

MORE ON ADVERTISING

Ted Lawrence,
Advertising Director
Missouri Press Service



Do you and your newspaper have “Super-powers”?

A recent report titled “The Rise of the Micropolitan Newspaper”, (posted at localmediainsider.com) seems to think you might. Author Alisa Cromer describes her report saying it’s “a series on super-healthy small-town newspapers: where they are, what makes them thrive, and why they matter.”

She begins: “Here is the dirty little secret of the newspaper industry: In some small cities across America, newspapers are thriving, with fat print editions and nearly universal local readership.

Local media executives have started to ask why some newspapers seem to be immune from the consistent losses of advertising and readership plaguing the rest of the industry.”

Gordon Borrell, president of Borrell Associates, says:

“I wish someone would write about the fact that, while weak and poorly-managed newspapers are closing, many others are doing just fine. How about Vail Daily or The Jackson Hole Daily, which routinely average (get this) more than 70 pages per day? These super-healthy newspapers require three essential nutrients: a well-managed staff of editorial and advertising people, a well-defined community that has limited local broadcast choices, and a financially healthy community. Many healthy small towns have likewise healthy newspapers. Where else can you find out who died, whose kid made Eagle Scout, who just got engaged, and what the Lieutenant Governor said at the Garden Club luncheon last week? Facebook? Google? The local radio station?”

The out-performing newspapers, in other words, perch on a three-legged stool, of which (1) market size and (2) economics account for two of the three legs.

For career newspaper executives, the idea that management comprises only a third of the keys to success is sobering.

What seems clear today is that newspapers in “micropolitan” areas too small to attract broadcast competition have real advantages.

From a newspaper perspective, having a core city is vital to a sense of identity and appetite for local news. Micropolitan cities typically lack broadcast news options. [Ted’s note: The author’s population marker for a “micropolitan” (50,000) is high for our Missouri standards. Many believe these success factors also apply to markets of less than 20,000.]

Good management is, of course, the third leg of the stool. Many small town newspapers have sold or closed because they did not get that part right.

More to come in this series: Should news be paid or stay free? Should management focus on print, or diversify with multiple business models? Are small family-owned enterprises slower or more nimble than larger chains? What is the right frequency for printing a small town newspaper?

Spoiler alert [and no surprise to Missouri Press members]:

“For the super healthy newspapers, exclusive local news is more than a product; it is their superpower.”

