

Survey: Community papers still tops for local news

Written by Gothenburg Times
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COLUMBIA, MO—Community newspaper readers, surveyed recently, still say they prefer their local papers for getting their news and information.

The survey was conducted in small U.S. towns and cities where the circulation size of the local newspaper was 15,000 or less.

The survey was conducted for the National Newspaper Association by the research arm of the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. This is the survey's seventh year.

NNA president Merle Baranczyk, publisher of the Mountain Mail in Salida, CO, said the survey shows that without a doubt, people read their community newspapers.

"The numbers are self-evident. They indicate the level of connectedness people have with their community newspaper," Baranczyk said. "From year to year, the studies have shown that people believe in their local papers, for the news they need and the advertising they rely on."

Since 2005, NNA has done research on how people read and what they think about their local newspaper. Results have been consistent over the years, even as sample and community sizes have been adjusted slightly.

Of those who participated in the survey, 52% were daily newspaper readers, and 48% were non-daily readers. The circulation sizes of the newspapers ranged from 309 to 14,943.

The trend for readership of community newspapers is consistent with earlier surveys. The study showed that 71% of the respondents read a community newspaper at least once a week. Analysis showed that readership of local newspapers was significantly and positively associated with age, suggesting that older adults read local newspapers significantly more than younger adults. This finding is consistent with those of the NNA surveys in 2010 and 2011, and those reported by the Pew Research Center in 2012.

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The pass-along rate in the 2012 survey was 2.18 people, compared to 2.33 in 2011.

On average, readers of the 2012 survey spent 39.92 minutes reading local newspapers, up slightly more than the 38.95 minutes in 2011 and 37.5 minutes in 2010.

Similar to previous research, 96% of readers paid for their newspaper.

75% read all or most of their newspaper. Compared to 73% in 2011 and 78% in 2010.

43.8% keep their paper for more than 10 days.

77.4% read the paper for local news and information.

Respondents who had children were also asked whether those children—between the ages of 11 and 21—would read local newspapers. Of the households where there were children in the age group, 18% read a local newspaper at least once a week.

Local news content is important, the study showed. More than half of readers (56%) had either clipped a story from the print newspaper or provided a link from the newspaper's website to save or send to a friend or family member in the past 12 months.

The majority of local readers continued to regard community newspapers as highly valuable and important sources information about their communities.

92% of readers thought local newspapers were informative.

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83% agreed that they and their families relied on the newspapers for local news and information.

84% of readers (and their families) would look forward to reading the newspapers.

69% thought the newspapers provided valuable local shopping and advertising information.

75% agreed that local newspapers entertained them.

Nearly half of readers (46%) used the newspapers for their political and voting decisions.

Of those who had access to the Internet, 49% reported that they had “never” read local news online, compared to 48% in 2011, suggesting that residents in small towns and cities still rely on print newspapers for local news more than through online platforms.

Of those who used online sources for local news, 59% “sought out” specific local news, higher than in 2011 (52%). In addition, 30% “happened to come across it,” and 11% answered “both.”

The survey shows that 47% of online users would choose a newspaper’s website as their favored source of information for local news. Twenty-four percent said they would select a local TV website. And 21% said they would use an independent site such as Yahoo, MSN, Google, etc. It should be noted that 2% of online users said they would rely on social networking sites, and 5% would use a radio stations’ site for local news.

Consistent with previous NNA research, readership of public notices in local newspapers continued to be solid, as a combined 51% “often” read the content. This number is up from previous years: 46% in 2011, 48% in 2010 and 40% in 2009.

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When asked “Do you think governments should be required to publish public notices in newspapers?” 78% said “yes,” which is consistent with past survey results: 80% in 2011 and 75% in 2010.

When asked how often they visited the website of their local Chamber of Commerce, 85% said they had never visited the website.

71% believe the accuracy of their local paper is either “good” or “excellent.”

70% believe the coverage is either “good” or “excellent.”

59% believe the fairness of their local paper is either “good” or “excellent.”

This showed that the majority of respondents said they trust their local newspaper over other media sources.

When asked about their preference for the source of information about local communities, 53% of residents preferred “newspaper” over other local media outlets such as TV, radio, etc. The local newspaper was preferred in a 3-1 margin over TV, showing consistency from previous research.

As a result of the rising popularity of mobile devices such as smartphones, the 2012 survey asked respondents about their ownership of mobile phones, use of mobile devices for news and shopping information, credibility of mobile devices in comparison to that of print newspaper, and the likelihood of using mobile phones for news and shopping information in the future.

60% own a simple cell phone.

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24% own a smart phone.

16% don't own a cell phone.

Of those who had cell phones, 69% said they accessed local news on the device within the last 30 days. Sixty-three percent of those who used their mobile devices for local news thought the news was either "very credible" or "somewhat credible," compared to 71% in 2011. The sample size of this group, however, was small—43. Forty-nine percent said they accessed shopping information on their phones within the last 30 days.

NNA members use the readership information for local marketing and promotion.

The survey summary is available at www.nnaweb.org.

The full survey and promotional material is available to NNA members at www.nnaweb.org. To join NNA and receive a complimentary copy of the survey, go to <http://nnaweb.org/membership-apps>.

NNA's industry partners promote quality content and sound business practices in the industry. The continued encouraging readership data are expected, they say.

"Waltery Insurance Brokers is proud to partner with and support the member publications of NNA," said Walter Coady. "We concur that they deliver a valuable message to communities across the country."

"We believe in newspapers," said Steve Smith, senior vice president of publisher relations at Publishers Group of America, publishers of 'American Profile,' 'Relish' and 'Spry' magazines. "Local newspapers provide pertinent information that tie communities and families together."

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“We here at Athlon Sports have always known community papers are prized by the people in their communities,” said Jerry Lyles, senior vice president publisher relations. “We believe in them as much as their readers do.”

“As a company serving the community-newspaper industry, we are not at all surprised that the survey found that residents of small towns and communities remain avid readers and supporters of their local newspapers,” said Bill Garber, Interlink founder and owner.

“Neither are we surprised that a sample of more than 1,200 of our customers’ newspapers showed that 20% had increases in their mailed circulation last year,” he added. “Not only are people still reading their community newspaper, in many cases more people are reading that newspaper.”

“We continue to invest in and grow our company on our belief in the strength of community newspapers. Nothing connects the people of a small community like their local newspaper,” Garber said.

Baranczyk said that often local surveys confirm NNA survey findings. “In Salida, a recent city survey asked where residents get their news of the city and events. About 86.9% said the newspaper.

“I believe that in small towns and cities across the country, these percentages are the norm rather than the exception.

“We at NNA believe in newspapers and, according to these surveys, our readers believe in newspapers as well.”