

Community news will always be important

by Mark Pavilons

No one needs to tell me about the importance of the free press in a democratic society or about the essential role a newspaper can play in its community.

Robert Kennedy

Prince Charles added that: There are countless examples of local newspapers acting as powerful and effective champions for their communities, and very often it is the local media that are first to a story and who stay with it long after the national media have moved on.

Local journalism is about giving communities a voice and empowering people with the knowledge to make informed decisions.

You don't have to be at the helm of a country to appreciate the value of a good, home town newspaper. I've spent my entire career proving it.

I am often asked whether I believe print is dead, and that people will turn to online, digital media for all their needs. I shoot back that newsprint, noisily crinkling in your hands as you turn the page will always be in vogue. There's nothing like sitting at the table, or in your favourite chair with a coffee by your side and a newspaper in your grasp.

Sure, our industry, like many others, has been impacted by the Internet and instant news. Just like instant food it's close, but it's not the real thing. It will do in a pinch, but it won't fill you like a home-made meal.

In the last decade, more than 200 newspapers have closed in the U.K., leaving 58 per cent of communities with no local or regional daily paper. What's interesting is that a 2016 study by King's College in London showed a democratic deficit in those places, as people were less likely to be politically engaged and also more distrustful of public bodies.

In the U.S., Warren Buffett has said he only has faith in three of his 31 newspapers - the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post.

Some believe that North American newspapers are a dying breed. Of course, there's been massive amalgamations and acquisitions, to the point where three or four media corporations own or run everything in Canada today. Media in Canada are primarily owned by a small number of companies: Bell, Corus, Rogers, Newcap, Quebecor and the government-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

For example, in 1990, 17.3% of daily newspapers were independently owned. In 2017, 6% of daily newspapers are independently owned. Currently, of the 1,083 community newspapers in Canada, 599 are corporately owned by one of 10 major corporate owners.

We've witnessed the closure of weekly newspapers at the hands of both Metroland and Sun Media.

But long live the independent community newspaper! Our prime motivating factor is providing community news, not numbers, circulation figures or even profit or loss.

Despite the challenges and corporate control of media in Canada, the public's love of their home town paper is stronger than ever.

News Media Canada released a study Local Newspapers: Trusted and True In partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage.

This comprehensive study explores the trusted relationship Canadians have with their local newspaper in an increasingly digital world dominated by search engines, social media and ad blocking.

Newspapers cover every inch of this country and are on the ground in their communities covering the news that matters to the people who live there. Nine out of 10 Canadians read newspapers each week across Canada, on different platforms at different times of day. Local newspapers are a trusted source of information in communities across Canada and continue to be the preferred source for local information, with a preference for the printed product.

The main reason for reading, in both print and digital platforms, continues to be something that can be hard to find anywhere else. Local information, in various forms (news, sports, entertainment, events, etc.).

Weekly newspapers are THE preferred source for local news and information.

Printed newspaper ads most effectively drive awareness, store visits and purchases, as compared to digital ads.

Print overpowers digital in terms of news, advertising, classifieds, jobs and real estate ads.

Having been part of King's recorded history over the past five years, I can attest to the depth of fascinating people in this municipality. The amount of accomplished individuals and groups is mind-boggling. And all are worthy of recognition outside of our community, even around the world.

Of all the amazing stories I've covered and crazy talented people I've interviewed, a few have received national media attention. For others, they become town heroes, put in the spotlight for their contributions.

One would think that stories are limited in this rather small community. But that's not the case at all. Every week new stories emerge, and local groups rise to the challenge. Our forward thinking municipality has made monumental strides in recent years.

We have a lot to be proud of, and we will continue to bring you the news of your community, the news that matters most!