

Numbers don't lie

Newspapers are in decline. It's a fact.

This is the first paragraph from a Washington Post article entitled "The accelerating decline of newspapers by Frank Ahrens:

"U.S. newspaper circulation has hit its lowest level in seven decades, as papers across the country lost 10.6 percent of their paying readers from April through September, compared with a year earlier."

The numbers were released by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), which measures circulation for print media across the United States. Some interesting (and sad) facts from the study:

- 30.4 million Americans buy daily newspapers, 40 million on Sundays
- Daily circulation has been declining since 1987
- In 1940, 31 percent of Americans bought a newspaper. Today, it is 13%.
- The top five newspapers are: Wall Street Journal, USA Today, New York Times, Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post (all except the Journal have lost readers)
- USA Today suffered the highest reader loss, declining by 17.2%, due in part to a decline in the travel industry

As fewer people buy print newspapers, fewer advertisers will pay fewer dollars for the chance to display their ads therein. What will happen to the industry? More cuts and less paper, that is for sure. The New York Times recently announced another round of layoffs from its newsroom. The Washington Post is desperate to reinvent itself and recently went through a complete redesign.

Is there a solution? Your thoughts?

How Newspapers Are Killing Themselves

We can dub it newspaper suicide when newspapers do things that are guaranteed to reduce subscription rates, and I don't mean by endorsing an unpopular candidate or showing bias on their pages. It is by cannibalizing their own print readers.

Let me give you a case in point about my local newspaper, the fabled Washington Post. Last Friday, I am checking the weather and blogs on the Washington Post website, and lo and behold, I see columnist Mark Fisher's LAST column. I read it to learn that he is leaving the Post, why, etc. Fast forward to Sunday. I settle in with my ever-thinner newspaper, and guess what, I see Mark Fisher's last column in PRINT. Now let me rephrase this in monetary terms. I read Mark Fisher's column on Friday online for FREE, and I read the same column in print for a price. (P.S. you can read lots of Sunday print columns online, on Friday).

Then, if this is not enough to get me thinking that I am a sucker for paying to have the newspaper delivered to me when all I have to do is turn on my computer to read the same stuff online, that I see that TV Week has now become an opt-in to the paper, meaning I have to actually call the Post to tell them that I want to continue receiving this handy-dandy TV guide. Let me repeat this again: I have to tell them to deliver it.

A couple of months ago, the Post folded its printed Book World supplement, making it online only. And in fact, if you want a

listing of paperback bestsellers in the DC area, you have to go online, because the printed edition just lists the hardcover bestseller list.

And here's another piece of the suicide pact that the Post seems to have: they are now touting a special online only investigation on the front page of the printed paper. So, it seems, they want me, a reader of the print version, to go online. If I haven't been online before, then I will realize that the entire newspaper plus much more is available for free.

In effect, the newspaper is driving me to go online. Special investigations, columns available before their print date, up to date event reviews, blog posts, discussions....why would I want to pay to get a newspaper delivered? I am asking that every day, and I bet a bunch of people are too. The thing is the paper is still making money from subscriptions and print advertising, right? So why are they not giving subscribers more not less????

In my opinion, this is a conscious attempt to drive people to the online version so that they can stop issuing a print version. Then, they will save printing and delivery costs, and finally, start charging for the online version once the printed version disappears. You will only pay for something if there is no alternative, right? The Post has been doing this piecemeal, but we are seeing the effects in a much reduced printed version, a heftier online version and a mandate for all reporters to blog, Tweet, and have a Facebook page. Obviously, the future is online.

What do you think?



The death of newspapers

We've spoken about it before on this blog, and the bad news for newspapers continues to come in. As you probably know, the *Rocky Mountain News*, Colorado's oldest newspaper, ceased publication as of Friday (Feb. 27). Add to that, the continual bad news concerning all print media, and you know that the outlook for newspapers in particular, and print media in general, is not good. The reasons boil down to: 1) fewer advertisers/less ad dollars; 2) the Internet and 3) the environment (and perhaps not in that order). We've seen the print news industry has been battered by reductions in advertising, and also, in reductions in people buying the print edition since they can get most content for free online. And some people are not buying paper because of the environmental consequences. So there you have it— we know the reasons why print media is going to be gone sooner rather than later. But how will we get our news if there are no newspapers?

In today's *Washington Post* there are two articles I'd like to bring to your attention. In one, Howard Kurtz, the Post's media commentator, discusses this phenomenon in detail. And another, by Marc Fisher, has to do with the lack of reporters covering Washington news. Indeed, this is the problem. If there are no newspapers, there are no reporters. With no reporters, there is no news.

Of course, part of the answer is adaptation. Newspapers will have to figure out a revenue stream from the online versions of their products and they will have to adapt what was essential reporting for print to reporting for the Internet age. However, the issue of advertising and paying for content will be just as relevant for the online versions of

newspapers. If advertisers are cutting back, they are cutting back across the board. And if people are watching their pennies, they will also not pay for content.

Well, time will tell. In the meantime, I will continue to read my print newspaper as long as it continues to exist. And I will also read it and other newspapers online (after all, I am a news junkie). What will you do?

[polldaddy poll=1413884]

