

How PR Professionals Can Help Save the News Media

It's no secret that local newspapers and traditional print publications continue to struggle significantly as demand for print issues shrinks and media coverage in general becomes more splintered against today's digital backdrop. With the many free resources available to audiences, readers are less and less inclined to pay for traditional print or other subscriptions. At the same time, newspaper ad revenue continues to drop as businesses decide to [invest their dollars in digital outlets](#), like Google and Facebook ads.



Jaffe Staff

We as media relations professionals have a role to play in helping to maintain the vitality of our media landscape. While print media continue to face enormous financial challenges and the public perceives flagship outlets with mounting skepticism, we can help preserve the media while also fulfilling our clients' goals.

News Subscriptions on the Decline

Newsrooms have gone through round after round of layoffs; journalists are asked to do much more with much less; and papers have decreased in physical size, with fewer printed pages and less content. Consider it the death spiral of newspapers.

While broadcast news channels have thrived during the coronavirus pandemic, print media have suffered, according to [Pew Research Center](#). Advertising revenue among six of the largest publicly traded newspaper companies fell by a median 42% year over year in Q2 2020 compared to Q2 2019. During that same period, circulation revenue fell by 8% – bad news, given that daily newspaper circulation fell to an all-time low in 2018. Meanwhile, newsroom employment at U.S. newspapers declined by 51% from 2008 to 2019, a reflection of newspapers' cost-cutting measures to counter losses in revenue.

Couple these facts with the fake news sensation that has reached an all-time high, and we have ourselves somewhat of a media conundrum. (While "fake news" is no longer anything new, the term has become so ubiquitous that it earned its own entry in the [Cambridge Dictionary](#).)

In both cases, perhaps somewhat ironically, media outlets have themselves turned to PR firms to build campaigns against the pitfalls they're facing. The Chicago Sun-Times partnered with Ogilvy for an entire newspaper and website redesign. CNN partnered with Figliulio & Partners for its "[Facts First](#)" campaign, which was established to combat the fake news mindset.

Meeting Client Goals in Challenging Times

As legal PR and marketing professionals, how can we help to keep the media circle of life active and healthy? More importantly, how can we best serve our clients, including lawyers, to ensure that their specific goals are met and exceeded? Here are some ideas.

Cherish and nurture the PR/journalism relationship. In our role as PR and marketing professionals, journalists are our greatest allies. We [work in tandem with our journalist colleagues](#), helping one another to tell the stories that people want to read. As we stay this course, let's ensure that the PR/journalism partnership is mutually positive, honest and valuable.

Remain vigilantly committed to high-quality, ethical, accurate journalism, PR and marketing. We should have a vested interest in the health and validity of our local and national news outlets. When news outlets have been forced to cut costs, quality inevitably suffers. Underpaid/overworked staff are forced to make decisions that may be less sound, less accurate and more biased. In response, we should be working daily to ensure that news items are nothing but the highest quality – timely, factual, compelling and ethical. Clients, businesses and daily decisions literally depend on the news cycle. Do the research, provide the facts and keep in mind that we stand alongside journalists with one common end goal.

Participate in the creative endeavors of traditional, sound media outlets. In the past several years, media outlets have found creative new ways to bring in revenue. Examples include community events, award and nomination opportunities, webinars, membership packages, and the like. As we scour the media daily for opportunities for our clients, let's not forget some of these highly worthwhile options, and participate when relevant and appropriate.

Identify and support reliable media outlets organically. Even if you/your clients cannot support media outlets through donations or subscriptions, you can still support the outlets that you deem to be reliable and nonbiased by faithfully reading, viewing, listening, sharing or clicking.

Respect the process. For as much change as the news industry has seen, and as much change as there is to come, remember that there is still a natural process and cycle. All the pieces of the media puzzle work together in tandem. Sound, traditional media outlets should be valued. Yes, the quick access to breaking news via Twitter or other social outlets certainly has its place, but reading a full-blown and in-depth story about a topic helps readers to dive deeper, be challenged and remain engaged.

If you would like to share an idea or to discuss changes you've seen or experienced in the current media climate, feel free to contact Vivian Hood at vhood@jaffepr.com.

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