NOVEMBER 2025

PAPERCLIPS

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

Find us on Facebook

in this issue >>>

President's Corner

Lisa Miller

Thankfulness Month

A time to count your blessings

It is November!

Hard to believe we are already in the month of thankfulness. In our business, sometimes I feel it is hard to always remember to be thankful. Over the last few months, we have seen so many changes in publications. Good and bad.

During my workout class this a.m., my instructor finished the class with "We should all be thankful we are able to be here and move our bodies." I know we aren't all into working out, but it holds true for so much more than that.

We can be thankful for being able to have a publication. Thankful for being able to provide a product that will help each of our clients. Thankful for being able to get out of bed in order to create a publication. All true statements. Every day we have the choice to be thankful for all things business and personal.

I have been told by so many people that the best way to remember something is to write it down. Whether that be to put it into your phone, an email to a fellow publisher or, if you are old-school, a sticky note that sits on your desk. I challenge each of you to write one thing down you are thankful for each day. It doesn't have to be big. It could simply be that you put a publication to bed on time. Try to be consistent for a week. On Friday, take a look at your week. Go into the weekend knowing that what we do is important to our clients and readers. And knowing that we can be thankful for being able to do what we do every week.

Last, but certainly not least, I am thankful for all of you. Make it a great November!

From the Office

Lee Borkowski
Executive Director

Missed the Ad Agency Call? Here's the Replay…

Plus- we want your ideas!

Thanks so much to everyone who joined our Ad Agency call last week! I've received more positive feedback on this session than any other we've hosted — and it's easy to see why. Ryan Dohrn is one of the best in the business, and he shared some powerful, practical ideas for better connecting with ad agencies and earning more revenue.

If you missed the session (or want to share it with your team), you can watch the recording here:

Click here for the recording
Passcode: G2%!B@Gp

Ryan will also be joining us *in person* at our **MFCP Annual Conference, April 16–17, 2026, in Cedar Falls —** alongside industry leaders **Russell Viers and Trevor Slette**. So be sure to add us to your calendar and make plans now to attend.

Click here to view our conference flyer

This year, the Engagement Committee has worked diligently to bring you several high-quality sessions, including:

Real Estate Roundtable led by *David Tomasini*, who shared strategies for building stronger relationships with agents and increasing revenue in this category.

CVC Audit Series – a three-part discussion on our *free member audit benefit*, covering:

- Why you'd want an audit
- Who in your operation should handle the data and filing
- How to leverage the results once you have them

We're committed to bringing you even more valuable sessions in 2026 — but we need your input! What topics, challenges, or opportunities would you like us to explore next? Your suggestions help us plan content that truly supports you and your team. Email your suggestions to me: director@mfcp.org

And remember — these calls are **open to everyone on your staff**. Even if your publisher can't make it, others are welcome to join. There's no pressure to speak up — so if it's a topic you're not familiar with, no worries. Just listen, learn, and take away ideas to help your business grow.

Thanks for being part of these conversations — and for all you do to keep our industry strong.

Warm regards,
Lee

MVP at Work

The Importance of Deadlines in the Workplace

By Kayla Reinhart
Office Assistant/Graphic Designer
Cresco Shopper, Cresco, IA

Over my time in the newspaper industry, I've learned that deadlines are more important than others may feel. Sometimes deadlines feel stressful, but they help you keep everything on track.

For myself, deadlines help me realize what is of importance first and when things need to be done. They also hold me and others accountable. When I get things done before a deadline it makes me feel good knowing that another thing is done. When I don't get a project done before a deadline it affects other people in the workplace.

Having a set deadline has helped me focus better. When I have limited time, I prioritize what needs to be done first, mostly the bigger projects. The smaller projects can get done at a later time. When there is some added pressure, it helps me work more efficiently and think faster. I don't try and rush to get things done because I want to put out quality work and manage my time well.

Deadlines work better when they are more realistic. You don't want to aim too high to put yourself into a burnout. When everyone on your team understands what the deadline is and who is expected to do what everything will run smoother. It will feel more like teamwork if you set this plan up and work together to get the project done before the deadline.

You don't need to dread deadlines, they can help you grow in the industry. Deadlines will help you stay organized, be able to communicate with your team better and prioritize. Deadlines will help you reach your goals and make you feel more satisfied about the work that you put out.

Kayla

Member News

CONNECTOR AND VOICES MERGE TO BECOME SOUTHWEST VOICES

Tesha M. Christensen (left) and Charlie Rybak aim to offer readers and businesses reliable information, relevant content, and connection to their community through the merger of Southwest Connector and Southwest Voices.

CLICK HERE TO READ ALL ABOUT IT!!

Member News

Cory Regnier

It's MVP Time… Nominate Your Best!

For the publishing industry to survive and flourish, we need the best and brightest to step up, lead and bring fresh ideas to the table. How can we make that a reality? By nominating the young professionals in your workplace for the MFCP MVP Program.

These *Most Valued Professionals* will become an integral part of the association. They'll participate in tailored discussions and receive targeted training designed to prepare them for leadership roles within your company, which strengthens the longevity, creativity and effectiveness of the publishing industry as a whole.

MVPs will:

- Participate in annual conference activities, including fundraising and idea exchanges
- Attend a private MVP-only session
- Join an MFCP committee
- Contribute articles to *Paperclips*
- Engage in monthly Zoom sessions on topics ranging from soft skills to effective sales strategies

Past discussion topics have included: conquering impostor syndrome, reading non-verbal communication, lateral thinking, preparing for future industry changes, and navigating difficult conversations. MVPs also read and discussed the leadership classic *Who Moved My Cheese?*, which emphasizes that change is constant and that adaptability is the key to success in both business and life.

This two-year program is sponsored by the Bill Welsh Foundation, allowing dedicated nominees to attend the annual conference up to three times fully funded by the association.

If you have a bright, motivated young professional under 40, who has worked with you for at least six months, and shows leadership potential or a genuine desire to grow within the industry, consider nominating them for the MFCP MVP Program.

Oh, and did we mention? We have a lot of fun, too!

Click here for an application.

Member News

IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE:

AD AWARD ENTRIES:

Start prepping those stellar submissions! The deadline is January 14, 2026. Let's show off the creativity and innovation that make our members shine. **Click here for a link to our contest packet.**

DIGITAL USERS GROUP ROUNDTABLE – November 5th, 10AM.

Our next **Digital Users Group training** will be held on **Tuesday, November 5th at 10:00 AM (Central)** via Zoom.

We'll be diving into **Employment Advertising** and exploring how to make the most of this growing category. From tying print and digital together to creating digital-only campaigns that deliver results, we'll cover best practices, smart selling strategies, and a few pitfalls to watch out for (like avoiding discriminatory language in job ads).

It's a great chance to swap ideas, pick up new tips, and strengthen your digital sales game.

As always, this training is free for MFCP members — we hope to see you there!

To Join – simply login via Zoom: **CLICK HERE TO LOGIN**

Nominating Committee Announces Board Slate....

Greg Birkett, Chair of the Nominating Committee, is pleased to present the slate of candidates for the MFCP Board of Directors:

Joyce Frericks, Star Publishing, LLC, Minnesota

Julia Thompson, Southern Minnesota Shoppers, Inc, Minnesota

Mindy Carter, Woodward Community Media, Wisconsin

Voting will be conducted electronically in late November, with ballots due by December 5th**.** When you receive your electronic ballot, please take a few minutes to make your voice heard and help shape the future of our association.

2026 MFCP Calendars – Order Yours Today!

We still have some 2026 calendars available. If you haven't ordered yours yet, please do so ASAP!

Two sizes to choose from:

- **Year-at-a-Glance Wall Calendars:** 22" wide × 29" tall – perfect for your office or workspace wall.
- **Strip Calendars:** 14" wide × 1 3/16" tall – adhesive-backed and ideal for your monitor or laptop.

To reserve your copies, email us at **director@mfcp.org** with the quantity you'd like of each type. Quantities are limited, so it's first come, first served!

Members Helping Members

Strengthen your audit without printing a single additional copy

Sometimes, small actions make a big difference.

Recently, Russ Swart of Tidbits reached out to his webmaster and asked to receive regular updates on his online readership. The webmaster provided the data, and Russ shared those reports with Tim Bingaman and the team at CVC.

The result? Russ saw a 4% increase in his gross contacts—without printing a single additional copy!

As Tim has often reminded us, these incremental digital numbers add up quickly. Think about your own operation:

Do you have newsletters or websites generating steady reader engagement?

Are you tracking your social reach or email readership?

Ad agencies today care deeply about total market penetration—and they welcome verified digital audience data.

So, take a page from Russ's playbook: share your numbers and strengthen your audit. Every bit of engagement helps improve how our publications—and our industry—are perceived.

If you'd like to get a copy of the audit recording package please contact Jim Kennedy: jkennedy@cvcaudit.com

DIGITAL IN A NUTSHELL

Wondering what types of digital campaigns MFCP is selling?
These are just a few:

- Help Wanted (Wesco -Job Coach, Family Dentistry, Alter Trading Corp)
- Events (20th Art in the Park, Dexter Sunflower Daze, Lyon County Shop Hop, Rock Rapids Chamber)
- Theater (Harlan Community Theater)
- Auctions (Merle Miller, Elite Auction, Bravo Auctioneers)
- Assisted Living (Harlan House)
- Hospice of Dubuque
- Retail (Spirit Lake Silver & Gold, Wesco Apparel, Fox River Sock Sale, Unblemished Beauty)
- Home Improvement (Midwest Bath Conversions, SD Windows & Doors, Cressman Sanitation, DR Air Heating & Cooling, JB Turf and Pest, Spaans Landscape & Lawn Services, RF Custom Construction)
- SMG Web Design

Wondering how to get started selling digital?
It is as easy as contacting Lee at director@mfcp.org. She will set you up with easy hands-on-training that has been proven to boost your confidence in digital sales.
Already a digital user? Don't miss the next roundtable!

DIGITAL USERS GROUP ROUNDTABLE
Our next **Digital Users Group training** will be held on **Tuesday, November 5th at 10:00 AM (Central)** via Zoom. **Click here to login.**

Words of Wisdom

Advice from our members…

"Simple lessons. Big impact. From our members, for our members."

For this month's issue of *Paperclips*, we're continuing our Words of Wisdom feature, where members share the best advice they've received in their careers. The response has been fantastic, and the chain of insights keeps growing!

This month, we received three contributions that all seem to revolve around a similar theme. Take a moment to read what our members have to say—you might find a tip or perspective that resonates with you.

- **From John Adams:** *Don't get too high when things are going well and don't get too low when they are not.* John uses his experience coaching basketball to help maintain a healthy approach all of the time.

The best advice I received was when I was a graduate assistant basketball coach at Iowa State working under Tim Floyd.

He would always tell us to "not to get too high when things are going well, and not to get too low during tough times", as well as "you're never as good as people tell you that you are when you are winning, and you're never as bad as people tell you that you are when you are losing."

I always take that advice to keep pushing forward when things are going well and not to stay complacent, as one of my favorite quotes is "good is the enemy of great". I also take that advice when things are not going well, when sales are maybe down and it seems like you can't sell water to a farmer during a draught.

Things will turn around, you just have to keep pushing through those hard times, don't get too down on yourself or your staff if you are a leader, and take those losses as learning opportunities and challenges.

- **From Tyla Wojahn:** *When you mess up, do the right thing.* Tyla believes in owning your mistakes and how making excuses is not an option and only makes the situation worse.

Everyone makes mistakes. Maybe you charge a customer the wrong price for an ad, you send an email with incorrect information or you forget something important. The mistake isn't the problem, but what you do next could be.

Owning a mistake is the right thing to do. It means saying, "That was me," without adding, "but it wasn't my fault." Then learning from it, apologizing if necessary and moving forward. Hiding or covering up a mistake usually just makes it worse. It may turn a customer against you, stop them from paying their bill or telling others what you've done. The only thing worse than making a mistake is pretending you didn't.

- **From Dez Whalen:** *Nothing is ever as good or as bad as it seems.* Dez uses this mantra to navigate the ebb and flow of her job and keep life in perspective.

I first heard this bit of wisdom years ago from my former manager and mentor at Woodward Communications, Greg Lawrence. We were having one of those deep talks about the ups and downs of business—and life—when he paused and said something that stuck with me ever since:

"Nothing is ever as good or as bad as it seems."

Simple, right? But incredibly powerful.

That one line has helped me stay grounded through so many twists and turns. It's a reminder that when things are going great, it's okay to celebrate—but don't get swept away by the moment. Keep your focus on the long game and what truly sustains success.

And when things take a tough turn—a lost client, a project that didn't pan out, or just one of those weeks—it helps to remember that the situation probably isn't as catastrophic as it feels in the moment. Taking a breath, stepping back, and looking at the bigger picture gives us space to regroup, learn, and move forward with confidence.

This perspective helps us find that healthy middle ground—where we're not paralyzed by fear or blinded by excitement. Instead, we're steady, thoughtful, and resilient.

Because if there's one thing we can all count on—in both business and life—it's change. And a little balance goes a long way in helping us ride those waves.

Ad-Libs

Reliability Means Paying Attention

John Foust, Greensboro, NC

I remember a billboard on an interstate in North Carolina which caught my eye. It was large 14' x 48' painted sign which promoted a law firm. The headline read, "We help people hit by drunk drivers." Below the headline was a photo of a wrecked car and the name of a local attorney. Advertising folks like us would like the fact that the message was easy to read, because it was in a legible font on a white background.

But the billboard had a problem. The word "by" was covered by an overgrown tree limb on the left side. Instead of reading *"We help people **hit by** drunk drivers,"* it read, *"We help people **hit** drunk drivers."* The missing word changed the message into something entirely different."

Quite a blooper, isn't it? The problem wasn't with the sign itself. Someone should have been responsible for sending someone to check on overhanging limbs. Ideally, the limb should have been cut before the advertiser noticed.

Thinking of that sign reminds me of the cover of an upscale clothing catalogue my wife showed to me recently. Suellen pointed out that the model in the photograph was wearing a summer-style dress, but it had obviously been photoshopped onto a scene of a European tourist attraction with people wearing winter coats in the background. To makes matters worse, the model was wearing stiletto heels on a cobblestone street. To people who pay close attention to such things – like my wife – that was a big mistake. "It hurts their credibility," she said. "The cover gives readers the impression that they don't pay attention to details. It creates a complete mismatch and goes against their established brand image."

I'm sure that both of these examples were produced by professionals, but they somehow lost track of the details. Their mistakes resulted in miscommunication and incongruent images.

These mistakes could have easily been prevented. Just ask Everett, who manages his newspaper's ad department. "We follow the old carpenter's philosophy to measure twice and cut once," he told me. "In our world, that means we check ads more than once. By the time an ad runs, we like to feel we've done everything to make sure it's correct. The headline has to be right, the copy has to be right and the illustration has to be right. Beyond those obvious things, we double-check phone numbers, name spelling, business locations, email addresses and web addresses."

“There’s another saying we take to heart,” he said. “’Do it right or do it over.’ Even a one-character typo – in something as small as a phone number – can ruin the effectiveness of an ad. If that happens, it costs the paper money to correct the problem and it damages our reputation in that advertiser’s eyes. That’s a lot to risk.”

Everett is right. Whether it’s billboards, catalogue covers or this business of newspaper advertising, it’s all about reliability. We should keep working on the little things to show advertisers they can count on us.

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

Kill Your Q4 Sales Goal

This month Ryan shares tips to finish the year strong. Once again, his insight and common sense see opportunities where others may not. He suggests to do some of the following to help finish 2025 strong:

- Bring significant value to the meeting
- Be aware of times of year when other sales people go quiet[- and get loud
- Recognize times of year when others are trying to get renewals and ask what you can do to make it easy
- Recognize that there is still money to be had. Some budgeted money might have to spend before end of year or lose it.

Click on the link below to learn all of his tips and why they work.

https://360adsales.com/podcast/ad-sales-training-podcast-episode-165/

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

Is Free as Good as Paid?

Kevin Slimp discusses software, not subscription plans

Kevin Slimp - kevin@kevinslimp.com

Peter Coleman – managing editor at *GXpress Magazine* – an Australian-based publication focused on the newspaper industry – sent this email to me yesterday:

"Hi Kevin, I hope you are well and doing well! I see an announcement today that our Aussie heroes Canva are bundling Affinity together and making it free (all but the AI bits). As my worldwide expert on such things, I'd be grateful for a comment on how this will work, for publication."

Peter, you sure know how to mess up a perfectly good schedule. Peter knows that this isn't such a simple request. To provide a comment means I'd spend hours downloading the new software, reviewing its tools and functions, and seeing what other commentators say about the product. Peter also knows I'm a sucker for anything related to design software, so I have no choice but to acquiesce.

For those not following the Affinity saga –probably most of you – Canva acquired the professional design company Serif, which makes the Affinity suite of creative software, in March 2024. Subsequently, Canva has relaunched Affinity as a free, all-in-one app called "Affinity by Canva" that combines Affinity Designer, Photo, and Publisher.

If you've been following my columns for a while, you might remember reviews I've written on Affinity Publisher just before and after the world was turned upside down by COVID. One of the biggest crowds I've ever had for a webinar was an introduction to Affinity Publisher, which drew more than 400 newspaper professionals. At the time, my advice was to give Affinity time. While a worthwhile design app, it had shortcomings that made it less than optimum for our work publishing newspapers.

Over the years, I've upgraded Affinity Publisher and other products in the Affinity suite and watched it improve in many areas. Still, when asked, my advice to publishers was to stick with their Adobe products, if for no other reason than not to convert everything from InDesign (or even QuarkXpress) to Affinity Publisher. My other issue with the Affinity suite was Photo, Affinity's photo-editing app. As hard as I tried, I couldn't get reliable results with CMYK images for pages going to print. I missed the color settings, control of dot gain, and ink colors I rely on from Photoshop.

So why all the hubbub about Affinity now? Canva – best known for its online tools allowing design and illustration online – recently acquired Affinity and released it for free to any user. Yes, free. That's mighty tempting for those of you who, like me, pay $29 (US) or more each month for InDesign or $69 for the entire Creative Cloud suite of applications. Why would Canva do this? Simply stated, they hope you'll eventually upgrade to paid tools related to the Affinity line.

There's nothing sinister going on here, at least as far as I know. Let's face it, Canva wants to siphon users away from Adobe, now the 10th largest software company in the world (Adobe had as few as 64 employees when I worked with them back on projects in the 1990s). Giving away software seems like a good way to do this.

Okay, let's get to the nitty-gritty. I could spend pages writing a full-scale review of Affinity by Canva, but I have neither the time nor inclination to do that today. I've downloaded the new software, which works pretty much like the Affinity software I've taught and used (only for research) over the past ten years. It is impressive in its abilities and rivals Adobe InDesign in many ways. Users can open and edit InDesign files (saved in IDML format) and export PDF files. However, the export capabilities of PDFs exported from InDesign aren't as intricate, nor do they include all of the functions. Having written that, it should be noted that many InDesign users aren't aware of these functions anyway.

Here's how we use Affinity in my publishing company, Market Square Books. Affinity Publisher is very good, but it has never had all the functionality we need in designing and publishing books. That's why I still spend $69 each month for each license of Adobe Creative Cloud. It's not worth the risk to save a few dollars. However, we do have staff members who don't need the full capabilities of InDesign, but still need to edit InDesign files from time to time. A perfect example is the person who sends boxes of books to vendors. These require a label with information about the book title, ISBN code, quantity, etc., that has been created in InDesign. Rather than purchase an Adobe license for this function, the staff member in the shipping department uses Affinity Publisher to open the InDesign file (previously created by a designer) and make the changes before printing the label.

I'm not in a hurry to upend our entire design process to save a few dollars each month. However, you might be. In that case, let me suggest you download a free version of Affinity by visiting:

https://www.canva.com/help/free-affinity-access/

After the holidays, I plan to do a detailed review of Affinity by Canva. In the meantime, let me know how you're using it and how it works at your newspaper.

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.