

June 23, 2022

Analysis to Address Decrease in Local Print Media Outlets for City News

Purpose

At the February 2022 City Council Retreat, Council requested staff to look at ways to reach Hudson citizens with City news with the decline in local media news sources.

Background

Across the United States, the loss of local newspapers in suburban and rural communities has led to “news deserts” in many suburbs. Often, one larger newspaper covers a vast area with little or no coverage of suburban issues and local news. As a result, more people are relying more on the internet for news, which has increased the spread of misinformation on social media.

Hudson Local News Source – The *Hudson Hub Times*

Over the years, the *Hudson Hub Times* has been a major source of news for Hudson residents. In the past five years, the *Hub* has gone from two issues a week to one, and the number of pages in an issue is significantly less. With the *Hub*’s purchase by the *Akron Beacon Journal* (ABJ), reporters are spread thin, covering stories for both the *Hub Times* and *ABJ*.

If the *Hub* and other *Record Courier* papers continue to be smaller in size or phased out over the next few years Hudson would be left no local print news outlet.

Recommendations

According to the U.S. census, 95.8% of Hudson households have a computer and 91.9% have a broadband internet subscription. Nationwide, 97% of Americans own cell phones which would provide access to email, internet, and social media. That leaves approximately 3% of residents with no access to internet or online news.

With the decrease in space for local City news, staff looked for ways to get news to our citizens via other platforms. There are no easy answers since individuals like to receive news in different ways. Here are our recommendations to help increase the reach of City news.

Options

1. **Communications Audit.** Use Let’s Talk Hudson to survey residents regarding how they receive their communications and what topics they want to hear more about, etc. Use results to modify communications strategy.
2. **Ramp up our use of E-News** as our primary source of weekly information for residents. We currently have 4,000 subscribers with a 60%+ open rate, which is excellent.
 - We already have increased the frequency to weekly, the same frequency as the *Hub Times*.
 - Begin a marketing campaign to increase the number of subscribers. Encourage residents to get all the City news sent to their inbox every week.
 - Encourage questions or feedback in the issues through public engagement.
 - Cost: \$0

3. **Increase the frequency of the *Focus on Hudson*** printed newsletter mailed to every household in Hudson. While printed, mailed newsletters are not as timely as the E-News, they would reach individuals who do not receive news from other sources. Currently we budget \$13,463 for 4 issues/year.
 - a. Cost:
 - i. Current Cost: \$13,463
 - ii. Increase to 6 issues/year: \$20,194
 - iii. Increase to 12 issues/year: \$26,537
 - iv. Total increase in budget: \$6,731-\$13,074
4. **Boost posts on social media** to reach a larger audience. By paying to boost important social media posts, we can increase the reach of our news. Currently we have done boosting sporadically, without a budget.
 - a. Cost: \$2,500/year.
5. **Create news program on HCTV.** Use HCTV to produce a regular news show (frequency to be determined). This would not be a standalone solution.
 - a. Cost: \$0
6. **Increase news distribution to other local media outlets.** This will be part of our overall strategy, regardless of other options. These include other newspaper outlets, TV stations, radio stations, and online news outlets.
 - a. Cost: \$0

Other Options (Not Recommended at this Time)

These are other options we considered. However, they are generally more costly, would have less impact, and would not necessarily be recommended. However, we will continue to look at these types of options if they become feasible and the return-on-investment becomes worth the cost.

1. **Allow Advertising in Focus on Hudson.** While allowing advertising in our publications would help offset costs, we are not recommending this option. We could limit advertising to only Hudson companies but cannot choose which ads to include or not because we are a government entity. If the Vape Shop, for example, wanted to advertise, we would have to accept it, as well as other ads that might be controversial or otherwise unwelcome by citizens. Most other city governments polled do not accept advertising for that reason. It also would require significant additional staff time.
 - a. Cost: \$0. Additional staff and/or staff required. Not feasible due to inability to limit ad sources.
2. **Advertorials.** Place advertorials (ads that look like stories) in the *ABJ*, *Plain Dealer*, or other local newspapers. While we still would consider these for important key project messages, we would not recommend it as an ongoing strategy due to the cost.
 - a. Cost: \$1,500 - \$3,000 per ad. With greater frequency of ads, the cost per ad would decrease.
3. **Digital Sign on the Green.** Revisit previous Council discussions about placing and attractive, digital sign on the green where passersby could see quick news items with

where to go for more news. Costs would need to be explored. The cost listed is only a ballpark estimate. We would not recommend due to the limited amount of information displayed, limited audience and inability to target just Hudson citizens, and cost.

- a. **Cost:** \$30,000 - \$50,000 plus ongoing maintenance fees.
4. **Information Kiosks Downtown.** Place kiosks in First & Main and on Main Street. I only spoke to one company, so we would need to look at others. We also would need traffic numbers in the downtown to determine cost per impression. Reach is limited but would be in addition to other platforms. Allowing the company to place ads on the signs brings down the cost but would present the same issues as using advertising in *Focus on Hudson*. We do not recommend at this time.
 - a. Cost: \$20, 000 to \$80,000 for installation of 3 kiosks; \$2,000 - \$6,000 annual fee.
5. **Text Messaging.** We currently have that capability with our Code Red. This could be used more often but only for more urgent communications. People generally do not want to be bothered with texts from government for regular news.
6. **Podcasts.** Requires significant staff time, and the reach would be significantly smaller than our other communications platforms. While we do not recommend it at this time, we will continue to evaluate this for the future. It would not serve to replace the Hub news.

Conclusion

Ideally, we recommend implementing all the first five options. We already have begun implementing the E-News strategy and increased news distribution to other media outlets. Our recommendations include:

1. Conduct a Communications Audit and use results to adjust our communications strategy.
2. E-News as replacement for the Hub news.
3. Increasing frequency of *Focus on Hudson*. Recommend 6 issues in 2023 and evaluate return on investments to determine future frequency.
4. Boosting posts on Social Media.
5. Creating an HCTV News program.
6. Increasing news distribution other media outlets.

Additional Background

As background, the chart on the next page lists the current communications tools we use regularly, as well as a list of local news outlets available.

CITY OF HUDSON COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS, TYPES, AUDIENCES								
Red X indicates proposed new audience or communication tool.								
TOOLS	COMMUNICATIONS TYPE				AUDIENCES			
	Digital	Video	Print	Verbal	Internal Staff	Council	Press	Public
Flyers/Fact Sheets/Reports	X		X			X	X	X
Hudson E-News	X				X	X		X
E-Mail Alerts	X				X	X		X
Hudson Headlines	X	X			X	X		X
Video PSAs	X	X			X	X		X
HCTV Channels		X						X
Printed Newsletter	X		X		X	X	X	X
Press Releases	X		X			X	X	X
Council Meeting/ Workshop Summaries	X					X	X	X
Newspaper Advertorials			X					X
City Twitter	X							X
Snow Command Twitter	X							X
City Facebook	X							X
Ellsworth Facebook	X							X
HFD Facebook	X							X
NextDoor	X							X
Instagram	X							X
LinkedIn	X							X
Website	X				X	X	X	X
Special Project E-Mails	X					X		X
Council Monthly Reports	X					X		
Emergency Alerts	X				X	X		X
Community/Neighborhood Meetings/Council Forums				X		X		X
State of the City, Year in Review, Presentations	X		X	X			X	X
Report a Concern	X							X
Data Hub	X							X