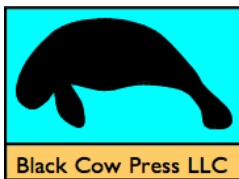


20 WAYS TO RE-INVENT THE LOCAL PAPER

A FEW IDEAS
ON HOW TO GET STARTED

By

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END THE PESSIMISM AT YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

SOLUTIONS TO RENEW YOUR LOCAL FRANCHISE

**LOCAL NEWSPAPERS ARE AMONG THE NATION'S MOST IMPORTANT AND
INFLUENTIAL BRAND NAMES.
WHAT TO DO TO KEEP THAT LEGACY AND HISTORY ALIVE.**

Imagine your city without your paper. Publishers, editors, managers and owners like you are worrying, not only about having to lay off staff, but who will cover the community in a meaningful way. Someone must, of course.

In Economics 101, it's the classic "free rider" problem. Who will attend planning meetings and the statehouse? Who will investigate police and crime? Will news only get covered when there is an outburst, and it somehow gets posted by some unwashed blogger? Let's call it the era of "Don't Taze Me Bro" journalism.

But it does not have to be that way. There is a role for your local paper.

That being said, there is a problem for you. The incredible 30 percent margins, unbelievable power and unassailable position of your regional paper have all made it hard for you to know what to do, and unable to act like the underdog. So far, your paper has redesigned pages, shortened articles, cut staff, eliminated bureaus, reduced paper size and redesigned your website now about, oh, 10 times. What the industry has done is put the newspaper in a severely reduced competitive position at a time when you need your scale and power more than ever.

Newspapers are the point where radio was after the advent of television. For years after television arrived, radio networks ran Hoover-era schedules of soap operas, dramas and westerns, even as television encroached on its audience. Radio's audience declined. But one day, clever station managers realized that if radio was to survive, new leadership would have to remake it completely. Somewhere in the 1950s, the proper mix of news, d.j.s, traffic, weather, music and talk radio was invented, and the great radio stations survived. Rock music arrived. FM took off. And radio's KDKA, WABC, KYW and the like thrived again.

The Greatest Regional Brands

Like the great radio stations, newspapers are important regional brands. *The Hartford-Courant. The Virginian-Pilot. The Richmond Times-Dispatch. The Los Angeles Times. Louisville Courier-Journal. Newark Star-Ledger. The Baltimore Sun. The Miami Herald. The New York Post.*

These franchises have legs, and the public trusts them, even though they curse the editorials. Use that legacy and history. People like the idea of reading a newspaper. Do not let your brand go the way of the regional department store.

Let's remember the below:

- **1910:** Recorded music will kill the orchestra.
- **1930:** Radio will kill the newspaper, *and* the music industry.
- **1950:** Television will kill the newspaper, and movies.
- **1982:** Cable will kill the newspaper and the network news.
- **1995:** The Internet will kill the newspaper and the music industry.
- **2002:** The Internet will save the newspaper and kill the movie industry.
- **2009:** Kindle kills the newspaper, and bloggers instead scoop the greatest story of all time, the Second Coming!

Let's get serious. Newspapers *can* reinvent their century old brands, and you are in a position to make that happen. Unless you lose your nerve.

What to do?

First, believe that there are solutions. These might not exactly be right for you. But the important point is not to give the pessimism an inch. Instead, realize that there is a changed environment, and you need to establish a process for coming up with, and implementing, ideas. New ideas. And you have to completely commit to killing sacred cows. Radio killed off *Dark Shadows*. CBS took the risk of moving Edward R. Murrow from radio to television. You need to be prepared to do things differently.

These 20 are just a start:

1. **Make inserts cost-prohibitive.** Saturday and Sunday papers are now a pile of ads, and while there is income in allowing inserts, what is lost is not only the identity and brand of a newspaper, but the hole for news. It's gone. Sunday papers have disappeared, and it is time to bring them back. Many Sunday supplement advertisers would go into R.O.P. ads if they were made to, but newspapers have allowed this silly practice to become habit. Tell the national big box retailer that if THEY want to reach 60 percent of the households in MY city, they need to buy MY R.O.P. ads, or pay some exorbitant price for junking OUR readers' experience. Better yet, at the next NNA or NAA meeting, have a panel on this, and get together and develop a case for R.O.P. to Walgreens, CVS, Target and the like. The case goes like this: Hey retailers, while inserts seem easy, there are a large number of people who throw them out. The discount shoppers read the inserts, but the RICH read the paper and recycle the inserts without reading them. *Note: Do not, however, discourage coupons, or product placement. No, no, no! No matter what the mess, these give value to a \$1.50 Sunday paper.*
2. **Upgrade your carriers.** The newspaper carrier is one of the most shameful things about daily newspapers. For decades, newspapers made 30 percent margins, and gave their route carriers little. In this new era, the newspaper needs to upgrade the carrier

status. Think of ways they can turn their routes into small companies, and become an eBay-like partner to you. Can you give them free classified space for their other side businesses? Can you get them to help you sell classifieds? Can you work with them on local delivery of *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* and help them turn their routes into a business? Can you get them to sell newspaper boxes? Can they partner and promote Saturday yard sale classifieds and give out yard sale kits? The key thing is that carriers are dependable, enthusiastic and desperate for money. They have kids, future readers. Allow them to be a partner in your value chain. Give their kids T-shirts to wear, and car banners to sport in order to promote your newspaper. You can't afford to carry a large staff overhead and this is one area where independent contractors can help you. Marketers will KILL for a direct route into the household, and every retail store. You have access with your newspaper carrier. Develop it.

3. **Selectively use overseas bureaus.** Correspondents are marketing for your newspaper. Don't fool yourself into thinking that you really need to have someone in Iraq. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. You will spend thousands to send a reporter to football junkets that are covered by hundreds of other media, including ALL your local TV stations. Instead, hire the traveling TV reporter to write a column, and instead establish a network of European, Asian and Central American correspondents that might somehow correspond to your readership's unique ethnic heritage.
4. **Make your paper unique.** Stop making your paper generic. In recent decades, the newspaper vogue was to reduce wonderful broadsheet newspaper to a Standard Advertising Unit. And then it got smaller. Colors disappeared, including green sheets for television, and yellow sheets and pink newspapers (except for the *New York Observer* and *Financial Times*). Graphics all looked like Poyter Institute. Bring these oddities, and more, back.
5. **Drop online partners that you don't own. Drop the A.P.** In the 1990s, newspapers began posting their employment ads with websites like careerpath.com and now careerbuilder.com. Then you ran columns from Motley Fool. Bad move, as now people don't buy the Sunday paper to see the ads. Other websites carry your stories that you send to the AP. Online sites carry your content when you post it to the Associated Press. Keep your content exclusive to your your site. Brand yourself, and your content. Make them link to *you* on Facebook.
6. **Force your website staff and newspaper staff to compete.** Don't ask reporters to multitask. Make your website compete with the main newspaper on its own, sharing some resources. Yes, you might hit jackpot one day, and DrudgeReport.com might link to your story, but your advertisers, who are paying the freight for print exposure, lose out when you post print stories online. Their ads are not seen. But DO post all of your old content online, back to the first edition of the paper, as an archive. The Internet is important, and you need to treat it as its own entity.
7. **Eliminate zoned editions.** Having multiple local editions is expensive, and unnecessary. Here in Sarasota, we get a South edition once a week, and it is great.

Folks from around the whole readership area would be interested in this news too. The idea that people living inside some arbitrarily defined five mile radius are NOT interested in a Good Samaritan who Feeds the Homeless at Age 96, or Grows a 30-Pound Watermelon, is malarkey. You want your ENTIRE readership to have a sense of the whole readership area. People have cars these days. They drive 45 minutes to work. They are not stuck in a borough. If you want a place to win advertising accounts from the mom and pop store, lure them in with a teeny half-inch ad that runs in the main paper. That serves them better anyway.

8. **Stress your local brand.** This seems obvious, and to any normal newspaper publisher, a duh. “Of course I stress my local brand,” you say. “I buy the scoreboard at the local high school, I sponsor the arts festival, I do all of that.” Yes, we agree, most newspapers are good at getting their name out there. But part of your local brand is being tarnished by wire content. Many savvy newspaper readers get their local paper and either *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*. Reconsider comics, advice columns and the like. Consider this. My children 4, 14, 15, well read, are not interested in the comics. Cut out national syndicated columnists. Cut out 99 percent of the syndicated sections, and fill it with local weddings, engagements, crime blotters and the like, things readers cannot get elsewhere.
9. **Cut back on sports reporters.** This is REALLY going to get me in trouble. Here is the deal. If you look at the average sports section, it’s the only section with ads for exotic dancers and tire dealers. That’s it. I am not saying that there should be no sports coverage. Only if your sports department is bigger than your city desk, move the sports reporters off the sports and send them out with the cops to the bad neighborhoods and make them look for trouble to write up. For local sports, hire desk editors who JUST digest the reports and scores sent in by coaches and coach assistants. These days, all the high schools have the ability to text you info.
10. **Ditch the ombudsman.** Make him edit the letters page, and force readers to write letters to the editor if they don’t like a story. The idea of having some goofball checking up on reporters is wrong. Reporters have a “check” each story they write. They have to put it out there to the public, which is the ultimate judge and critic. Isn’t that enough?
11. **Bring back crusades and un-bylined front page editorials.** Your editorials are too balanced. So make people mad. Poison pen! And stop hiring out-of-towners to write them. Haven’t you learned from bloggers that strong opinions make readers?
12. **Bring some balance back to reporting.** Newspapers, even smaller regional dailies, do not understand how much reporters and editors are mistrusted by the average reader. Conservatives are deserting you because you do go after them, and liberals grumble because you are *the establishment*. No one else cares. McClatchy’s motto is truth to power. How about just *truth* as the ultimate standard? Reporters are should be reporters; let the editorial writers be unbalanced.
13. **Re-hire the retired.** Give them all locals columns, where they get to write, either online or in print, about their birds, their collecting, their Rotary Clubs and their

- zoning issues. Our church in Sarasota has a crew of at least half a dozen retired priests who attend every Sunday service and help with communion. Your retired staff loves newspapering, misses the thrill and wants to be a part of it. A small stipend for each would do wonders for them, and for your paper.
14. **Stodgy up the design, to emphasize words.** Bring back column rules. These were eliminated in the 1970s, and you can pack more in if you have them. Tight, tight, tight. Go back in the archives and see your editions from the 1940s and 1950s. They were packed with stories, tidbits and ads, big and small. In short, an utter joy to read. Bring that back, and you will force people to spend time with the paper. Print details. Print crime blotters. Print meeting minutes sent in by local groups. Print social pictures. Sell ads around it all.
 15. **Decrease the size of photos.** This is an easy way to get some extra space. Routinely, section covers have four-column photos. While it is great to have something colorful on the cover, there is no need for this space waster. In addition, newspapers have too many separate sections and tab inserts. Our Sarasota paper comes in six or so piddly sections. When there are sections, people put them to the side.
 16. **Reintegrate classifieds into the paper.** Very often, classifieds sections are separate, and their contents are lost in a sea of ads stuck in the back. Bring the classifieds back *into* the main sections of the paper, so people see the ads along with the stories. And consider splitting the classifieds up, so help wanted goes in business, cars go A section and residential real estate goes in the lifestyle section. Police your advertisers better, and kick out the scams. All of this will help to make the classifieds seem PART of the content, and will make your newspaper seem bigger, even as it is the same size.
 17. **Stop charging for weddings.** And stop charging for obits. Today, most newspapers get only a handful of wedding announcements. They got greedy by charging for them, and now most wedding and engagement sections in medium-sized dailies are gone. Instead, make weddings free again. People like to read these details, and you can sell advertising around a Saturday Engagements Page and a Sunday Weddings Page. Ditto with obits. Obits are among the MOST read thing in a paper; you want to have AS MUCH content there as you can.
 18. **Stop hiring just from J-schools. Stop specific minority recruiting.** Most of these minority and special recruitment and diversity programs are a joke in an era when there are major staff cutbacks. They demean bright minorities, who could easily get one of the low-paid newspaper jobs anyway. Turn newspapers back into a trade, and hire locally. All of the “diversity” you need can be found WITHIN your local community. Hire local English majors, hire history majors.
 19. **The stunningly high prices for advertising won’t last.** Seems obvious, but even today, a full page at a large daily is exorbitant. While you shouldn’t lower your rates, you need to realize that the days of being able to bully the local furniture store and Ford dealer are over. Intellectually, you know this, but old habits die hard, and if you

are pushing or guilting that struggling Pontiac dealer into advertising two Saturday pages when then can only afford a half page, you are hurting both of your chances for survival. You have to come to advertisers where THEY are, not where you are.

20. **Bring humor into the paper.** Be slightly naughty and saucy. Be silly. Don't take yourself seriously. Encourage headlines with bad puns. Play goofball tricks on your readers, like inserting funny illustrations doodled by the art department. Give your newspaper personality, and it will again become an essential read. And on the opposite spectrum, cover lots of crime. Readers can't resist it, even the petty stuff. In fact, the petty stuff is often the most interesting. Make your paper as interesting as real life.

ABOUT GARLAND POLLARD

AND BRANDLANDUSA.COM

EDITOR'S CAREER BRIDGES NEW AND OLD MEDIA

Garland Pollard began working in newspapers at Richmond's alternative *Style Weekly* in 1985, where he wrote a pop culture and local interest column, as well as features. He learned the basics of major daily newspapers while working in the composing room of the advertising production department of *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*, where he became a whiz at building double-truck supplements for likes of A&P, Pantry Pride and Safeway.



He revived the 150-year-old broadsheet newspaper *The Richmond State*, which was a leading newspaper in Richmond from the Civil War until the early 20th century, when it was merged into *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*. The boisterous and snarky *State* covered politics, society and culture in Richmond. He has worked as a staff editor at the afternoon daily *The Progress-Index* in Petersburg, where he redesigned the weekly real estate section and edited the business page. It was fascinating in so many ways, including the fact that the paper ordered Lava Soap by the caseload, a practice continued from the days of hot type.

He was the launch editor of *Virginia Living*, the magazine about Virginia that debuted in November 2002. At the start-up for the magazine, he not only developed the content but created a framework for revenue sectors, including real estate, fashion and general retail. The success of the magazine proved the viability and relevance of old-style, large format magazines like *Look* and *Life*.



He was most recently senior editor for the VISIT FLORIDA family of products at Miles Media in Sarasota, Florida, where he revamped their 60-year-old print *Official Florida Vacation Guide* and a suite of ancillary publications. He launched the revamped online site VisitFlorida.com, which during his tenure added “2.0 elements” including blogs, videos and other multimedia content.

In his study of branding, he set up the website BrandlandUSA.com to help the American public and branding community assert the value and tradition of America's legacy brand names, not only in publishing but in consumer products, retailing and tourism. The site and its companion blog receive over 3,000 unique visitors a month.

A native of Virginia Beach, he attended The Norfolk Academy and graduated from Woodberry Forest School. He attended the College of William & Mary and holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Richmond.

BRING THE AUTHOR TO SPEAK

YOUR NEWSROOM, CLASSIFIEDS DEPARTMENT, AD STAFF AND
CARRIERS NEED MOTIVATION

Bring Garland Pollard to speak to your staff retreat, awards banquet, association luncheon or industry conference. In his journalism career, he has worked in every newspaper department, including paste-up, sales, marketing, circulation, advertising and editorial. He can bridge gaps between departments, and has been an owner, a manager and a start-up partner. He has worked at dailies, weeklies and monthlies, and has experience in local television news. Some recent speaker engagements include:

- North American Travel Journalists Association: Keynote speaker at Santa Fe national conference. Topic: the future of travel journalism.
- Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond: Panelist, future of downtown Richmond.
- Virginia Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus: Panelist, travel journalism.
- National Society of the Colonial Dames, Virginia Chapter: Annual meeting keynote speaker. Topic: The future of historic preservation in Virginia.
- Leadership Metro Richmond: Orientation speaker. Topic: Civic trends in Virginia.
- Hospitality Sales and Marketing Institute, Orlando Chapter. Topic: Revamping editorial at VISIT FLORIDA, and the new VISITFLORIDA.com.

Trusted by reporters and respectful of sales staff, he can talk to and brainstorm with all departments about the future of your newspaper. Daily fee, \$750, plus travel expenses.

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