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PAPERCLIPS

MFCP midwest free community papers
the official newsletter of Midwest Free Community Papers

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President's Corner

Back to School Means Time to get Back to the Basics

Lisa Miller

The time has officially come and summer is over. Several parents have taken that brave step of dropping off their college-bound child off to a university. Tears were shed but brave nonetheless happy they are off for their next adventure. Then there are the parents who are going to battle every morning with tired and cranky elementary-age students just to get them to eat their breakfast before they get on the bus. Lastly there are the grandparents that can sit back and smile during this time of year, enjoying all the first-day-of-school photos, remembering when it was once them.

We are all at different stages in our lives. That holds true for our publications too. Some of us have been in this industry for a few months and others too many years to count. However, I think going back to the basics is something that can have a positive impact on every part of our ourselves and our publications.

Step one, make sure you are up for change. We haven't gotten to where we are today without change. The industry is constantly changing, so make sure you are keeping up. Don't be afraid to try new things. Watch the webinars! MFCP has several recordings Lee would be happy to share with you.

Step two, ask others what they would like from you and your products. Do they want digital? Do they even know they want digital? Open communication is key in our business. Without communication, this world would be a very lonely place.

Finally, step three, remember who you are doing this for each day. There are so many people who rely on you. Employees, clients, readers … there are just too many to mention. Don't forget — if you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of others.

Of course, there are many more steps to the basics. These are just a few to help you get back to the basics for your first days of school. We are all in this together. Yes, I am currently picturing Zach doing the dance from "High School Musical."

From the Office

Roll Up Your Sleeves: Real Estate Session Sept 17th 10AM

Lee Borkowski
Executive Director

Mark your calendars! On **Tuesday, September 17th at 10 AM**, MFCP is hosting a real estate session you won't want to miss.

Our speaker is David Tomasini, a retired publisher who knows two things inside and out: advertising sales and real estate**.** These days David is one of the top Realtors in the Myrtle Beach market. Fortunately for us, his heart still belongs to print. He's entertaining, straight-talking, and ready to share ideas you can put to work right away.

During this session, he'll help us make sense of today's real estate market, give us smart strategies for growing lineage, and show us how to build stronger relationships with local Realtors.

And here's the best part: this won't be a sit-back-and-listen type of call. It's going to be a roll-up-your-sleeves session. You'll get real data for your own county and learn how to use it to drive revenue. Think about it—if you could show Realtors how quickly homes are selling, how much prices are jumping, or how competitive the market is, how much easier would it be to secure more advertising dollars? With just a little effort, this kind of information can turn into increased $$$ every single month.

Bonus: Everyone who signs up and attends with their camera on will get a custom market analysis for their primary county—just like this sample.

Join Zoom Meeting:
Meeting ID: 895 3672 7860
Passcode: 626106

MVP at Work

Do the “Best” Thing

By Aaron Burns
Advertising Sales Manager- Cityview
Johnston, IA

For more than 30 years, CITYVIEW’s Best of Des Moines awards have been a fun, meaningful way to highlight the businesses, people, and places that make this city what it is. When we added a live event 18 years ago, everything changed. The awards were already a big deal, but bringing everyone together to celebrate in person? That took things to a new level.

It’s not just about winning (though that certainly matters). It’s about the experience. Business owners bring their teams to celebrate, post live from the event, and proudly display their certificates afterward.

The success comes from keeping the process simple and fair. There’s no nomination fee or “pay-to-play.” We choose the categories, and open a single-vote survey to the public. Voters write in their nominations for who they think is “the best.” When voting ends, we tally up the top three in each category, notify the finalists, and announce the winner at the event and in the print issue. This is distributed at the event, so it's the first chance to see the full results in print.

The event is free for nominees. Our revenue comes from sponsorships and thank-you ads from businesses. If you’re a publisher or organizer thinking about launching something like this, don’t overthink it. Start with around 100 categories, keep it transparent, and let your community lead the way. Run your poll for a decent amount of time (we go three months) and give yourself time to calculate the results and contact the nominees.

Start selling ad packages before the event. Let businesses know they’ve been nominated and that results will appear alongside their ads. Thank-you ads are especially effective. We even run a follow-up issue for more personalized recognition with winners and runners-up.

Create a clean, recognizable emblem or logo. Once your emblem starts appearing on windows, websites, and advertising, you’ll want to make sure it’s protected or copyrighted. That emblem can become one of the most valuable parts of the whole program. We’ve even seen the Best of Des Moines emblem on everything from billboards to semi-trucks. It carries weight because the community decides.

You don’t have to launch with a live event, but it’s worth adding once the buzz builds. It’s been a game changer for us, especially when it comes to sponsorships. Beyond Best of Des Moines, we’ve expanded to other areas too—like our new Best of Guthrie County event this September.

This isn’t just a contest. It’s a celebration. And if you’re not doing something like this yet, it’s time to start.

“

Members Helping Members

What is the Best Advice You’ve Ever Received?
Our MVP’s want to know!

This morning our MVP group had a lively discussion around a simple question: *What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received in your career?* The conversation was both fun and thought-provoking but there is room for more advice. I thought it would be nice if we joined in the conversation and shared our words of wisdom. I’ll go first:

When I first started out, I really struggled with errors—whether it was something that slipped into the paper when I was designing, or mistakes I made as a sales rep. One day, I made a pretty big error of omission in a client’s ad. I was the sales rep, and the error was probably my fault (doesn’t really matter—it was big!), and I knew the client would be unhappy… if they noticed.

My boss at the time—who also happened to be my Grandma—asked me what I planned to do about it. I admitted I hadn’t decided yet and was hoping maybe the client wouldn’t see it. She quickly set me straight. She said, *“No, you are going to pick up the phone and tell them about the error—better they hear it from you first. Then you’re going to ask what we can do to make it right. Ask what they want—not what you want.”*

She went on to say that mistakes will always happen, but the important thing is to be in front of them: open, honest, willing to accept responsibility, and committed to setting things right. That advice has stuck with me ever since.

Another important lesson I learned later is that sometimes you need to “fire” a client. In my career, I can only think of a handful of cases where that was necessary. In one instance, a landscaping customer bought a 1/8-page full-color ad. This was in the early days of 4-color, and while the color was good, it wasn’t perfect. He expected it to look exactly like the color print he had supplied us. It didn’t.

I tried everything—doubling the ad size, rerunning it multiple times at no charge, and carefully explaining what to expect from a reproduction standpoint. Each time, the ad looked fine, but he was still unhappy. Finally, I calmly told him I was sorry we couldn’t meet his expectations and suggested he might be happier at the daily newspaper. Then I handed him a check refunding his original purchase.

I felt pretty good about that decision—until a month later when my regional manager stopped in to ask if I had fired a client. Apparently, my client had called him. I explained the background, what I had done to try to fix the issue, and then braced myself for his disapproval. Instead, he fully understood, said we had been more than fair, and told me to move on—that our entire team had wasted too much energy on trying to please a customer who was never going to be happy.

So, while “firing” a customer isn’t something to be taken lightly, sometimes it’s the right call. Both of these lessons—owning your mistakes and knowing when to move on—have served me well throughout my career.

So, what’s the lesson that’s served you well? Please click below to share a story or two. I in turn will compile the responses, add them to the MVP’s words of wisdom, and share them with all of you in our next newsletter.

Thanks much and see you next month!

Lee

CLICK HERE TO SHARE

Ad-Libs

A Lesson from Lockwood's Folly

John Foust, Greensboro, NC

I remember a conversation with Brent, a long-time print and digital advertiser. "I enjoy meeting with advertising sales people and hearing their ideas, but I always cringe when they show up from out of the blue with a spec ad – before they've even talked to me. What that usually means is, 'I haven't learned enough about your business to base this idea on actual information, so I made it up.' More often than not, the idea consists of one-size-fits-all stock art and a headline so generic that it could apply to a number of businesses. If that kind of spec ad is the centerpiece of their presentation, the sale is a no-go."

Brent's comments remind me of Lockwood's Folly, a tiny spot on the map of coastal North Carolina. The river that shares the same name first appeared on a map which was created by John Ogilby in 1671, which makes it one of the oldest named rivers in North Carolina. There are a number of stories regarding how the area got its name. The one I like best is about a man named Lockwood, who set out to build the sailing ship of his dreams along the banks of the river. After many months of work, he launched the boat and quickly found that the draft (the depth of the boat from the waterline) was too deep to clear the sandbar at the inlet. With no way to sail the boat off the sandbar, he had to leave it to rot. According to legend, the boat was visible above water for years. Locals called it "Lockwood's Folly" and eventually the name was applied to both the river and the inlet.

If old Mr. Lockwood had done some research – if he had taken the time to row a small boat to the sandbar to check the river's depth – he could have changed his building plans and avoided the catastrophe. All he had to do was tie a weight – or even a rock – to the end of a rope, drop it into the water, mark the rope where it stopped descending, and measure the distance. But for some reason, he skipped that important step and ended up with a stuck dream boat.

If the people calling on Brent would simply do some research before preparing spec ads, he might buy more advertising from them. "Those unresearched spec ads create a bad impression," he explained. "At worst, it makes them look lazy and, at best, it makes them look like they're in too much of a hurry. And to boot, it's a waste of my time and a waste of the newspaper's resources."

There's a good chance that some of those rogue spec ads which Brent has rejected are being recycled to show to other prospective advertisers. But he doesn't give them much chance of success, unless there are big adjustments.

The lesson here is simple: Do your research, so your ideas won't get stuck in the mud with nowhere to go.

John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many ad departments are using his training DVDs to save time and get quick results from in-house training. Email for information: john@johnfoust.com

Ryan Dohrn

Guide Your Buyer: Mastering the Journey to Close More Sales

This month Ryan uses the analogy of a road trip to give you ideas on how to guide your buyer to a sales plan.

Ryan starts out this way: So, you take your clients on a bit of a drive when selling to them. How bumpy is your road? Are you leaving them at a rest stop? Or, do they feel safe and sit back and enjoy the ride? Find out if you are an F driver or an A+ road warrior.

He goes on to explain that "in this episode I dive into the art of leading your buyers through a seamless journey that makes saying "yes" an easy decision. You'll learn how to be a trusted guide, suggest outcomes that align with their goals, and create a buying experience that feels natural rather than forced. "

Why not take a trip and see what success looks like at the end.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3SQfTFQr_o

Listen to Ryan's ad sales podcast, Ad Sales Nation, on iTunes or on Soundcloud. Keep up to date with Ryan's ad sales training advice on Facebook at: https://www.facebook.com/RyanDohrnLIVE

Ryan Dohrn is an award-winning ad sales training coach, a nationally recognized internet sales consultant, and an international motivational speaker. He is the author of the best-selling ad sales book, *Selling Backwards*. Ryan is the President and founder of Brain Swell Media and 360 Ad Sales Training, a boutique ad sales training and sales coaching firm with a detailed focus on ad sales training, internet consulting, and media revenue generation. Ryan is also the Publisher of *Sales Training World*.

Kevin Slimp

There's a New Paper in Town

And 14,000 LinkedIn followers are all worked up about it

Kevin Slimp - kevin@kevinslimp.com

I once joked that if I were hosting a birthday party and wanted to be sure no one would attend, I'd send out the invitations on LinkedIn. More about that later.

Around 12 years ago, a young man, around 30 then, approached me during a break at a convention in Des Moines, Iowa, and asked if we could talk. He had worked at a local newspaper, owned by a newspaper conglomerate, in his home state (Kansas). I've never forgotten his words, "I know I could put out a better newspaper."

Ten years ago, Joey, his wife Lindsey, and a few friends he recruited to be a part of the news and sales team, published the first issue of Newton Now. Newton Now was later renamed Harvey County Now.

I was so impressed with Joey, Lindsey, and their team's work that I started writing about them. My first column was in 2015, shortly after the first issue of Newton Now hit the streets. In late 2016, I interviewed Joey for my syndicated column for newspaper publishers. I learned in that interview that Lindsey and Joey didn't inherit the paper, nor did they inherit any money to start the paper. In Joey's words, "We did it through luck and hard work."

In a recent column for The Hutchinson (Kansas) Tribune, Joey wrote, "On Tuesday, Nov. 15, 2016, Hutchinson lost its newspaper." Hutchinson, by the way, is Joey's hometown. He said, "Many in the community didn't know it yet, but I take no victory lap in saying, 'I told you so."

On November 16, 2016, Joey had written about the fate of his local newspaper. In it, he wrote, "It was a good run," and predicted what would happen to his "beloved" hometown newspaper, now that a private equity fund owned it.

Nine years later, in a June 1, 2025 column, Joe wrote, "Today, the Hutchinson News isn't really a newspaper anymore. There hasn't been a local reporter in that newsroom for over a year."

What about LinkedIn?

What does all of this have to do with LinkedIn?" you might be wondering. Let me explain. Two days ago, I added a post on LinkedIn about Lindsey and Joey's new newspaper, The Hutchinson Tribune.

Usually, when I post something on LinkedIn, the counter will tell me there have been 500-1,200 impressions. (A LinkedIn impression is the number of times a piece of content, such as a post or article, is displayed in someone's feed, even if they didn't interact with it. To count as an impression, the content must be visible on the screen for at least 300 milliseconds with 50% or more of the post in view, or it must be clicked). That basically means 500-1,200 people scanned over a post, whether they stopped to click on it or not. In addition to the impressions, generally 10-20 people will comment on one of my LinkedIn posts.

My post began, "New newspapers are formed all the time. Today, my friends Joey and Lindsey Young helped start a new paper in Hutchinson, Kansas."

I wrote, "helped," because The Tribune began as an effort by a local 16-year-old, Michael Glenn, to provide online news to his community, which had lost almost all news coverage of local issues. Michael, with the help of Gina Long, covered county commission meetings, local news, and more. Michael is now a full-time student at The University of Kansas, where he received a full scholarship.

When it was time to venture off to college, Michael sold the website to Joey and Lindsey, and they began the work to create a new printed newspaper for Hutchinson. The first issue – 24 pages – was distributed on August 28, 2025.

As of this morning, there have been more than 14,000 impressions of my post on LinkedIn and hundreds of responses. All were incredibly positive. Many writers expressed outright joy and enthusiasm about the new newspaper. Some publishing "insiders" wrote to ask how they did it. "Is it a non-profit?" they asked. "Does it run off donations?" It seems that it's hard for some to fathom that a printed newspaper can be funded through subscriptions and advertising.

It's hard for some. But not all. I see newspapers successfully doing it all the time. I also see newspapers successfully flourishing as non-profits. It's not a one-size-fits-all business.

When asked about their success (she and Joey have started three successful newspapers over the past ten years, all within an hour of their home), Lindsey answered, "The secret of being a successful community newspaper is actually being part of the community. When newspaper owners consolidate and ship jobs away, they lose the newspaper's soul. Our readers know us, they trust us, and they connect with us."

But what about Atlanta?

Yes, I read the headline. Online only. A few years ago, I received several frantic calls from business leaders in New Orleans when the Times-Picayune made a similar decision. We created a strategy that led to The Advocate, a newspaper based in Baton Rouge, coming to town.

Atlanta will be fine. Someone will see the opportunity and take advantage of it.

Kevin Slimp has been a popular consultant and speaker in the newspaper industry since developing the PDF remote printing method in 1994. His upcoming webinars on design, circulation, and software can be found at newspaperacademy.com.

Kevin Slimp is former director of The University of Tennessee Newspaper Institute and founder of NewspaperAcademy.com.