication, and the recognitions will be held during the 2021 Summer Convention, June 24-26.

The afternoon programs will include Brad Hill, the CEO of Interlink and a member of the USPS Periodical Advisory Group. He will share his knowledge of the current postal situation and advise members on the best actions for 2021.

At 3:30 p.m., the Summit will close with an idea exchange program – It's Five O'clock Somewhere. Bring your preferred beverage and your best revenue idea for a chance to win the \$250 grand prize. A total of \$500 in prize money will be awarded.

Change in subscriptions for APA dues

The APA board has approved a change in the subscriptions that members are required to send to the APA office as part of their annual dues. In the past, newspapers have sent two copies of each edition they print to APA and two to Magnolia Clipping.

APA uses these copies for tearsheets as proof of publication for ads placed through ANAS. In recent years, more and more of ANAS clients are requesting e-tears. With these changes, APA now requests one hard copy and one electronic copy or access to your online edition.

A letter is attached with more details.

If you have an e-edition, please provide login information to access current and past editions. If you do not have an e-edition, please contact Shaina at the APA office, and she will provide instructions on how to upload to a dedicated FTP site.

Please continue to mail one hard copy to: APA, 600 Vestavia Parkway, Suite 291, Vestavia Hills, AL 35216. Magnolia Clipping will utilize the electronic editions, so once you submit the information for us to get electronic issues, you can stop mailing them hard copies.

Thanks in advance for your help in making this change.

Daily Mountain Eagle moves from five to three print days

The Daily Mountain Eagle in Jasper has cut print days from five to three days a week as part of a new "LOCAL FIRST" initiative. The page count for the print days have increased, with all local front page news and features.

Publisher James Phillips says most Associated Press Content will be eliminated in order to provide readers with news they cannot get anywhere else. All comics and puzzles will be published in the three print editions.

Their website, mountaineagle.com, will be a real-time news source with content updated throughout the day. The paper also has a newsletter each Monday, and they plan to add video content on the days they do not publish.

In his column announcing the changes, Phillips said, "It is an organic process where we expect more changes in content to be made as we move forward. Evolving doesn't happen in a day, but it is necessary in our business if we are going to continue to thrive while other newspapers struggle to survive."

How to improve media literacy in the age of misinformation

By John Sharp/al.com

Following the violence at the Capitol, fueled by misinformation spread online about the outcome of the presidential election, AL.com asked media experts their thoughts about improving media literacy in this charged political era. Here were some of the comments:

Dennis Bailey, a Montgomery attorney and longtime media law practitioner, said the best approach is for news consumers to analyze all sides of an issue.

"I would recommend that you do not always listen to the news you agree with and that it's important to hear the sides you don't agree with subject to your ability to have time to do that," Bailey said. "But

to be a differentiating on the type of news consumed online. Taylor said that "maybe that comes with a disclaimer" at the beginning of a TV news show or on a website that differentiates opinion from fact-based reporting.

She said the shifting between hard news content and opinionated programming on 24-hour cable TV news stations is confusing to the viewers.

"Because these news shows are on back-to-back, there is a misunderstanding on what the opinion is and what is the news part," said Taylor. "We see this on The Today Show where the hosts ruminate on the topics of the day and then talk about their families before tossing it

people to do this hard work" of verifying the source of the information they are consuming daily. He suggested making basic journalism or mass media literacy a "core credit" in college, or even introduce the class in high school.

"That we teach how journalism works, and how you verify sources and evaluate sources," he said. "That you ask about this person, 'What is their skin in the game?' It's about whether I should trust

"Ultimately, we will need to see structural intervention and meaningful regulation. This should include a better-funded public media system to provide a reliable alternative to profit-driven news and information."



getting from one source is probably not a good idea in today's world."

Phillip Rawls, a retired journalism professor at Auburn University and a former longtime journalist with The Associated Press, said websites need to do a better job of labeling opinion and analysis stories and need to make them look different from news stories.

"News organizations' websites often put a small 'sponsored' or 'sponsored content' label by ads, but to the average person, this material looks very much like news stories," Rawls said. "Doing a better job of branding news websites would help the public distinguish what is news, what is opinion and what is advertising. Some news organizations let staff members write news stories and opinion pieces. That also leads to confusion among the public, and it diminishes the value of a well-known byline."

Robbyn Taylor, a lecturer of journalism and communication at Troy University, said there needs to be a "national understanding" about the difference in the types of media that is consumed by users.

She, like Rawls, said there needs

back to the news desk."

She said that the public, in general, needs to take ownership on their own media literacy.

Taylor said, "We cannot pretend to be the victims of this anymore. We know it happens. We have to be good consumers of the media."

A.J. Bauer, an assistant professor in the Department of Journalism and Creative Media at the University of Alabama and author of the book, "News on the Right," said a stronger and robust discussion of facts is needed.

He said the Federal Communications Commission can take more of a lead in cracking down against outright false information spread through broadcasting platforms. He said, "We have had 70 to 80 years of a defanged FCC. But there is nothing stopping a new administration in getting vigorous regulators in there to get it done."

Justin Blankenship, assistant professor of journalism at Auburn University, said that "ideally, some media literacy education on a broad scale would help this problem."

He said he has realistic "doubts asking

something that comes from USA Today or one of these off-kilter sites. I would hope teaching people to do this would help."

Victor Pickard, an American media studies scholar at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the 2019 book, "Democracy without Journalism? Confronting the Misinformation Society," said that greater media literacy "is always important," but that it places the responsibility on the audience instead of the "tremendous unaccountable power of irresponsible news media and social media corporations."

Pickard is an advocate of a better-funded public media system. In his book, he suggests the potential of publicly funded newspapers.

"Ultimately, we will need to see structural intervention and meaningful regulation," said Pickard. "This should include a better-funded public media system to provide a reliable alternative to profit-driven news and information. It might also include a return to public interest obligations that we once tried to apply to broadcasters."

Newspaper Association Managers launch nationwide public notice website

Newspaper Association Managers, Inc., a consortium of North American trade associations representing the industry, has launched a website aimed at promoting legal notices in newspapers.

The website, USALegalNotice.com, provides direct access to 47 public notice websites from across the country, each of which is operated by state newspaper associations. The site allows the public to more easily access legal notices nationwide, including foreclosures, public hearings, financial reports, ordinances and resolutions, and other important government proceedings.

"For centuries, newspapers have published public notices in order to make vital government information transparent and accessible to citizens," said NAM President Steve Nixon, who also serves as

the executive director of the Saskatchewan Weekly Newspapers Association. "In the last several decades, newspapers and newspaper associations have worked to broaden that effort by aggregating these notices on public notice websites that maintain independent, third-party oversight.

"The launch of USALegalNotice.com allows the industry to continue to build on its mission of informing the public about government actions and facilitating participation in the democratic process."

As the most trusted source of information in their communities, newspapers are committed to making the public aware of important civic matters that affect them. NAM's launch of USALegalNotice.com allows the industry to continue distributing public information to the largest possible audience.

About NAM: Newspaper Association Managers, Inc., is a professional organization comprised of the executives of state, regional, national and international newspaper associations headquartered in the United States and Canada.

NAM was founded in 1923 in an effort to bring together state press association managers to work toward addressing challenges and opportunities in the newspaper industry.

The organization hosts various meetings throughout the year for its members and is also responsible for the coordination and promotion of National Newspaper Week each October.

Industry

DOL ruling allows for reporters and photographers to be treated as salaried employees

Updated guidance says duties of small town and local journalists can qualify for the creative professional exemption to federal overtime rules; professional exemption is not limited to journalists working in major markets. *(From America's Newspapers)*

The United States Department of Labor published four opinion letters in response to requests for an opinion regarding an interpretation of various aspects of federal wage and hour laws. One of those requests, Opinion Letter FLSA2021-7, on behalf of unnamed members of the America's Newspapers membership, requested the DOL provide guidance as to whether local small-town and community news source journalists are creative professionals under the Fair Labor Standards Act, and thus, exempt from the FLSA's obligations to pay overtime as a result of federal law.

The FLSA's creative professional exemption allows newspapers to pay reporters and photographers a salary as opposed to hourly if their primary duty requires "invention, imagination, originality or talent in a recognized field of artistic or creative endeavor." 29 C.F.R. 541.300(a)(2)(ii).

The DOL recognized that in light of technological advancements that have changed the way in which news is gathered, packaged and reported,

including a focus on "context-based" reporting rather than the "just the facts" approach of decades past, prioritizing substantive analysis and commentary in reported stories, has changed the nature of the written and analytic component of journalism for print, broadcast and digital media employers.



The DOL recounted the history and early analyses of journalists and the professional exemption, noting that journalists' status as creative professionals has been a question since the government's first attempts to regulate wage-and-hour issues. The DOL concluded that, in contrast to prior readings of the FLSA's creative professional exemption to overtime, it would give the creative professional exemption a "fair (rather than a narrow) interpretation."

The DOL concluded that, under a fair reading of the creative professional exemption:

- Journalists whose primary duty requires "invention, imagination, originality, or talent" are not confined to national networks and major media markets.

- The FLSA should not be construed to find that the majority of local print, digital and broadcast journalists perform work that is not creative in nature.

- Every journalist who performs the appropriate primary duties qualifies for the creative professional exemption, regardless of the size, prestige or geographic reach of the journalist's employer (so long as their work product is not subject to substantial control by the employer, and the journalist meets the exemption's salary level).

The DOL agreed that the following journalist duties and requirements are within the creative professional exemption:

- Originating and developing creative, engaging, shareable, content-driven stories, relying on creativity, memorable storytelling and unique perspectives.

- Identifying, researching and interviewing sources of background information, sources of current information, subjects and witnesses.

DOL ruling continued on page 5

Industry

DOL ruling continued from page 4

- Composing and producing unique and captivating stories.
- Using creative photographic techniques to capture stories through photographs and video presentations.
- Using creative techniques, such as graphics and new forms of media (viewer pictures, webcam interviews, etc.) to enhance stories.
- Identifying and synthesizing documents and data from numerous sources to develop original content, sometimes for specialized rather than general audiences, independent of daily news events.
- Interpreting and analyzing developing news stories.
- Maintaining a strong, creative and engaging social media and community presence to engage readers or viewers

directly to drive readership or viewership.

- Operating autonomously and without constant supervision, subject to occasional check-ins and final editorial review for print or broadcast.

- Maintaining composure and professionalism while continuing to execute their duties as a journalist, without direction, during live breaking news situations.

America's Newspapers Board Member Camille Olson, of Seyfarth Shaw LLP, described the Opinion Letter as the first guidance provided by the Department of Labor that recognizes that technological changes and evolving consumer preferences for news stories that provide original, creative, individualized analysis and perspective on topics is not limited to work performed by journalists at major national news outlets, but also is applicable to work performed by journalists at local newspapers and television stations. The Opinion Letter also makes clear that,

contrary to prior Department statements and positions, the routine editing of a journalist's work product and editorial review does not constitute "substantial control" by the newspaper.

Olson encourages newspapers to take a fresh look at the specific duties of its reporters and photographers, directed by the guidance provided in the Opinion Letter. Unless a contractual or applicable local law requires a reporter or photographer to be treated on an hourly basis, the newspaper may have the option of treating the journalist on a salaried, overtime exempt, basis if their primary duty includes the above-described duties, and they are paid a salary of at least \$684 a week or \$35,568 annually. Olson predicts that the Opinion Letter's modern, balanced, critical analysis of specific duties of today's local journalists will serve as helpful guidance now, and also in the coming years, for newspapers, digital media companies and local broadcasters.

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Columns

Execute your strength: Put names and faces behind the stories



by Jim Pumarlo

How many newsrooms have received complaints about coverage of local public affairs – specifically meetings? It might be the city council, school board, county board or one of the numerous other government bodies under your microscope.

From an elected official: “You didn’t give the full story. Where was my quote?”

From a person who spoke during a contentious hearing: “How come the other side received more attention? Again, how come you didn’t quote me?”

From a reader who did not attend the meeting: “Why was the decision made without public input? We’re always kept in the dark.”

Editors and reporters constantly evaluate how they deliver the news, especially when it comes to public affairs. The most meaningful stories are those that interpret the practical impact of policy-making. The need to communicate those decisions looms even more important as access to local government is diminished during the pandemic.

Newspapers can no longer simply regurgitate a body’s proceedings from beginning to end. Newsrooms also must look at the continuum of coverage, going beyond the blow-by-blow reports of meetings.

Here is one list of ideas to enhance coverage of public affairs.

Tour the town. Familiarize yourself with the agenda – at least the major items – prior to a meeting. Names and places are at the heart of most decisions. Connect with the subjects firsthand.

Identify the news. Write the headline and a summary paragraph. It will help focus your writing. If you don’t know where you’re going with a story, your readers will be lost as well.

Rate the news: Some stories warrant front page. Some belong on inside pages. Other actions can be mentioned in a package of briefs or in bulleted items. Some agenda items, even if they prompted discussion, should never see the light of day in your publications.

Avoid chronological reports. Announcing that a group met is not the lead, especially when a story appears two or three days after the meeting.

Put items in descriptive terms. Brighten writing by making the content

more understandable. For example, which sentence are more readers likely to connect with: “The city is looking to develop a three-acre parcel of land” or “The city is looking to develop a parcel of land about the size of three football fields.”

Translate statistics. Reports are often filled with numbers, and percentages can be meaningless. For example, a 5-percent increase in garbage fees is better reported as the specific dollar impact on households, retailers, manufacturers.

“The strongest coverage of public affairs is two-pronged: solid advances to inform readers and promote robust community discussion, and follow-up reports that provide meaningful interpretation of actions taken by elected bodies. As part of any beat, reporters should have regular dialogue with elected and appointed officials. Some of the most important stories can occur between meetings.”

Include the voices of those affected.

At the meeting: As one editor smartly phrases it, write for those at the back of the room and not the front of the room. Be selective when quoting the officials around the table. Pay attention to what the audience says.

After the meeting: Deadlines might dictate reporting only the actions taken

by a body. Provide follow-up stories on the impact of decisions. How will families be affected by higher school extra-curricular fees? What’s the impact of an ordinance to eliminate all neon lights on storefronts? How will rezoning affect agricultural properties?

Pay attention to committee action: You may not cover every meeting, but be aware of key discussions. Certain committee decisions may foreshadow what likely will be the final vote on a topic.

Track issues. Prepare a summary paragraph of an issue that can be inserted in all stories. Track key dates and votes on the issue to insert as a sidebar, where appropriate.

Providing accurate and meaningful reports is the primary task. But words may well go unread unless equal attention is given to presentation. Editors and reporters should review agendas to brainstorm ideas for graphics and photos.

And don’t stop with the print edition. Coverage should span the range of digital platforms at your disposal. Are you tweeting meetings? Are there opportunities to post video? What about creating a hash tag to convene and enhance a communitywide conversation on topics of particular importance?

The web is useful on two fronts. It allows for immediate reports and places nondaily media on equal footing with daily competition. It has no space constraints and therefore allows for publication a variety of reports, speeches and detailed statistics.

The strongest coverage of public affairs is two-pronged: solid advances to inform readers and promote robust community discussion, and follow-up reports that provide meaningful interpretation of actions taken by elected bodies. As part of any beat, reporters should have regular dialogue with elected and appointed officials. Some of the most important stories can occur between meetings.

Make no mistake: Producing solid coverage of public affairs demands hard work – and the effort will reap dividends for everyone. Citizens will be more engaged in policy-making. Elected bodies will appreciate the additional attention to and participation in their decisions. And newspapers will increase their relevancy to readers.

Jim Pumarlo writes, speaks and provides training on community newsroom success strategies. He can be reached at jim@pumarlo.com.

Columns

12 ad design tips



*Ad-libs
by John Foust*

Want to get more eyes on your ads? Let's take a quick look at some ad design tips:

1. Keep things simple and uncluttered. The four basic elements of a print ad are (1) headline, (2) illustrative element, (3) body copy and (4) logo. When they are arranged in a way that is easy to follow – and when there are no unnecessary images – the ad is more likely to be noticed.

2. Use easy-to-read line breaks in headlines. A line break is where one line ends and the next line begins. Since readers naturally pause for a split second at the end of a line, the break should be placed to look visually correct -- and sound right in the mind. Here are two headlines. The second one works better.

Save big on ceiling fans	Save big on ceiling fans
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3. Use a graphic hook. A dominant visual element stands out on the page

or on the screen. If an ad features a number of illustrations or photos, make one considerably larger than the others. Don't hesitate to make the image so large that it bleeds off the edge.

4. Use white space. Like a room with furniture which is placed too close together, a crowded ad doesn't provide enough room to navigate. In addition to giving readers some walking room, white space can be a powerful graphic hook.

5. Don't use distracting borders. It's what's inside the border that counts. The border shouldn't become an extra element.

6. Use all-caps sparingly. There are two times to use all upper-case characters: (1) in short words in a short headline or (2) in a proper name, like IBM, BMW or NHL.

7. Use readable fonts. Trendy styles can be difficult to read. It's best to stick with traditional fonts. Generally speaking, serif fonts are more legible in lengthy body copy and bolder sans serif fonts are fine for headlines.

8. Put the logo at the bottom right or bottom center. Resist the temptation to place the logo at the top. Because we read from top to bottom and from left to right, an ad's logical ending

point – the spot for the logo – is at the bottom right or center.

9. Use relevant illustrations and photos. Pictures must be meaningful and should clarify the headline. The best illustrations show the advertised product in use or demonstrate a benefit.

10. Set body copy flush left. Ragged left text is nearly impossible to read, because readers are accustomed to starting each line at a consistent left margin. Justified copy blocks are problematic, as well, because they create wide spaces between some words.

11. Use color with restraint. Research shows that color helps ads stand out. But don't overdo it. Too much color creates clutter. You've probably seen ads that look like an accident in a crayon factory. That's no way to appeal to readers.

12. Stay away from reverses. It's not a good idea to use white images and words on a dark background. Readers are accustomed to dark print on a light background. Make it easy for them.

John Foust conducts training programs for newspaper advertising professionals. E-mail for information: john@johnfoust.com

Help Wanted

News Reporter/Editor - Grove Hill, AL

Weekly newspaper group in southwest Alabama seeking news reporter/editor to cover community news and sports. Requirements: A self-starter with a nose for news and an ability to write engaging and interesting stories with photo skills and computer pagination skills. Experience preferred. Competitive salary/benefits. Please send resume and work samples to Jim Cox, jimcox@tds.net, or mail to The Clarke County Democrat, P.O. Box 39, Grove Hill, AL 36451.

Managing Editor - East Central AL

If you are an experienced managing editor looking for a nationally recognized, progressive newspaper that has successfully blended print and social media,

Tallapoosa Publishers, Inc. wants you.

You will lead the team that produces an award-winning twice-weekly newspaper and four community weekly newspapers located around Lake Martin in east-central Alabama near Auburn University. We are strong and growing and our properties produce quality local journalism, compelling design, and exceptional sports coverage for a dynamic and growing area. The Alexander City Outlook recently took home 65 awards in the Alabama Press Association convention, including General Excellence two years in a row.

Our properties include The Alexander City Outlook, a 3,500 circulation twice weekly; four weeklies, The Wetumpka Herald, the Tallassee Tribune, The Eclectic Observer and The Dadeville Record and associated websites. We cover both

rural and fast-growing suburban areas surrounding one of the largest recreational lakes in the South.

The successful candidate will help us move the organization forward with strong leadership skills, have a vision of our continued integration of print and social media, be able to identify and develop talent and be willing to become immersed in our communities. The ability to write, edit, and contribute to the daily product when needed is essential. Pagination skills are helpful but not required.

Salary and bonuses approx. \$50K, an excellent benefits package, bonus opportunities, and advancement based on performance.

Please a resume, samples of your work and a cover letter to Steve Baker at steve.baker@alexcityoutlook.com.