

The Impact of *Impact*

How Newspapers Are Putting the Study to Work

This report is a work in a progress. If your newspaper is implementing findings of the Impact study, or doing anything else to grow readership, please let us know so we can share what you are doing with the rest of the industry. We will maintain a frequently updated version of this report on our Web site at www.readership.org

For more information about this report, or to contribute to it, contact Steven S. Duke, 847-467-4374, or e-mail at s-duke@northwestern.edu.

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*Wayne Mitchell, editor
Independent-Mail
Anderson, SC*

It has given us a framework for analyzing readership issues and our approaches to growing readership. Many of our newspapers – Chicago Tribune, Daily Press – have used the imperatives to organize their strategic plan thinking. We have used the readership Imperatives in strategy sessions with Publishers and Editors. Most of our newspapers have used the framework to self-assess strengths and weaknesses.

*Timothy R. Kennedy
VP Strategy/Development -Tribune Publishing*

The Monitor has been hard at work . . . utilizing much of the wisdom learned in the study. . . . The early results, as measured by unofficial ABC numbers for February, have been handed to me as I write this response. The daily Monitor is up 226 or 1.1% over February 2001, while Sunday is up 527 or 2.3%. Sunday single copy was up 6%.

*Tom Brown, publisher
Concord Monitor
Concord, NH*

We're using the study in a number of ways: 1. Its principles underpin our redesign. 2. It's a basis for the work of the company-wide readership taskforce, one of the company's five strategic priorities for 2002. 3. We're incorporating the recommendations into our daily scorecards for sections of the Tribune.

*Gil Thelen, editor
Tampa Tribune
Tampa, FL*

We have made many changes, some small, some larger, as a result of the Readership Institute's Impact study. One of the most positive results we've seen has been in overall circulation, in other words increased trends long before the effects of Sept 11th. As of November 2001, we have had 13 straight months of increased circulation figures for our combined daily papers. Also, we're beginning to "win" the battle with the advertising reps' minds in switching from homes reached to readers reached.

*Bob Magel
Lancaster Newspapers, Inc.*

One of the most common questions the Readership Institute has received since the Impact study results were released in spring 2001 is this: "What are other papers doing with the findings? And are they getting good results?"

So we asked around, and about 50 editors, publishers and executives at individual newspapers and newspaper groups replied. (They told us more than we could include in this already lengthy document, so we have selected highlights.)

They say the study findings have given them direction and focus. Many say they have made the eight imperatives the cornerstone of their annual strategic plans for 2001 or 2002, including papers such as the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the Media General newspapers, Cox newspapers, and others. And many have implemented changes that are getting results.

The experience of the newspapers most active in implementing the Impact findings illustrates a couple of big learnings: First, there is a lot newspapers can do with what they already have – like packaging and presenting existing news and other information in ways that increases reader satisfaction; and second, there are a lot of new things newspapers can do that will bring good results.

Editor Wayne Mitchell's *Anderson Independent-Mail* illustrates both learnings.

We focused first on what we thought was an over-arching "umbrella" issue we gleaned from the reports. We found that the

micro analysis study showed that the amount of local news material generated by our staff was greater than our circulation peer group. But the macro analysis showed that reader perception from “neutral” readers did not reflect that fact.

We concluded that a reason might be because local news was spread throughout the newspaper, tucked in here and tucked in there. We also found that we had more micro news than most other newspapers our size, but we were not getting credit for it. . . . At the time, it was running in long small-type lists with little attention to display and no headlines.

We decided to bring together our local news stories and pages into a new, separate daily section. It debuted March 19, 2001. We are a three-edition, geographically zoned newspaper so it meant three different daily sections. We brought together local news pages that had run in the “A” section, two obituary pages that had floated through the newspaper, and an open-page zoned micro-news page that also had floated in the newspaper. We ended second-class citizen status for the micro-news page by mandating headlines on the stories and display like the rest of the local news.

We also added a daily community calendar that we gather on the Internet using software that permits community groups to add their events. The online calendar is then extracted daily for our print editions.

The addition of the Local news section required significant changes in our operation. It meant a daily newspaper with at least five sections (Main, Local, Sports, Lifestyle, Classified), not four. It meant a pre-run of our lifestyle section every night before the main newspaper. Frankly, adding another entire section to the newspaper and more expense during a time when our revenue numbers were heading south made us a little nervous. But it turned out to be a good example of following your gut to do the right thing.

Through careful booking of our sections and news columns, we were able to pull off a five-section newspaper with little increase in total news columns for the year.

The reaction? Readers loved it; praise poured in. A new readership study found that it is the highest read thing in the newspaper after Page 1A. And our new ABC audit shows we had gains in both home delivery and single copy circulation during 2001. It represented the first gain in home delivery in several years, and we

had a year-over-year gain even before Sept. 11 added some single-copy numbers.

We also increased our local lifestyle story counts by 38 percent in 2001 by pushing hard for more productivity from lifestyle reporters and by making more city desk assignments that could run in lifestyle.

We also have used the Readership Institute material to make plans for 2002 content changes. Here are several things we are going to do during this calendar year:

- We will have a weekly “ordinary person” lifestyle page profile. Sort of a “15 minutes with” sort of thing. They will be short, eight to ten inches, and include a picture.
- We will have a weekly “ordinary person” business page profile. Same sort of thing. We will be careful that it is not someone who has appeared in our business coverage – no community or business leaders.
- We will start a local business page column, using a local stockbroker with a knack for writing and humorous writing. We hope to add more personality to our business page.
- We are starting a weekly sports reader feedback column. They can send letters, faxes, e-mails or call our anonymous comment line.
- We already have moved to increase our reader participation and community involvement by starting a monthly book club, complete with membership cards, a monthly discussion group at the local library, and prizes for those who do the whole year. More than 100 people are participating in “Read It With Leah,” named after our lifestyle editor Leah Daniels.

We think our participation in the Readership Institute research has been invaluable. We also think there are many more things we can do based on the current research. Some will require additional resources, but we have been moving ahead on things we are confident we can accomplish with the same level of staffing.

The Anderson Independent-Mail is among scores of newspapers that have shared with us details of their readership building efforts, successes and failures. We will quote extensively from their stories in this report.

However encouraging the news has been over the past year, it is equally clear that work remains to be done. The defensive, change-resistant culture that permeates the industry remains a significant roadblock at many newspapers. Witness this dispirited report from one newspaper manager eager to implement Impact findings:

“I shared a lot of information about the study and its findings with the newsroom and our board of directors. The reception was lukewarm. ... It's been a real struggle and what we are finding is that the biggest part of it is trying to implement a cultural change in the organization to get people to embrace the idea of [customer orientation]. I am finding that it is hard when you don't have company leadership. ... The task force has decided that rather than agonize over what we don't have (such as real leadership, a strategic plan and a shared vision), we decided to work with what we have. Things don't move very quickly around here. That's one of my frustrations. They say let's wait six months. There's no real sense of urgency and a strong resistance to change from the top down.”

While we hear from enthusiastic executives at newspapers and groups who are eagerly pushing forward with change, newspapers like the one where this manager works remain all too typical. Often a few managers and staff are enthusiastic about the potential to grow readership, but they meet indifference or resistance to change from subordinates, peers or – worst of all – bosses.

To keep momentum, they need the continued support, affirmation and success stories from those who are finding ways to bring change to their organizations. Fortunately, such success stories abound. Many of them are included here.

WHERE TO BEGIN

“Where do I begin?” Often that’s the first question newspaper leaders ask after they have absorbed the findings of the Impact study.

The best answer comes from the newspapers that have been the most aggressive about implementing the Impact findings. While publishers at these newspapers talk about teams and task forces, it is equally obvious that the place they really begin is in demonstrating leadership.

At the newspapers where change is happening, everyone knows that the publisher is making readership growth and reader orientation a top priority. That’s a given; no argument. How the newspaper gets there is where the teams and task forces come in.

These publishers also have a small group of people who are really committed to the readership goals, each of them heading one of the teams. Typically these newspapers say they began by creating cross-departmental teams around the imperatives in *The Power to Grow Readership*. This approach has the dual benefit of breaking down departmental silos and dividing the overall challenge into manageable portions with clear lines of responsibility.

Some newspapers, such as the *Herald Times/Sunday Hoosier Times* in Bloomington, IN, have created a team for each of the eight imperatives. Others have collapsed one or more of the imperatives together (for example, all the content-related items). The *News and Observer* in Raleigh, NC, for example, created seven task forces; the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* created six.

The most detailed description of how to organize a task-force approach to the readership imperatives came in a posting to the Readership Institute’s email listserv by Kate Burgun. (To join the listserv, go to the Readership Institute’s Web site at www.readership.org.) Burgun, marketing manager at the *Herald-Times/Sunday Hoosier Times* in Bloomington, IN, was responding to a publisher who had asked listserv members “where do I begin.” She told him how to do it, right down to a suggested worksheet for the task-force committees:

To implement readership initiatives in daily and Sunday products, we proposed the formation of eight teams. Each team will take on one of the recommendations and work on developing recommendations for improvements. A Team Facilitator will head up each team and Facilitators will make up a Readership Steering Committee.

We recommend that the Readership Committees meet every other week until the Operations Committee meeting in February, where Team information will be presented by the steering committee. One of the initial activities of the readership Committee should be preparing a worksheet to provide guidance, expectations and structure to team work. (Some ideas on that worksheet follow.)

For each team, we recommend a cross-functional composition with employees who have a stake within that readership area. Leaders should be dedicated to the complications of the tasks and have expertise in their area. We recommend that teams should be balanced with long and short-term employees as well as a combination of managers and staff. Youthful employees as well as employees that are new to the industry should be included as well. The editor of the paper will head the steering committee and will not head up a specific area but oversee the entire project.

Steering Committee Objectives:

- 1) Appoint Facilitators and assist in putting Teams together.
- 2) Provide orientation session for Teams.
- 3) Create a structure and layout expectations for Teamwork.
- 4) Report to senior management and the Operations committee with recommendations, feasibility of recommendations and priorities.

Team Objectives:

- 1) To study and interpret the eight recommendations as they pertain to specific situations and features of the Herald-Times and Sunday Hoosier Times.
- 2) Utilize the worksheet to create a report and analysis with some actionable recommendations and priorities to be presented to the Readership Committee.

Ideas for the Team worksheet:

TEAM TACTICAL PLANNING

1. Mission Statement (pertaining to specific area of solution)
2. Goals (Broad, attainable statements)
3. Objectives (Specific, measurable results)

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

4. What actions are currently in progress?
5. Strengths
6. Weaknesses
7. Opportunities
8. Threats

9. MAJOR ISSUES

RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTIONS

10. Objectives and desired outcomes
11. Personnel, actions and timeline
12. Next steps and possible research recommendations

TACKLING IT ALL

A number of newspapers and newspaper groups around the country have embraced the Readership Institute's findings in their entirety and have launched extensive efforts on all eight imperatives. They range from the 11,000 circulation *Gleaner* in Henderson, KY, to the 70,000 circulation *Rockford Register-Star* in Rockford, IL, to the 150,000 circulation *Dayton Daily News*, to the 163,000 circulation *Raleigh News & Observer*, and the 400,000 circulation *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Newspaper groups such as Cox, Morris, Community Newspaper Holdings Inc. and Media General have embraced the findings at the corporate level and are actively pursuing implementation through their properties.

Jay Smith, president of the newspaper division of Cox Enterprises, said "All four of our large newspapers (Atlanta, Dayton, Austin and Palm Beach) involved dozens of their staffers in efforts that spanned several months. In Palm Beach, for instance, more than 60 staffers were involved. Committees were formed to explore each of the imperatives.

"In Atlanta, as you know, we exposed most of the editorial department staffers to day-long presentations of the readership study. Led by Managing Editor Julia Wallace, the work that has evolved fits much of what was recommended."

Tom Silvestri, president, community newspapers, for Media General said, "A good part of our 2002 initiatives at Media General involves growing readership. . . . Every Media General daily has some sort of campaign. For some, cross-departmental teams have taken each of the eight imperatives to develop ideas, build action plans and add readership throughout 2002. Others have stepped back and created lists of things we can do to add readers. In waves of four or five priorities, the papers hope to install this approach into daily operations.

"We have grasped the significance that the Readership Institute's work goes well beyond the needs of metro markets. Media General efforts to rebuild our small daily in Jackson County, Fla., *The Floridan*, basically has used the eight imperatives as a 'recipe' for quality improvements."

Lee Enterprises credits its bullish embrace of the Impact findings for its near-1 percent circulation growth.

At the newspaper level, there are many similar stories. In 2000, *Rockford Register Star* publisher Fritz Jacobi launched a multi-year, cross-departmental Rockford Readership Initiative. The *Register Star* combined the research from the Impact study with its own 2000 Gannett market research and its Generation X research to create the 2001 plans to improve the newspaper.

In Raleigh, publisher Orage Quarles III made the Impact findings the core of the *News and Observer's* strategic plan. Seven teams have worked for eight months on the eight Readership Institute imperatives. In the April 2002 *Presstime*, Quarles wrote, "It's time to move beyond crunching data to applying the insights they provide to our business plans."

An ownership change shortly before the release of the first Impact study findings found *The Gleaner* trying to work out cooperative arrangements with a former competitor that was now a corporate sibling. Despite the inevitable sense of dislocation the change brought, *The Gleaner* has persevered with implementing the imperatives.

Here is what some of the newspapers with all-encompassing readership efforts told us they are doing.

Dayton Daily News, Dayton, OH

We have created a newspaper Readership Council comprising major department heads and drawing from all the departments of the newspaper for input. The Council has created six committees focusing on the areas of Content, Advertising, Service, Culture, Marketing (including Promotion and Branding) and Design (Ease of Navigation). These committees have been meeting regularly for the past few months. In January, the Council prepared a specific action plan for 2002 and these deliverables will be incorporated into Council members MBOs.

One of our earliest decisions was to conclude that this should not be a short-term effort and that the Readership Council should become an institutionalized part of the way we do business. Further, we have placed heavy emphasis on cross-departmental involvement in all the committees.

In content, we are in the midst of a thorough content audit of the newspaper using standards delineated in the Readership Study as benchmarks for evaluating the paper. Audit is due to be completed with a full set of recommended changes to the product in early March.

In brand, we anticipate a review of our positioning statement and our brand message in general to begin in the first quarter led by our new Marketing director. She also is reorganizing the Marketing staff to create a new position – newsroom liaison – to ensure better coordination between the extensive in-paper promotion Editorial already produces with other Marketing efforts. Our Editorial-produced in-paper promotions, which run on all sections fronts, including the front page, are already focused on upcoming content.

Our sense is that service will be the most challenging and involved piece of the Readership project. We're narrowing down where we want to concentrate, looking for an early "win" to build on.

The fact that we've created a Readership Council involving all the newspaper's major departments works to tear down silos in the operation. Cultural issues will be critical to achieving service goals.

Jeff Bruce, editor

The Gleaner, Henderson, KY

First off, the qualifier: We're still in a "transitional" period, working out "synergies" with our sister paper, and former competitor, the Evansville, Ind. Courier & Press, 12 miles across the Ohio River. But we're still trying to blend Readership Institute data with our own market studies and other sources (Knight-Ridder study, Pew, etc.) into a formula that will build readership.

As we move into 2002, we are (culture-wise) restructuring our newsroom, shifting responsibilities and sharpening our focus on content and the enhancement thereof, much of it based on Readership Study findings which we interpreted as a mandate (content-wise) to keep on keeping on in terms of local, local, local and people, people, people. We also will package our newspaper so it will have greater utility and we have become more conscious of the importance of lists. AND, we will promote content more than ever.

Advertising salespeople and ad designers are teaming up to develop more spec ads and generally improve ad content.

A new circulation manager is obsessed with improving service and we have new advertising and production managers, so we have some opportunities/challenges there.

We are meeting/communicating regularly and the silos are coming down, so we are working on a better culture. I am co-chair of a strategic action committee to improve communications among employees (from the board room to the boiler room) in both The Gleaner and The Courier & Press, which share resources in many areas.

Ron Jenkins, editor

The News & Observer, Raleigh, NC

The Readership Initiative has established benchmarks and a focal point for company-wide initiatives. Seven interdepartmental teams have been developed to address the eight imperatives; common goals and newfound teamwork have produced efficiencies and general enhancements to newspaper and internal culture.

In content, a cross-departmental committee is analyzing content over several months with a focus on opportunity areas defined by Readership Institute analysis for The News & Observer. The committee will prepare conclusions and recommendations for content to be taken back to the newsroom for consideration in 2002 content decisions. Newsroom leadership already is working on changes in education coverage to improve coverage in area identified as readership opportunity area.

Marketing Services created a 1/4-page ad anchored on page 2A every day but Saturday to promote upcoming content. Meanwhile, the newsroom runs a "Coming Sunday" feature on 2A every Saturday. Also, the newsroom runs same-day content promotion promos on section fronts. Marketing Services runs ads promoting specific upcoming news and advertising special sections, news enterprise stories, and news series. We will continue to run topical radio spots during morning drive time that promote several of the day's stories.

In brand, we are analyzing the findings of the Impact Study relative to our brand attributes and will design our advertising communications accordingly. Also, the N&O is participating in a Readership Institute branding pilot project that began in January 2002.

In service, we've done things big and small. We conducted a customer service survey in four departments (classified, display, business office and circulation) to get employee ideas on where are

the most opportunities to improve customer service. A circulation billing process overhaul is in the works. New carrier contracts will include service standards. We put in place a cross functional team in circulation – home delivery, sales & marketing and customer service. Smaller, but evidence of our commitment, we added a print quality phone number and e-mail address to our page 2 directory and we changed the classified front page disclaimer to be more customer friendly with regards to errors.

In culture, we surveyed other companies who are known or perceived to have a constructive culture. We are studying the preliminary results of the NAA Recruitment and Retention Survey to determine overall why people join and/or leave the newspaper. We have developed a “laundry list of ideas” to increase communication within and between departments.

Chris Blaser, vice president/circulation

Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc.

Our mission, briefly: Educate nearly 200 small newspapers in the information that came out of the Readership Institute's Readership Initiative project, and encourage each to set a path toward responding to what readers have told us – loud and clear – they want in a contemporary newspaper. Much of the data is good news for us, in small newspapers, with its endorsement of news about "ordinary people," value of obits, community calendars, locally written columns, etc.

Where we started: Our executives quickly embraced the Readership Institute's work shortly after it was released about a year ago. CNHI's president and two COOs have promised support for the long haul: three to four years. Corporate has put money behind the commitment: national training in the fall for every publisher and top newsroom editor in the company (day and a half sessions, in eight cities); RBS scores being computed now for each daily in CNHI, which is a hefty piece of research, among other efforts.

How it went: Perhaps three folks (in nearly 400 folks to go through about 12 hours of training) expressed minor skepticism ("Are you saying dumb down my paper?") but even before the end of the session, each seemed to have bought in. Frankly, with such a diverse audience, I had expected more resistance.

And what about when the trainees got home and the time came to put the information into action? The reception in the newspapers might have gone even better than in the training. In the last couple

of weeks, I've received a "plan" from each paper on steps they took after the training to get everyone else at the paper on board (all departments), and steps they plan to take in response to the data.

I'm hearing lots of reports of great ideas – and sometimes full campaigns – coming out of the interdepartmental committees charged with carrying through on the "eight imperatives." There are employee rewards programs being launched and pledges being signed to try harder to relate to readers. I'm being emailed photos of smiling staffs wearing spiffy new golf shirts with their paper's readership slogan. Add to that invitations to attend follow-up work sessions from some folks who seldom took part in company-wide efforts until this one.

It strikes me that we were exceedingly ready for this message; for an interdepartmental formula for responding to what consumers want in their newspaper that not only doesn't compromise newsroom values but endorses reader-focused efforts many of the most respected papers, large and small, already were trying. It also helps that the RI prescription factors in "culture," the strange, defensive personality of our newsrooms, and our entire industry.

Multiple training evaluations from our sessions called this research "the most important information I've ever received in my career" or "the key to ensuring the future of our industry."

For us, it seems to be the right message at the right time.

Vickey Williams, director of editorial services

The Appeal-Democrat, Marysville, CA

Our Strategic Plan was built around the RI cultural inventory (coupled with Gallup Q12 information and our company's set of Core Values). So, taking our year-old plan, and digging into the imperatives, we are finding a better connection with our readers. We have focused more on not just what we are writing, but how we are writing it; we are promoting ourselves better; we are gearing news toward health and families more. In general, we have taken the imperatives and taken them seriously.

Among the content changes, a health page was added to the Sunday edition. Stories are much more descriptive and narrative in nature. Promos are much more prominent – section fronts touting what's coming up tomorrow, or Sunday, or in the weekend entertainment guide. Local content has been increased, even though international news is at a premium these days (we also paid

close attention to the ideas put forth by RI on how to keep the new readers we have post 9/11).

Our brand efforts include marketing who we are – introducing individuals to the community. We are about to embark on a branding campaign geared toward the 18-35 set. We are using Web site advertising, radio and print. We also produced some ancillary publications, including a cookbook and calendar under our brand.

We have made customer service an imperative. We formed a customer service task force with one person from every department. Once a month, we have Wal-Mart-style greeters in our lobby. We are using five different types of customer satisfaction surveys: One each for the newsroom, circulation, advertising, and ad agency, and a general survey on how we are doing. These are handed out to everyone who conducts business at our front counter. We also name a “customer service hero” each month.

We could go on for hours about culture. Culture has begun taking a serious turn around. Gallup Q12 scores up highest in the company year over last year. Core Values have become our mantra. We stick by them, seriously. Among the things we are doing to develop a constructive culture:

- Monthly “Lunch with the Publisher” where 10 people are invited for a box lunch in conference room with me, nothing more than a get to know you session. Great results.
- Monthly recognition event for whole building (125 associates)
- Highlighting birthdays, anniversaries, employee of the month. Each month, a new committee of three people organizes the event, which includes refreshments, raffles, fun and games...lasts about an hour.
- Constantly preaching respect for one another. And it's showing up!
- Established interview panels. Finalists for a job are selected by hiring manager. Then that candidate must chat for about 45 minutes with a panel of three people made up of folks from other departments. If that panel (different people for each candidate) decides the candidate would not be a good fit for our family, there is no job offer made. Not even the publisher can overrule the panel.
- And on and on....

M. Olaf Frandsen, publisher

Rockford Register Star, Rockford, IL

In 2000, the Rockford Register Star launched its multi-year, ongoing Rockford Readership Initiative. The initiative is an outgrowth of the Register Star's participation in the Impact study. Publisher Fritz Jacobi formally launched the Rockford Readership Initiative with a daylong workshop for executives, key managers and newsroom leaders. The workshop introduced the three components to driving readership: culture and people management practices; content; and marketing and branding, which also included circulation service.

We formed three newspaper-wide committees to develop strategies and action plans in each of the three readership components. The Register Star combined the national and local market research from the Impact study with its own 2000 Gannett market research and its Generation X research to create the 2001 plans to improve the newspaper.

We identified five readership priorities, then set strategies to accomplish them.

- a. Community announcements and ordinary people
- b. Business, economics and personal finance (this was one of Rockford's top drivers, though it doesn't appear on the top five of the national list)
- c. Generation X
- d. Families
- e. Newcomers

Some of our strategies included:

1. Integrate news in print and news online through the creation of the newsroom's Cyber-Fiber Committee, which resulted in the May launch of the new Web site.
2. Use the introduction of the 50-inch web width as an opportunity to launch improved newspaper design in news and advertising, and improved content to drive readership among our geographic and demographic Readership Goals. Among other things, we introduced a new Local & State section with significantly expanded "community announcement and ordinary people" information in two daily, standing packages. We will launch in second quarter 2002, the new standalone Sunday section based on the "community announcement/ ordinary people" driver.

Culture components, which are briefly alluded to above, included several significant inter- and intradepartmental teams that drove our Web site, special sections, marketing and content and redesign projects.

Culture efforts pre-date the Register Star's participation in the Impact study. We initially used building-wide task force committees to craft and implement a mission statement and six core values that establish priorities for the newspaper. A team of more than 30 executives, managers, supervisors and employees create an annual "operating plan," which outlines the strategies and action plans to drive the mission statement, its core values and the operating plans for the coming year to 18 months.

In late 1999, another building-wide effort created new and/or revised job descriptions for every position in the newspaper, tying responsibilities to the mission statement and core values. Those job descriptions are tied to performance appraisals and regularly are updated and revised as needs of the employee and newspaper change. Also, from 1999 through the present, the Register Star used a building-wide task force, know as the "Brand Flakes" to develop the marketing strategies that brand the newspaper. The strategies underpinning our efforts tie well with those readership potentials targeted in the readership project.

Linda Grist Cunningham, executive editor

Austin American-Statesman, Austin, TX

The eight initiatives gave a focal point for increasing readership. We have framed copies of the initiatives throughout the building to serve as reminders for our staff. We have also begun to speak in terms of readership instead of only circulation.

Content

Content Emphasis – Initiatives include the following: expanding letters to the editor and commentary in sports; expanding commentary, perspective, and advice in business; and overhauling our Insight section to expand local news and commentary.

Local News – We are taking steps toward expanding and diversifying our Metro and State Roundup to place increased emphasis on achievers, governmental doings, conversation pieces, and, in general, people reporters encounter on their beats who are interesting but are not getting into the paper. We are also looking into starting a monthly feature about small towns within easy drive of Austin and using graduates of our high school intern program to begin a teen board to create content for peers.

Brand

In-Paper Promotion – we are developing a permanent anchored space for promotion of advertising, special sections/upcoming content, and circulation offers. We are also working toward eliminating “plug” ads and replacing them with day of week promotions, branding campaigns and circulation offers. Finally, we have developed a cross-functional “Intra-Company Marketing Team” with a representative from each department to develop and direct marketing efforts and ensure all departments are properly served.

After receiving suggestions regarding brand from a working group, we will be looking for outside help in developing a branding campaign during the year 2002.

Service

We have completed a customer survey focusing on service and are in the process of defining a service statement for the company. We are taking a global look at service; each department will be adopting a few service initiatives as recommended by our Service Excellence working group. Some examples include creating a service-oriented phone book for assisting in directing customer inquiries, including service issues in initial employment interviews and better signage throughout the building.

Culture

Based upon recommendations from a working group, our Executive Committee is developing a list of priority initiatives to embrace as well as behaviors to abandon.

Sara Steger, assistant to the publisher

Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta, GA

Publisher Roger Kintzel hosted a July retreat of about 55 managers where seven interdepartmental teams of managers reported on findings regarding the initiatives. (We combined two Editorial content initiatives into one.) It gave credibility to long-standing issues to have managers outside the responsible department advocate an issue.

At the end of October each group was asked to narrow their recommendations and summarize how the recommendations should be implemented in our daily operations. By this time, we had five groups: Branding; Customer Service/Constructive Culture; In-paper Promotion; Navigable Newspaper and Advertising as Content. The content issues had been deferred to Editorial where

ME Julia Wallace was implementing “A Better AJC” process that preceded our retreat.

Several initiatives have emerged as priorities.

1. Customer Service/Constructive Culture. We’ve created a standing committee to solicit “department ambassadors.” One of the co-chairs of the committee is our Reader Representative, Mike King. Part of the plan is to publish our new customer service mechanisms, either through Mike’s column or in-paper ads. The ambassador group will identify procedures and policies that impede us from offering excellent customer service and develop plans to resolve those issues. Specific areas to be addressed include phone issues; the sundown rule (solve a problem before day’s end or talk to the customer before day’s end) and develop what we’re calling a “concierge desk” which is actually a network of ambassadors who can answer customer questions across department lines.

2. Branding. We created a standing committee that will report to our Marketing Committee. The committee will follow through on guidelines created for use of our logo, and other printed standards that reinforce our image. We’ve asked that they conduct an employee survey of how to improve our brand image. Finally, they’ll contribute articles regularly on branding to help our employees what it means to a newspaper.

3. Navigable Newspaper. This group quickly focused on the structure of the paper’s sectioning and how to make it more consistent. Out of the committee came a recommendation to unite our classified section as often as possible. Our classifieds had been used to balance the press run.

4. Advertising as Content. This is another area of tremendous improvement that emerged from our process. We are now consistently promoting the coupon values in Sunday’s paper. In-paper promotion of advertising includes special sections.

5. In-paper Promotion. We had a lot of fun with this one. We created a standing committee, chaired by Editorial Innovations Manager Amy Glennon, who’s physically located in Marketing. We already had a three-person team (Amy plus a Marketing and a Circulation manager) in place that huddles daily on our radio content, so in-paper is an extension of what they’re doing. Their goal is to increase our in-paper content promotion ads from two per week to seven per week, in other words, daily. They will create a process to initiate and manage the messages, to place the

messages in the appropriate sections of the paper and, of course, to develop messages that appeal to light and occasional readers. The ads will point to next-day and weekend content. Because Amy straddles the two departments, she'll also work with Editorial on encouraging greater use of promos on section fronts.

Paula Rattray, vice president/strategic marketing

Palm Beach Post, Palm Beach, FL

The Eight Imperatives set a framework for our newspaper's action plan. We created interdepartmental committees based on the Imperative subject areas. Each committee analyzed data and made recommendations to improve our newspaper's readership. The final committee recommendations will be implemented in 2002.

Content: We are creating content to appeal to our top target audiences, including more health, fitness, entertainment and travel content. Also, we're focusing on running excellent local obituaries.

Brand: We're focusing on building on our strengths as well as changing perceptions in our areas of opportunity. These initiatives include promoting the expertise and knowledge of our Editorial staff, emphasizing local news and improving customer service.

Service: We're implementing programs to elevate customer service to a higher level of excellence. These include an interdepartmental initiative to improve telephone service, a customer bill redesign and an analysis of the condition/completeness of our home delivered product.

Laura Cunningham, marketing services director

FOCUSED APPROACHES

In addition to the strategies that embrace all eight imperatives, newspapers and newspaper groups have told us about initiatives they have launched to implement individual imperatives. Here are some of them, organized under the four cornerstones of readership: content, brand, service and culture.

CONTENT

E. W. Scripps

Intensely local people news: The barriers to doing this usually are no place in the paper and nobody available to take the information. Several of our newspapers have created, redesigned, consolidated or expanded local-local news space, most recently Anderson, SC. Others have reorganized to create a clerical desk devoted to such material (called the “Data Desk” in Memphis TN and the “Yes Desk” in Redding CA).

Obits: Bremerton WA worked out a way for one person to cross-departmental lines and take news obits and paid obits (called “Tributes” there). This creates an automatic cross-check on accuracy and helps assure that no community death is overlooked.

The Cincinnati Post and Kentucky Post insist that at least one full obituary news story accompany the shorter news obits every day. On a slow day that headline might read something like “Mary Smith, loved her children” – but as the New York Times now understands, every human story has value.

People-focused approach to news: After Sept. 11, our metro in Memphis launched a series of stories about the impact in individual lives. For instance, a family peanut business that was hurt by loss of airline purchases.

I judge our monthly in-house contest, which includes an enterprise-reporting category. Since our editors absorbed your data, I'm seeing a significant increase in “real people” sourcing, even in heavy investigative pieces.

Quality of life topics: We've been focusing on education, health and land use/growth. We're conducting workshops around the country for reporters who cover these subjects and organizing regional reporting projects that give the reporters experience in getting past institutional coverage and into personal impact. For instance, our four newspapers in Texas (Corpus Christi, Abilene,

San Angelo and Wichita Falls) are collaborating on a look at the kids, teachers and parents behind “at risk” schools that defy the odds and achieve academic excellence.

Letters to the editor: Many of our newspapers keep track of how many local letters they publish and try to grow that number every year. Several have passed the 3,000 mark – which is a lot of letters in a small community.

Local story count: As a quick way of measuring localness and community connection, we keep track of local story count rather than local news hole. We want it to rise even if news hole doesn't. A rising local story count means editors are putting their resources where they matter most and are actually editing – keeping short the stories that don't need to be long so that the complex stories can include all they depth they need without having to fight for space. At some of our newspapers, I saw double-digit local story count increases last year – in the midst of a recession.

Feet on the street: One other rule of thumb that is helping us is: Shoot for at least 60 percent of the FTEs in the newsroom devoted to local content creation (reporters, photographers, artists). And 70 percent is even better.

Real-life lifestyles: Our Corpus Christi newspaper probably is our best at poking into the corners of real-life popular culture, including a weekly fashion feature on what people have in their closets and a regular column for the largely Hispanic low-rider crowd.

Personal finance: All of our newspapers are taking a hard look at stock listings, looking for ways to tighten them and open up space for personal finance advice. The AP, by the way, has been most helpful and freely shares expertise that isn't available in most newsrooms.

Mike Phillips, editorial development director

The Truth, Elkhart, IN

When the economy took a tumble, we saw a big hit in jobs-wanted classified. Dave Ogle, our publisher and my partner, said he wanted to bring in a bit more in retail than classified, so when classified drops off we don't take such a hit. Dave was talking about all of this at the same time the “Eight Imperatives” came out. Scott Miller also sent us a follow-up to the “Eight Imperatives” and coined the phrase “malls” – a place where news and related advertising could be featured.

Shortly after all of that, the proverbial ton of bricks landed on my thick head.

1. We need to boost retail.
2. We have content topics where readers have told us they'd like to see more.
3. We've cut back on pages over the past year or so to save on newsprint.

So ... What would it mean to *The Truth* if we could come up with a series of malls – two pages with 50 percent advertising and 50 percent content on related topics? Would the revenue more than offset the costs in content, paper and production to make it worth our time? We ran some figures and the answer was yes. It would boost revenue, add content readers want and make the paper bigger.

We came up with a number of ideas – usually a story on the cover of the section related to the facing inside pages. Of course, if we went up two pages in the feature section that meant sports went up two pages. So we tried to pair ideas.

We wouldn't start these until we had sold most of the ads.

1. We started food in the feature section and an accompanying service directory in the sports section. The service directory is doing well – we expect a bit more than \$20,000 annually in new revenue with very few switch dollars. Advertisers have told us the ads are doing well. Food is struggling, but readers are thrilled with more recipes.

2. We also started a senior citizens mall the last Wednesday of the month. We had a local cover story and wire on the inside.

We hope to fill out the existing malls and launch as many as nine new ones in March and April.

Terry Greenberg, editor

Lee Enterprises

Lee Enterprises is aggressively pursuing improved in-paper content promotion. A cross-departmental team developed a variety of promotional ideas and examples, then three Lee newspapers – Billings Gazette, Racine Journal Times and the Quad-City Times – began experimenting with the new ideas. After several months of testing of the ideas, and a series of reader focus groups, the cross-departmental team refined the promotion ideas and produced a

content-promotion toolkit that was distributed to all Lee newspapers. The newspapers are beginning to implement the concepts. Lee generously granted the Readership Institute permission to post the toolkit on its Web site – www.readership.org – for others to use.

Racine Journal Times

The Readership Institute's Impact Study helped us in at least three areas:

1. Appreciating and developing a more constructive culture at the newspaper.
2. It gave us a blueprint for strategic planning for additional local content and better newspaper structure.
3. It helped us focus more promotions on specific content in the newspaper and coordinate the effort between different newspaper departments.

The Impact study's Reader Improvement Potential Scores helped us prioritize contemplated changes in our FY2002 Plan.

Our readers rated us very highly on intensely local content, listings, announcements and obituaries. In addition, our Reader Improvement Potential Score for this type of content also was high. So, the Impact Study results suggested an obvious solution: Give our readers much more of what they already say they need and appreciate.

We're launching a full page of community news and listings every day, expanding on the popular Saturday Community section content so we can build more reader satisfaction all week long.

Similarly, the findings pointed toward the need for more varied content in all our daily thematic features sections, so we're doing that, too. It also suggested that our inconsistent section booking and layout of the newspaper needed to be straightened out, and we're doing that, too.

The Readership Institute suggested that newspapers with effective in-paper content promotions keep and attract more readers. We joined the Lee pilot project to test a few experimental in-paper promotional ideas put together by a Lee team, and we tried a few of our own. We tested some new prototype ideas and we are studying those prototypes to add more sophistication to our in-paper promotions, and we'll be sharing those efforts among other Lee newspapers.

Randolph Brandt, editor

Seattle P-I

A new design includes consistent places for same-day and upcoming content promotion.

- Six to eight items of upcoming content are showcased at the top of A2 every Monday under a “Coming this Week” flag.
- A news summary on the same page promotes 20 or more same day content items every day of the week.
- Same day and upcoming content is promoted in the section flag on every section front.

Chris Beringer, deputy managing editor

The Gleaner, Henderson, KY

Specifically, one project that actually popped into my mind while in Evanston was a “Letter Writer Profile” in which we asked our frequent Opinion Page contributors to respond to a questionnaire in which we asked, among others questions, about favorite movie, president, book, their philosophical slant, favorite way to spend leisure time and, finally, “I write letters fairly often to the newspaper because . . .”

We published about two dozen one issue at a time on our Opinion Page during the month of May. It was a big readership hit. Sample comment: “I always wondered who that *&^%\$#* guy was who wrote those letters. Now I know!”

Another result: We created other letter writers and improved our connection to the readers.

We hope to have more reader participation projects in the months ahead. In fact, for our annual Progress Edition, we're soliciting nominations for “Hometown Heroes.” We hope to profile 50-60 community volunteers – sung and unsung – who help make ours a better community.

Ron Jenkins, editor

Roanoke Times, Roanoke, VA

As part of our short-term strategy, we've focused on upcoming and same-day content promotion and anticipate developing a program (with the cooperation of our News and Ad Operations departments) to consistently promote in 2002. We're focusing particular attention on front-page reefers to stories with high readership potential.

We have also developed action plans for improving content following the RI guidelines in a variety of areas, with responsibility for each area assigned to an individual. Some of the areas targeted

for improvement include stories about ordinary people (what makes them tick and why do they do what they do), including an occasional series on unsung heroes; getting ordinary people's voices into the paper through several different reader-submitted features; emphasizing and packaging news obituaries; building local technology content; adding a personal finance column. We're also using the Impact survey information to inform the newsroom through critiques and in other ways.

Trulinda Britt, marketing specialist

Sacramento Bee

A joint effort of the editorial and marketing departments has resulted in increased and more consistent in-paper content promotion.

Daily editorial space on the bottom of the back page of the A section is devoted to upcoming content, special reports and ongoing series. The design of the prominent, color position was done in concert with marketing, while the content and production rests with editorial.

To complement the newsroom's upcoming content promotion, marketing developed a daily house ad anchored in the main news section to tease readers about specific stories, columns, and points of interest in the same day's paper. The ads are specifically designed to connect with the occasional newspaper reader who doesn't read the paper daily, or whose reading habit doesn't include every section. The ad was developed by marketing to ensure consistency, but to provide the most current content selection, Editorial places it in the paper daily. Creating an anchored daily position overcame the ad-deadline obstacle that often keeps newspapers from promoting live copy in house ads.

Editorial continues to run daily highlights in the skybox of each section and, following the paper's April redesign, has boosted its use of referrals and tags throughout the paper to alert readers to related stories in that day's edition.

Marketing also developed house ads that tease readers to upcoming content. These quarter to full-page ads provide additional visibility to direct readers to special features and series.

Another component of The Bee's readership efforts is played out through sacbee.com, the paper's Web site. By seeking to drive readers to the web and online viewers to the newspaper, we hope to strengthen the overall relationship with the consumer. Throughout the newspaper, there are editorial mentions that inform

readers of continuing or extended online coverage, including an A2 reference that calls attention to the most current sacbee.com story or feature. The sacbee.com site was recently redesigned to include prominent home page placement that highlights upcoming content in The Bee.

Steven Weiss, director of marketing and public affairs

Richmond Times-Dispatch, Richmond, VA

The Impact study:

- Clarified content and other efforts most likely to yield results.
- Identified the quick hits where we can make a difference quickly.
- Reinforced some of the messages we thought our readers were already sending us.
- Provided reassurance that we were indeed headed in the right directions but needed to move faster.

In content, we are putting more focus on what readers need/want. We completely revamped our Weekend section in content and design to aim at under-35 adults. More emphasis on go-and-do information resulted in several new features, such as day trips and Under 30, which is dinner for two under \$30. (We also opened up writing these two features to the non-news members of the task force that accomplished the redesign.) Emphasis on readability resulted in major packaging changes: more informative and less cutesy labels; calendar information sorted day by day with more labels; movie summaries and ratings in grids; a longer list of recent restaurant reviews, again in grid form; "Family Fare" of good clean fun in a livelier, faster-read format; and more items. Nothing jumps except the cover story, sometimes.

The 2002 focus is on readability. Goals are for 80 percent of leads throughout the paper to be 30 words or less, for half of staff bylined stories to be 15 inches or less, for an average of one story per section front to be wholly contained on the section front, for one of every four staff stories to cross-promote or forward-promote content likely to interest occasional readers, and for 40 to 50 percent of staff stories to have visual entry points. These goals were settled upon by a group of news staff members who were asked to translate readability into measurable components; when a spot check showed we were close to the numbers initially chosen, we raised the bar.

This year, we began promoting an article for the next day in our A1 summary, and Business News and Sports especially began forward-promoting more than one story for Sunday and Monday.

We'll do more. We use our teen Web site (greatly improved after we had to kill our youth section) to cross-promote back to the newspaper, especially our extensive prep sports coverage, and will use the Web site more that way in coming months. (We still have teen coverage in the paper but not in a separate section anymore.)

Louise Seals, managing editor

Seattle Times

Upcoming and same-day content is promoted consistently throughout the paper:

- Every Sunday inside the back cover of the A section is “What to Watch for This Week in the Seattle Times” promoting one item for each day of the upcoming week.
- “Morning Newsline” daily on Page 1 describes in brief nine or so same-day news and business stories.
- A daily rail on the front page of the features section includes same-day content promotion and one item of upcoming content.
- Skyboxes on the front page of the Sunday Travel section promote content in the Thursday Northwest Weekend section and the “Travel Notes” feature inside the Thursday section promotes content in the Sunday Travel section.
- The Sunday Health page always carries a promo for a regular health column that appears in the Sunday magazine and always carries a promo for upcoming health content in the weekday paper.
- Once is not enough. In one issue of the paper they promoted an upcoming sports special section twice -- once on page one, and again on page one of the sports section, in both cases with a large color graphic and prime positioning.

Cyndi Nash, director, content development

Bluefield Daily Telegraph, Bluefield, WVA

We're running more feature-style writing of news stories; increased home, health, food, fashion stories; more comments and quotes from “average people”; more “go and do” information.

We also hold weekly planning sessions to brainstorm innovative story ideas, discuss ways to put a unique, different or fun spin on traditional stories and plan ways to get the comments from ordinary people in our upcoming stories. We also plan our features for the upcoming week, which helps the reporters with their planning and time management.

Samantha Perry, city editor

Stanley News & Press, Albemarle, NC

As a result of your work, we have created a “How to Get Your News in the Newspaper” booklet that we inserted in the newspaper and have thousands left that we give out free and distribute at Rotary, Lions, Optimists, sewing circles, anyone who wants a copy. It is designed to explain our code of ethics and how to submit items to get local news published.

C.F. McClughan, publisher

The Corvallis Gazette-Times, Corvallis, OR

We used the eight Imperatives as part of our annual editors retreat to help focus our priorities for 2002. We implemented a daily storyboard in the newsroom that lists our top five ongoing story subjects. We report on one or more of these topics in almost every edition. All these tend to be topics that are intensely local, and we've emphasized a focus on “real” people.

We've also paid more attention to how we organize this news, including promos to other sections of the paper, or upcoming editions of the newspaper.

Rob Priewe, managing editor

Tribune Co.

Across our newspapers we have focused much more on in-paper promotion. Internal analysis has shown that we have not carefully managed our internal processes for in-paper promotion. We are changing that. We are intensely focused on best practices for in-paper promotion. We are sharing best practices from inside Tribune and the newspaper industry. We are looking at our broadcast brethren for analogies to in-paper promotion. There are some good lessons to learn from other media. We are also developing processes to better monitor the deployment and messaging from in-paper promotion – same day, tomorrow's news and day of the week stories.

Timothy R. Kennedy,
vice president strategy/development -Tribune Publishing

Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

We are following the RI guidelines on reader improvement potential by increasing content in health, home, fashion, food, science, technology and environment and ordinary people and obits.

Recognizing the RI findings that science and environment are strong potential areas, that readers recognize these are global issues and are willing to read longer, more complex stories on these subjects, we've produced some particularly strong coverage in these areas.

In the area of obits, people in our market do not have to be famous to have an editorial obituary published. They need to have interesting stories. Today we had one that would make you cry – about a 9-month-old, and it ran on Page 1 above the fold. Local obits show the diversity of the people and their lives. Local obits are also a special thing that newspapers can do, which TV and radio cannot.

We've introduced a Q&A format that appears on page 2 or 3 that is people, unfiltered, talking in their everyday lives. It runs about two-thirds of a column in length and is done by variety of reporters. The subjects range from local kids to a celebrity coming through town. For example it could be a Girl Scout talking about what it's like selling Scout cookies; at same time, when Bush comes through town, if we can get a couple minutes with him to ask some less official questions, we'll do him too.

Other ways we've been getting ordinary people into the paper and doing stories that explain how things affect ordinary people include Monday's People, which are briefs on local, ordinary people; Snapshots, a photo and extended caption about an ordinary local person; and Road Warrior, a column about traffic and transportation problems of everyday life.

Along those same lines, we're about to launch a Tuesday through Friday column about ordinary people written by one of our outstanding reporters, one of our great feature reporters, Crocker Stephenson. The column will run in the same spot on either page 2 or 3 and each day will be about a different ordinary person.

In March we launched a new two-page package inside the Lifestyle section that will include ordinary people in the form of regular reader submissions in answer to a question we pose, a regular column asking ordinary people to tell us how they accomplished

something in life; a calendar that will contain lots of community announcements-type stuff; and regular inclusion of other items that are high on the Opportunity Scorecard: health, relationships, parenting.

Robin Seymour, research director

The Times Leader, Wilkes-Barre, PA

The readership study has given us some quantitative information to attack reader interest. When discussing story assignments and play, it is often brought up as a reason to put a story on 1A, for example, or not. This adds information to a purely subjective exercise on what our readers care about. We have also made a concerted effort to better use the paper to promote items of interest to our readers. In addition to promoting fewer sports items sometimes, we have added a “Coming tomorrow” feature to promote upcoming stories. Not rocket science, but not something we consistently did in the past.

We continue to focus more on health issues and other feature content that scored high on readership potential. We added a person to our features desk to do just that.

Allison Walzer, editor

The Meridian Star, Meridian, MS

We have adopted the following recommendations:

More narrative style writing, focused on letting people tell their stories, with more prominent play. Our reporters love this style because it gets them out of the traditional inverted pyramid box and lets the creative juices flow, and our editors love it because stories really are more interesting. This deliberate change is working very well with the redesign we launched on Jan. 1, which readers are telling us has made our newspaper much more appealing and easier to read. They are telling us the paper seems to have more news.

Community-focused announcements. Under the general concept of “local is always better,” we have reorganized the information in our community calendar. We have a standing calendar for regular events and a “local digest” of upcoming events that runs twice a week.

We highlight the lives of so-called ordinary people, even when they’re not necessarily doing extraordinary things. We moved the obituary page closer to the front of the paper. We place higher priority on health-related news, from what local physicians think about certain diets or health issues, to people who are overcoming

serious medical problems, to how hospitals are expanding to meet new needs.

We're doing more promotion of our stories. Example: We have traditionally published an editorial board interview on Mondays. It would run without any advance promotion. Now, after we actually conduct the interview on Thursday or Friday, we will do a news story for Sunday and alert readers to watch for the full story on Monday.

We routinely pull boxes of "go and do" information to help illustrate stories. This required something of a re-education effort among reporters, editors and the page layout staff.

We actively solicit reader-written material, not only letters to the editor and op-ed pieces. This builds on a theme we launched with our Profile 2001 edition, "By the people." That publication featured hundreds of reader-bylined articles, interesting stories about their lives or loved ones, told by the readers themselves.

Buddy Bynum, editor

SERVICE

In a fascinating service experiment of the past year, the *Kalamazoo Gazette* piloted a “total satisfaction guarantee” program from March 1, 2001 to August 31, 2001 to address two major objections to subscribing seven days a week – price and no time to read. Seven-day subscribers were offered a credit for every day they were not satisfied with the *Kalamazoo Gazette* – for any reason – including no time to read, poor delivery or editorial dissatisfaction.

Two communities were chosen as a test group. Subscribers received guaranteed delivery (if your paper does not arrive, call and the *Gazette* will deliver one within an hour) and seven-day subscribers received guaranteed satisfaction. Any day that a seven-day subscriber was not satisfied, for any reason, that day’s paper was free.

The mailings included targeted messages for specific groups: seven-day subscribers were invited to participate in the program; weekend subscribers were encouraged to upgrade to seven days with no risk and participate in the program; and non-subscribers were shown the important features of the paper and encouraged to become seven-day subscribers with no risk if they participated in the program.

Marketing efforts were designed to promote visibility. The *Gazette* management group went door-to-door one evening to visit with weekend subscribers and try to upgrade them to seven days. Outdoor advertising rotated in the two communities for all six months. Monthly advertising was purchased in weekly and shopper publications. The *Gazette* “Keep In Touch Tour” traveled to events in both communities.

Two similar communities were chosen as a control group. Residents received three mailings at the same time as the test group. The message promoted the *Gazette* and encouraged people to subscribe, but did not offer subscribers a guarantee.

Marketing efforts in the control area included outdoor advertising, weekly newspaper advertising, community presentations and posters. Every effort was made to ensure that marketing was equal in the test and control areas, to eliminate that as a possible variable.

“We hoped that the no-risk part of the total satisfaction offer would be an incentive for people to begin or upgrade to seven-day subscriptions,” says Mary Oudsema, assistant to the publisher. “We found that people were still concerned about not having the time to read and having papers pile up. We also had very little response to the direct mail.”

To test effectiveness, the *Gazette* compared net starts and stops of the test area versus the control area. The total starts versus stops in the test area versus the control area was 46 (\$547.40). While this was a gain, it was not a significant gain. The *Gazette* also had an increase in credits for the test group for the six months versus the same period the previous year. The net credit increase of \$529.55 almost equaled the gain in net starts versus stops. The *Gazette* also spent approximately \$35,000 on mailings and marketing.

“Our conclusion is that the total satisfaction guarantee program created good will and made many people feel good about the *Kalamazoo Gazette*,” Oudsema says. “People were pleased that we cared about them. We got to know them better and they got to know us better. However, most of the time, it was not enough to change the minds of those who think they have no time to read.

“The effect of the program on circulation numbers and revenue was almost break-even. It didn’t help us, but it didn’t hurt us either.”

Baltimore Sun

No other newspapers told us they engaged in large-scale controlled studies of service issues like the *Gazette*’s, but many are working hard at improving service.

The *Baltimore Sun* is among the most aggressive in improving its customer service. Bill Green, the Sun’s home-delivery manager, says his newspaper is driving to deliver “legendary” service. “Let’s face it, circulators have not been in the business of seeking out complaints,” Green said, but that is just what the Sun is doing, as a way of building a relationship with its customers.

He says most customers typically don’t take the time to complain. They eventually just end up going away. So Baltimore doesn’t wait for customers to complain, it actively solicits their opinions about service. Baltimore’s message to customer service representatives is that they should embrace a

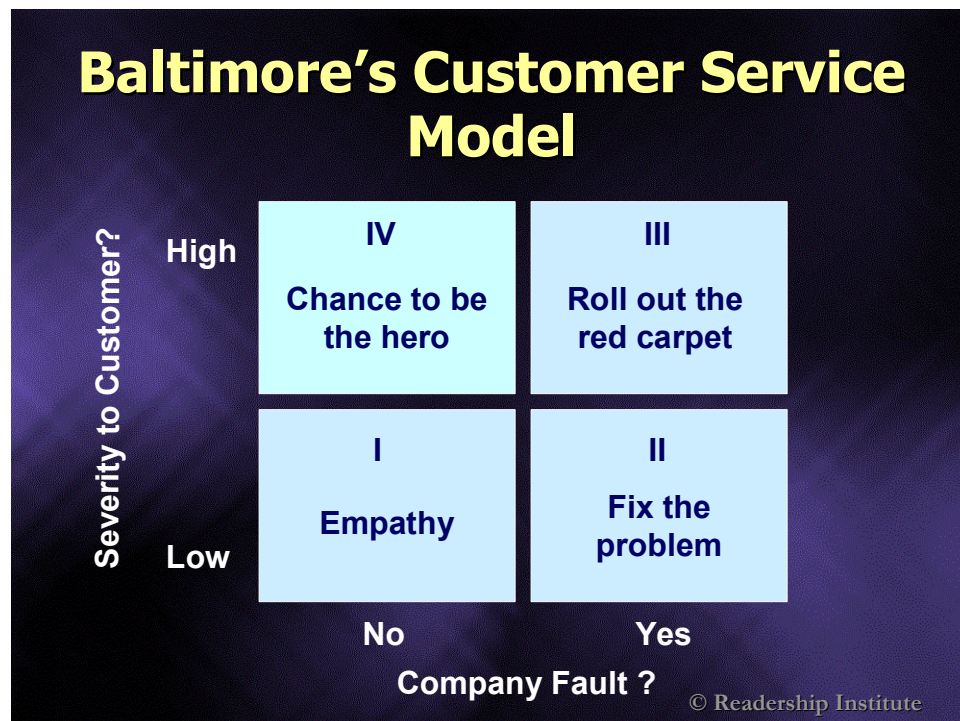
complaint as an opportunity to build loyalty, not hide it to make the numbers look good.

“The key is not just getting the complaint,” Green said, “it is resolving it quickly, the first time.”

Among the Sun’s other actions, it:

- Removed delivery agents’ phone numbers from bills and other correspondence and promoted the newspaper’s phone number,
- Restructured delivery contracts so that a quarter or more of agents’ income is based on service measurements, including complaints per thousand, repeat complaints per thousand, prompt starts of new subscriptions and redelivery of a missed paper within 60 minutes,
- Trained employees on the importance of handling customer complaints correctly.

The Sun adopted a service model borrowed from The Walt Disney Co. The model is based on a four-quadrant grid that looks like this:



Service problems are categorized according to whether the issue is of low or high severity *in the customer's view* and whether the service failure is or is

not the Sun's fault. Based on the quadrant, customer service representatives know how the problem should be handled.

If the problem is of low severity and it's not the company's fault, the response is *empathy*. Listen to the customer, accept the complaint, sympathize.

If the problem is of low severity and it is the company's fault, the response is to *fix the problem* expeditiously, then move on.

If the problem is of high severity, and it is the company's fault, then the response is to *roll out the red carpet*, not only to solve the problem, but to take extra steps to let the customer know that the company takes the problem seriously and is eager to retain the customer's business.

If the problem is of high severity, but not the *Sun's* fault, that is the newspaper's *chance to be a hero*. In these cases the *Sun* solves the problem, even though it is not at fault, in order to earn the customer's loyalty.

Baltimore offers these two real customer problems to illustrate how the matrix works:

Real customer problem #1

A subscriber has not been receiving his newspaper. There is road construction in his neighborhood, which precludes the delivery person from driving down the road and delivering the paper. The construction will continue for another 30 days and the area affected is about one city block.

This falls into the upper left quadrant. The problem is of high severity to the customer, but it is not the Baltimore Sun's fault. Resolving this problem enables the newspaper to be a hero, so it finds a way to get the newspaper to the door, so the carrier walked the paper to subscribers' porches.

Real customer problem #2

The Lexus Auto dealership called several days in a row. The papers delivered in the rain had been wet. On Tuesday and Wednesday the following week, the newspapers were thrown hard against the door and scared the night auditor to death!

This problem falls in the upper right quadrant. It is of high severity to the customer and it is the newspaper's fault. The service-recovery response is to roll out the red carpet, not just solve the problem.

The matrix and actual subscriber complaints were used in classroom-style training for circulation employees. Baltimore also had banners of the matrix made for each office and warehouse to serve as a reminder of the training and that this was the behavior and thought process that was expected. Finally, they captured specific examples of employees and agents doing it right and shared them with everyone to infect the rest of the group. The matrix became Baltimore's commonality of language.

Under the premise of "What gets measured gets accomplished," The *Sun* is measuring the results of its service efforts. Although call volume is up, speed of answer is down and abandoned calls have dropped. Here are the results on a variety of service metrics.

Metric	1999	2001	Improvement
Prompt Starts – Did we start the subscription on time?	77.2%	90.7%	17.5%
On-Time Delivery – Did the paper arrive at the distribution points by the deadline?	80.5%	95.2%	18.3%
Lost Call Percentage – How many customers hung up before speaking with us?	2.4%	0.3%	87.5%
Complaints/Thousand Papers	1.96%	1.53%	21.9%
Missed Paper Recovery – How many complaints of no delivery were resolved by delivering a newspaper within 60 minutes of the complaint? Note: 1999 guarantee was 90 minutes.	92.3%	96.9%	5.0%

Baltimore is moving to improve service in areas in addition circulation. For example to improve service to advertisers, the *Sun* launched advertising sales teams comprising sales representatives, artists, sales assistants, research analysts and compositors. These customer-focused teams are expected to provide better customer service and improve collaboration among internal departments.

Other newspapers

Here are some of the service ideas other newspapers are pursuing.

Bluefield Daily Telegraph, Bluefield, WVA

Put a new emphasis on the importance of high-quality, consistent customer service. Revised the in-house “Customer Service Skills” booklet for distribution to all employees.

Samantha Perry, city editor

Herald-Tribune, Sarasota, FL

One short-term goal is to deliver the paper by 5:30 a.m. every weekday. We plan to build our first distribution center, which will cut 45 to 60 minutes out of the delivery cycle, improve product integrity, carrier communication and retention. Meanwhile, several improvements have been made in both production management as well as equipment maintenance to improve product quality, press “up-time” which results in fewer “late days” and earlier delivery.

The Herald-Tribune continues to address contractor turnover. We continue to monitor profits and adjust accordingly to ebb the flow of contractor turnover. Efforts have paid off, but a changed economy with increasing unemployment has improved carrier retention and the quality of individuals seeking newspaper delivery.

We created a new Customer Care Supervisor position to help manage phone operations. Existing employees received remedial training, plus new employees receive new customer care orientation.

We expanded our phone lines, which allows for more customer access, upgraded our voice response system and paging system for employee communication.

Diane McFarlin, publisher

The Times Leader, Wilkes-Barre, PA

The Times Leader is focusing on its circulation department and some phone routing issues. We are trying to empower more staff to satisfy customers – whether they are in the building or outside...--inspiring the idea of flexibility when meeting people's needs. We have made some headway with clear direction from the top.

Allison Walzer, editor

Hamilton Journal-News

Last fall, the *Journal-News* embarked on a major circulation reorganization project to provide better service to readers and advertisers. We basically dismantled our delivery structure and

created smaller routes, where carriers can deliver the paper on time, and cleaned up our zoning boundaries so that advertisers can target inserts more accurately. We are now in the clean up stages of this but our anticipation is by spring of this year, we will be consistently providing better service to our subscribers. When the *Journal-News* started this process, 20-25% of our carriers were delivering later than the 6 a.m. Monday-Friday delivery deadline and later than the 8 a.m. Saturday and Sunday delivery deadline. When all is finished, we will have all of their carriers with routes that can be delivered by 5:45 a.m. Monday-Saturday and 7:30 a.m. on Sunday.

Edwin Blackwell Clark, editor and publisher

Concord Monitor, Concord, NH

We added a circulation marketing director, a job justified, in part, by a plan to take better control of single-copy outlets through close weekly monitoring. The goal being to improve service, reduce waste and increase sales. The results are very positive. Jason Plante, circulation marketing manager, is also working closely with the news staff, including attendance at daily news planning sessions, to identify stories for rack promotion and to manage the daily single copy draw.

Tom Brown, publisher

The News & Observer, Raleigh, NC

- Added a print quality phone number and e-mail address to our page 2 directory.
- Changed the classified disclaimer regarding errors to be more customer friendly.
- Conducted a customer service survey in four departments (classified, display, business office and circulation) to get employee ideas on where are the most opportunities to improve customer service.
- A circulation-billing overhaul is in the works.
- New carrier contracts will include service standards.
- Put in place a cross functional team in circulation – home delivery, sales & marketing and customer service.

Chris Blaser, vice president/circulation

The Palm Beach Post, Palm Beach, FL

The Customer Service Committee concentrated on six points in the Reader Opportunity Scorecard: (1) condition/completeness of the paper; (2) quality of paper, ink and type size; (3) customer service; (4) accuracy of the bill; (5) when and how the paper is delivered; and (6) the cost of home delivery.

The committee took immediate action on The Post's highest ranked opportunity area, condition/completeness of the paper. They created a new report that categorizes incomplete complaints, so that future action may be taken. They also studied the quality of the paper and delivery, and determined that these are large, complicated issues that involve considerable expense to change. Therefore the committee made its top recommendations on actions that can most impact their relationship with customers now:

- Establish a "weekend duty" call list, especially of Advertising staff, for customer service questions and complaints that Circulation reps cannot answer.
- Establish customer service and telephone etiquette standards for all departments.
- Create a list of employees who can handle calls from non-English speaking customers.
- Redesign customer bills to place the expiration and rate information on the receipt portion of the invoice. Weekly rates should be shown so the customer can see the value of a longer-term subscription.
- Longer-term goal: Have a credit card payment option for subscription and renewal on PalmBeachPost.com.

Laura Cunningham, marketing services director

Austin American-Statesman, Austin, TX

Completed a customer survey focusing on service and are in the process of defining a service statement for the company. Each department will be adopting a few service initiatives as recommended by the Service Excellence working group. Some examples include creating a service-oriented phone book for assisting in directing customer inquiries, including service issues in initial employment interviews, and better signage throughout the building.

Sara Steger, assistant to the publisher

Richmond Times-Dispatch, Richmond, VA

Customer service used to be something that only circulation or advertising talked about, and then only in terms of external audiences. No longer. Our circulation service got A+-level marks from subscribers in a January 2001 random mail survey of subscribers. We're proud of that, but every department – marketing and sales, circulation, news and editorial, and production – is focusing on internal and external customer service. It's new for some of us and ties in to the response on culture and management practices.

Louise Seals, managing editor

Dubuque Telegraph Herald, Dubuque, IA

Resurrecting customer service training.

Brian Cooper, executive editor

The Oakland Press, Pontiac, MI

Circulation Director Dan Gallivan consolidated the customer service and retention departments to make one more efficient department and improve results.

The Press has made progress on things such as packaging improvements, location satisfaction, and customer service. Improvements include:

- Better invoice messaging
- Professional CSR training
- Friendlier grace periods
- New carrier contracts
- Delivery list availability
- Better customer communication (follow-up)
- Understanding product value

Gallivan also sends personalized letters to former subscribers, seeking reasons why they stopped subscribing and asking them to try the newspaper again.

Gary Gilbert, executive editor

Houston Chronicle

Service, especially in the area of home delivery, has taken on a new dimension with questionnaires sent to all subscribers quarterly, with results tabulated and acted upon by zone managers and distributors.

Jack Sweeney, publisher

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Implemented a new first-class customer service program to address delivery issues. Redesigned bills to make them easier to read. Also working on a reader's guide to the newspaper, which will go to all new readers. Instituted the mailing of a welcome letter to new and renewing customers. Until the task force made this recommendation, the first thing a new customer received from the Post-Gazette was the bill. Now they will get a letter from the publisher, delivered by the carrier.

Lorraine E. Branham, assistant to the publisher

BRAND

Four Impact newspapers have volunteered to participate in a Readership Institute branding experiment: the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, the *Racine Journal Times*, *Raleigh News and Observer* and the *Durham Herald-Sun*. Results of that work will be reported separately.

Other newspapers have been engaged in work to establish or improve their brand images. Here are some of their reports.

E.W. Scripps

We have a unique opportunity in Scripps because we've been busy creating highly successful cable networks like HGTV, Food Network, DIY and, soon, Fine Living. That means a Scripps newspaper isn't just a community newspaper; it's a community newspaper with some interesting friends. We're in the early stages of developing a cross-branding project that we think will drive both readership and viewership.

We're also heavily emphasizing partnerships with local broadcast TV. We're not just cross-promoting. In many cases, we're covering stories together. The most sophisticated examples so far are in Knoxville TN, Corpus Christi TX and Evansville IN. I have no way of proving this (so far), but I'm convinced that these shared efforts – particularly then they are high-quality local enterprise reporting – raise brand respect for all concerned.

Mike Phillips, editorial development director

Baltimore Sun

The Sun was one of the six newspapers cited for having a strong brand identity and unique brand position. Using this information, we developed a broadcast spot with a consistent message (Where Maryland Comes Alive) that reinforces our position as Maryland's most trusted and useful source of news and information. Also, since columnists represent the "personality" of the newspaper, The Sun launched an in-paper ad campaign promoting our columnists.

Tim Thomas

Corvallis Gazette-Times, Corvallis, OR

We've formed a newsroom promotions committee to help coordinate an improved and expanded promo campaign that will focus not only on upcoming coverage, but highlight the strengths of our current coverage, along with some profiles of the staffers who gather and organize the news. We also hope to begin cross-

promoting with our redesigned Web page, which is now updated by the newsroom to accommodate breaking news.

Rob Priewe, managing editor

Herald-Tribune, Sarasota, FL

The Readership Initiative, the Eight Imperatives and a Belden Research project have resulted in creation of a comprehensive branding plan to be rolled out this spring for all aspects of our multimedia company -- television and Internet, as well as the newspaper. Details are still in development, but on the newspaper side our objectives are to stimulate frequency of use, increase loyalty, reduce price resistance and increase satisfaction by doing the following: show how we deliver benefits that matter to people in ways that cannot be duplicated elsewhere, tap people's emotional needs and provide compelling reasons to choose the Herald-Tribune, establish a personality for all our media and enhance our credibility by creating a commitment upon which we can consistently over-deliver through our products, services and behavior. Everything will communicate brand. It is the sum of all contact with our customers. We will launch an internal campaign to our employees in February and the external multimedia campaign in March 2002.

Diane McFarlin, publisher

Concord Monitor, Concord, NH

The readership study promoted an innovative direct mail program last spring geared to lifestyles. The circulation department created a campaign from six impact items on the Monitor's list that the research suggested could win readers through promotion. These were advertising, things to do, places to go, science/technology, health/fitness, easy to use/navigable. The campaign resulted in 373 new starts.

Tom Brown, publisher

The Daily Sentinel, Grand Junction, CO

We are slowly but surely putting a face on the paper, and trying to always position ourselves as a community information resource. We are using more employees from different departments in our house ads, TV ads, and in the near future our radio ads. The message is "we live here, we work here, we care about our town too!" A truly effective branding campaign will require a lot more work and money than I think we can dedicate this year. However, the readership study did give us very useful information about what a branding campaign should try to accomplish, when we are ready to take it on.

Lynn Lickers, marketing director

Roanoke Times, Roanoke, VA

The brand results served to validate our positioning statement, which was launched through the development of The Roanoke Times Communications Standards in August 2001. We integrate our positioning statement and the consumer's view into all of our communications and promotions. We feel strongly that demonstrating consistent and grounded communication standards will improve readership over time.

Trulinda Britt, marketing specialist

Lancaster Newspapers, Inc., Lancaster, PA

For 50 years, the newspaper never publicized the fact it had given more than \$30 million dollars to local community organizations. Beginning this month we began a promotion campaign to inform readers of donation activities.

We developed a "parade" van with graphics of persons reading the three papers and Lancasteronline.com. This van was highlighted in numerous, large community parades and events.

We intensified promotion of content on the newspaper Web site under a new Web promotional theme: "There's always more to learn about Lancaster County at Lancasteronline.com."

We intensified promotion of upcoming editorial content with prior and same day radio and point-of-sale promotion.

We have added rack cards for specific events and articles to increase single copy sales.

Harold Miller, vice president/marketing

Richmond Times-Dispatch, Richmond, VA

We are testing the statements in our own readership surveys. We completed one with subscribers this year and have one in the field now among single-copy readers, and we try to do a marketing telephone survey three or four times a year. (The database was gleaned from contest entries cross-matched against our subscriber database, and the sample was randomly chosen from the resulting single-copy database.)

Louise Seals, managing editor

CULTURE

Among the most significant findings of the Impact study was that newspapers overwhelmingly have defensive workplace cultures. Defensive cultures are risk-averse and have difficulty adapting to changes in the marketplace and business environment. Companies with constructive cultures are more flexible, more risk tolerant, and more focused on customers. The study also found that the few newspapers that have constructive cultures also tend to have higher readership.

One of the hardest tasks in changing culture is for leaders who have thrived and succeeded in the existing culture to view it critically in order to analyze its strengths and weaknesses. Yet, many newspaper leaders are doing just that and confronting the challenges of moving from a defensive to a constructive culture.

One newspaper group executive told us, "I've never heard so much discussion of cultural issues as I did at this year's strategic plan reviews. Intensity of publisher focus on the issue varies, but at many of our newspapers I'd say 'relentless' would be a fair description."

That relentless attitude manifests itself in a variety of ways. "Some newspapers in the group are conducting customer advisory panels as cross-departmental projects. A circulation department exec at the daily news meeting is a common sight at most of our newspapers," the newspaper group executive said.

Newspapers leaders in the group also are willing to take tough action when appropriate, the executive told us. "One of our bigger newspapers has practically ripped a couple of departments up by the roots in the course of breaking down walls and eliminating inward-looking empires."

Changing culture is a long-term process, sometimes needing major upheavals like that cited above, and always involving myriad small steps. Here are some of the steps newspapers have told us they are taking.

The Meridian Star, Meridian, MS

We all signed a "pledge" to be more cooperative and communicative with each other, with our ad department, with

visitors and with our readers. As a result, I've seen a shift in the newsroom's willingness to try different approaches to stories (yes, we even welcome story ideas from the ad staff and newspaper carriers), all based on the general theme "we don't know it all." The attitude is changing to "how can I best get this story in the paper" instead of "how can I avoid doing this story today."

Buddy Bynum, editor

Bluefield Daily Telegraph, Bluefield, WVA

Increased communication between editors and reporters before stories are started, so that writers are clear about the expectations. More recognition for outstanding work. (We have an "Attaboy" display on our bulletin board that we update regularly and we have started having contests, such as "Best Lead" and "Most Ordinary People In One Week," giving the winners prizes such as T-shirts.

Samantha Perry, city editor

Herald-Tribune, Sarasota, FL

Part of the branding initiative will be an internal program to make employees aware of our common goal and create goodwill among departments so that we work together even more closely.

A performance-management training program was begun late last year to help managers and employees build better working relationships through open communication. Many times assumptions about what is expected from both managers and employees are made regarding job responsibilities and it causes a rift in that working relationship. That rift can result in unhappy employees, which is not only felt in the work environment but with our customers as well.

Our Partners program, launched under the auspices of NAA, will act in the same manner, but will result in a better understanding and appreciation between departments of each other's job responsibilities.

Diane McFarlin, publisher

The Times Leader, Wilkes-Barre, PA

What the study did in this area is underscore what we all knew: we are a defensive culture and it doesn't help matters most of the time. If denial is the first stage, perhaps we are beyond that..... Have we made major culture shifts? Hardly. But our management team has shifted greatly and with that has come – and will encourage more – change. It's a good thing.

Allison Walzer, editor

Concord Monitor, Concord, NH

The most dramatic changes are now underway in management organization and practices. Editor Mike Pride has employed a very open, consultative, team approach for well over a decade. Still, the study made clear there was work to do throughout the building.

Communication in the newsroom was addressed by moving a veteran, talented editor back from the editorial page to a new position of senior editor. He is working closely with the reporting staff to train, grow and involve its members in taking the news report to a higher level. Among the goals for our new managing editor is to improve the performance review process to make it more timely and positive.

We have restarted a cross-departmental team focused directly on using readership data to grow circulation. It includes the advertising director, web manager, circulation director, controller and circulation marketing director. This last job is new and inspired by the study and our goal to focus on growing circulation. Among the team's goals is taking action and listening to staff suggestions.

Tom Brown, publisher

Austin American-Statesman

Based upon recommendations from a working group, our Executive Committee is developing a list of priority initiatives to embrace as well as behaviors to abandon.

Sara Steger, assistant to the publisher

Dubuque Telegraph Herald, Dubuque, IA

We will develop a structured orientation program for all new employees. It will be cross-divisional (knock at those silos) and will have a mentoring component (to pay more attention to a new hire's first two years).

We will also attempt to minimize the use of e-mail in favor of more personal interaction.

Brian Cooper, executive editor

Richmond Times Dispatch, Richmond, VA

We are about to enter the second year of a two-year reassessment of business challenges and the leadership and management competencies needed to meet them. We are undertaking a top-down leadership training program that will include greater authority and greater accountability at the appropriate – and usually lower – levels. Throughout the newsroom, managers and supervisors are

being held accountable for their department's contributions to the readability goals.

Louise C. Seals, managing editor

Appeal-Democrat, Marysville, CA

We could go on for hours on this. Culture has begun taking a serious turnaround. Gallup Q12 scores up highest in the company year over last year. Core Values have become our mantra. We stick by them, seriously.

- Monthly "Lunch with the Publisher" where 10 people are invited for a box lunch in conference room with me, nothing more than a get to know you session. Great results.
- Monthly recognition event for whole building (125 associates)
- Highlighting birthdays, anniversaries, employee of the month. Each month, a new committee of three people organizes the event, which includes refreshments, raffles, fun and games...lasts about an hour.
- Constantly preaching respect for one another. And it's showing up!
- Established interview panels. Finalists for a job are selected by hiring manager. Then that candidate must chat for about 45 minutes with a panel of three people made up of folks from other departments. If that panel (different people for each candidate) decides the candidate would not be a good fit for our family, there is no job offer made. Not even the publisher can overrule the panel.
- And on and on...

M. Olaf Frandsen, publisher

The Oakland Press, Pontiac, MI

A member of the Circulation management team attends the daily news meeting in the Editorial Department to report on sales results, learn about upcoming Editorial stories, and to discuss ways to sell more newspapers. Additionally, the editor and the vice president for sales and marketing have made presentations to the Circulation Department's communication meetings.

Garry Gilbert, executive editor

Lancaster Newspapers, Inc.

We involved the entire editorial staff and representatives from advertising, circulation and marketing in the current newspaper redesign. In the past only the editor was involved with a professional designer.

We involved readers in newspaper redesign through use of focus groups to help determine reader wants, needs and perceptions. Prior redesign activities did not use focus groups.

We're beginning to share circulation, stop, retention, churn, "stolen" subscriber numbers between morning, afternoon and Sunday papers. Never done prior to this year.

Editorial is meeting regularly with the marketing manager and the circulation marketing manager.

The marketing department is working with editorial staffs of the three newspapers to help develop stories on Census 2000 information.

Marketing is working with editorial for special articles that will increase single copy sales.

Harold Miller, vice president/marketing

Dayton Daily News, Dayton, OH

The fact that we've created a Readership Council involving all the newspaper's major departments works to tear down silos in the operation. Cultural issues will be critical to achieving service goals. We decided to use the company's existing Diversity Council – made up of 12 employees from various levels and locations throughout Cox Ohio – as our Readership committee on culture. The primary focus will be to define the current culture and then use those findings to determine what our preferred culture should be. In order to accomplish this mission, as Phase I, we have commissioned an employee survey.

By June 2002, we hope to have results that can be shared with employees. Success will be defined with this initiative by measuring not only how well we gather information pertinent to defining the culture, but also by gaining better understanding of the link between employee satisfaction and increased readership. The challenge put forth to senior management will be to make sure we act upon the employee feedback that we solicit – that will be phase II.

Jeff Bruce, editor

Ventura County Star, Ventura, CA

We now have a communication committee that educates staff on our market indicators, strategic intentions and skills needed by employees. We have an intranet site for these same issues.

Tim Gallagher, editor