

The defense of newspapers

It was a matter of time, I suppose. The newspaper industry has finally woken up and realized it needs to defend itself. It is as if the newspapers industry decided to say to the world, much like Mark Twain did, the rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated.

Today (which is Memorial Day), buried in the Style section of the Washington Post (which makes me wonder) is a half-page ad entitled: The Reality About Newspapers, paid for by the Arlington, VA-based Newspaper Association of America. The ad attempts to defend the viability of newspapers. It proposes to set the record straight about the following “myths:”

1. No one reads newspapers (they say more than 104 million people read every day –in the US? Worldwide?)
2. Young people don't read newspapers (they say 61 percent of 18-24 year olds read a paper or visit a newspaper website)
3. Newspaper readership is tanking (They say newspaper readership declined a “mere 1.8% compared to 10% decline in prime time TV viewership)
4. Many newspapers are going out of business (they say newspapers remain profitable????)
5. Newspaper advertising doesn't work (Google research says 56% of consumers researched product that they saw in a newspaper)
6. No creative options in newspapers (says who?)
7. If newspapers close, you will still be able to get news from other sources (newspapers are the premiere source of journalism–no quibble there)

The ad concludes with the idea that the newspaper industry is transforming itself, and invites you to visit www.newspapermedia.com.

I am not sure that these are all “myths,” or that they are widely held, and I am not sure the ad did a good job of refuting them. The facts don’t all add up and they don’t clarify who is reading newspapers and where. Additionally, the placement day and place within the newspaper makes it highly unlikely that many people will see this. Besides, isn’t printing an ad about defending newspapers in the newspaper preaching to the choir?

It was time to hear the newspaper side of the story. But the facts are there: several newspapers have closed their doors in the past few months and many are seeing falling ad revenues and decreasing readership. If the Newspaper Association wants to salvage its industry it must do a better, more clever job of getting its message across. This may be one of the lamest ads I have ever read, and I read a newspaper every day!!!!

