

# news clips

## New Year scares

**O**n Christmas eve, Rainy River Record Editor Ken Johnston was called to the scene of a fire. However, when the call came through he was surprised at the address. 312 3rd St. in Rainy River. "That is the Record's address. I will be right there," said Johnston.

An adjoining apartment's smoke alarms were wailing away as another tenant called the fire department.

Apparently the Record's neighbour left a candle burning and then went to be with family on Christmas Eve.

It burned down and shattered. The smoke set off the alarms, and fortunately the fire did not spread and basically went out on its own.

"It was scary," said Johnston, who was most concerned about losing the historic issues, stored in the back of the Record office. "Computers can be replaced, the papers can not."

It was *deja vu* for Johnston as The Record's previous office burned to the ground in 1971 when a fire in an adjoining Main Street business caught fire. The previous owner was not going to reopen,



### Selecting the best kids in Ontario

**Our judges for the Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Awards got together this month for the very difficult task of selecting the 12 outstanding final recipients of the 2004 Awards program. The recipients will be announced on February 18 once all the community newspapers have had the opportunity to present certificates of nomination to the 157 nominees from across the province. Shown here, left to right, Junior Citizen Coordinator Nancy Burman, J.P. Bradette from Corporate Sponsor Tembec, Dundas Star's Debra Downey, The Londoner's Phillip McLeod, Collingwood Enterprise-Bulletin's Doreen Sykes, and St. Marys Journal Argus' Bill Huether.**

but the town council offered office space at a very reasonable rate. In the front of the building was the Record office and the fire hall. In the back was the town garage. The walls were thin and staff could hear

all the town gossip every morning and smelled the equipment starting up. They moved to the 3rd Street location which was the old Canadian Legion

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## Minding the industry trends

**By Don Lamont**  
Executive Director

**E**very now and then publishers make some decisions about how to organize their newspapers that spark discussions within the industry about whether those moves will set a precedent for others in the industry to follow later. The current example centres around The Post - a region-wide, free distribution, total market newspaper recently launched in midwestern Ontario.

Communities aren't stagnant. It's important to continue to try new ways to meet the changing needs of readers and advertisers.

Industry insiders are wondering how an essentially rural market comprising small towns once served by individual papers will respond to The Post, which combines the news and advertising once delivered by The Hanover Post, The Chesley Enterprise, The Durham Chronicle and Saugeen This Week. Three of the old papers were paid circulation broadsheets. Current subscribers of the paper who live in the more populated areas, as well as out-of-town subscribers, will have the option to pay the postage to have the new product mailed to them.

Similar approaches have been tried in Ontario in the past but they have tended to cover more urban settings or they involved regions not served by individual papers before. The question

*Continued on page 3...*

# Slimp's favourite technology picks for 2005

By Kevin Slimp  
Institute of Technology

It's hard to imagine a year has gone by since my last 'favourites' column. As I travel throughout the U.S. and Canada, I'm always amazed at the number of people who stop to tell me they keep this particular column taped to the wall in front of their desks. There's no magic in this list. These are simply the products I've found most valuable as I work each day with newspapers of all sizes. This year's list is so long that I've had to divide it into two columns. This month, I'll cover hardware. Next month, I'll fill you in on my software favourites. If you disagree with something included in this list, feel free to send me an e-mail to let me know. A lot of folks do.

So here it comes. My list of favourite hardware products for newspaper designers in 2005:

## Desktop Computers

The Power Mac G5 is the perfect computer for the serious newspaper designer. Offering options from single processor models to a dual processor 2.5 GHz model, the Power Mac G5 packs a serious punch. Recent tests indicate the slowest model, a 1.8 GHz G5, completes a 450 function test in Adobe Photoshop CS 15 percent faster than a similarly equipped Dell Dimension 3.4 GHz Pentium 4. The Dual 2.5 GHz G5 completes the same test 98 percent faster. Models start at \$1499 (US, for the 1.8 GHz single processor).

I was tempted to select the iMac G5 as my desktop computer of choice, but the Power Mac G5 is still the best option for pagination. However, the iMac is too good to ignore. The design is futuristic with the entire computer, optical drive, hard disk, speakers, and power supply housed within the flat panel display. Starting at \$1299 (US), this system fits in with many of the tasks necessary at a modern newspaper.

Although Macs make up the majority of design workstations at most newspapers, there are plenty of folks laying out pages on Windows-based systems. When I'm making a recommendation concerning PC purchases, I usually recommend a Dell workstation. The product numbers constantly change, but the Dell Precision 670 - starting at \$1,589 (US) - is a solid option today. Users will appreciate the speed (up to 3.4 GHz processor available), the storage capabilities and more. The Precision 670 also comes loaded with Windows Professional.

## Server

Several months ago I had the opportunity to assist in the installation of a 64-bit Xserve G5 at a newspaper in Crossville, Tennessee. After waiting more than two months for the server to arrive - this was one of the first Xserve G5s shipped - we went to work installing the server. Since that time I've visited numerous newspapers and universities who rely on the Xserve. Designed to deliver UNIX-based strengths and cutting-edge capabilities of Mac OS X Server, this rack-optimized server offers phenomenal processing power, massive storage capacity - up to 1.2 TB - and remote management tools that make it a snap to maintain. At just 1.75 inches thick, the Xserve behaves well with both Macs and Windows-based workstations.

## Cameras

Newspapers use digital cameras for a variety of purposes, from simple shots of houses for real estate ads to the runner sliding into home at an evening baseball game. The quality of the camera has a lot to do with



the results. Two cameras arrived on the scene over the past few months and began changing the way a lot of papers take photos. My favorite high-end camera is the new Canon EOS 20D. With 8.2 megapixels, the 20D is faster than similarly priced digital SLRs. At \$1,599 (US, without lens), we're sure to see a lot of these at newspapers in the coming months.

Another camera that became a staple at many papers in late 2004 is the Nikon D70. An incredible camera for the price, around \$950 (US, without lens), the D70 replaced the Canon Rebel as the hot camera in the industry.

## Desktop Scanners

Epson and Canon continue to make the best desktop scanners for newspaper purposes. Ranging in price from \$99, both vendors offer several models which work nicely at an 85 or 100 line screen. My current favorite is the Epson Perfection 4180. Listing at \$199 (US), this scanner offers true 4800 x 9600 resolution, with excellent clarity and color. The Epson Perfection 2480 is another excellent scanner. Offering 2400 x 4800 resolution, the 2480 lists at \$99 (US). For more information, visit [www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com).



## File Storage

LaCie continues to offer the best options for file storage. Behaving well with both Macs and Windows-based PCs, LaCie d2 hard drives continue to be my favorites in 2005. For testing purposes, I selected the LaCie d2 Hard Drive Extreme with Triple Interface 250 GB drive, listing at \$269 (US). Connecting via FireWire 800, FireWire 400, iLink, USB 1.1 and USB 2.0, this drive works smoothly in just about any configuration. Video professionals love this drive for its speed. Newspaper designers will learn to love it for the same reason. It's almost like working on an internal hard drive. Similar drives are available from LaCie in 160 GB and 200 GB models. For more information, visit [www.lacie.com](http://www.lacie.com).

Network disks began to make their way into newspapers in late 2004. As I mentioned in a previous column, Ximeta released the NetDisk in the fall as the first external hard drive that could be connected to either a LAN (local area network) or directly to a Mac or PC via USB 2.0. It sounded too good to be true. I took the NetDisk for a test drive by connecting it directly to the network switch at my office. I was very impressed with its speed and ease of use. At less than \$250 (US) for the 160 GB model, the Ximeta NetDisk is quite the file server, without the server. For more information, visit [www.ximeta.com](http://www.ximeta.com).

In 2004, LaCie released the Ethernet Disk, an easy to use online storage disk ranging in sizes up to 800 GB. Featuring advanced file-sharing technology, the LaCie Ethernet Disk frees servers by providing independent, stand-alone storage accessible to anyone in the network. The Ethernet Disk backs up and shares files among as many as 25 users at a time. I installed the 500 GB version, which lists at \$899 (US). Designed for Mac, Windows, Linux and UNIX operating systems.

## DVD Drives

CDs are quickly being replaced by DVDs, due to the massive amount of storage space available. Standard DVDs hold up to 4.7 GB of information, nearly seven times the amount held on a CD. Newer, double layer, DVDs hold up to 8.5 GB. That's more than 10 times the information that can be stored on a CD. In my

*Continued on next page....*

the industry

# Changing communities dictate how the industry develops

*...continued from page 1*

being posed now is how will advertisers and readers respond to a region wide controlled circulation newspaper?

Clearly, the trend in the community newspaper industry is toward controlled distribution tabloids, a model with its roots in urban and suburban communities. But rural communities are changing: Some are shrinking, which makes it difficult to sustain local newspapers, while others are growing as retail and service patterns change and more franchise operators take hold. Many of these franchise operations serve wider areas and prefer inserts to ROP, and hence free distribution newspapers come to mind.

The model put forward by The Post may apply to other markets in Ontario. The Post will feature complete news coverage from all four regions, with an emphasis on community-related news.

The challenge is to satisfy the readers who were accustomed to their own individual, stand-alone newspaper. But if anybody can make this new model work, it's Publisher Marie David and her talented team.

There are other models also being studied. Ontario is rich with many different models and permutations for operating newspapers. It's fertile ground for students of the game.

Marie David was the group publisher of each of the individual newspapers before they were combined. For many years, most small town newspapers had their own publisher. That's still the case with many independents and even some corporately-owned newspapers. Owners and corporate managers continue to think about moving to the group publisher format as times change.

Stand-alone, paid circulation news-

papers continue to be a viable option. It all depends upon on the market.

Another model, suited to the circumstance entails keeping the paid newspaper of record and creating a free, distribution newspaper with a consumer flavour to serve a wider market. This approach has been taken in a number of markets in Ontario such as New Liskeard.

In urban settings, total market newspapers have been created to either bolster or compete against paid, daily newspapers faced with the challenge of maintaining or growing their circulation. This approach has also been applied to mid-sized cities like London or across regions like Niagara (with a zoned newspaper). Some fairly large cities like Ottawa or Hamilton have operated with the so-called cluster model with the daily serving the core and outlying regions (particularly on Sunday) but with distinct community newspapers in the suburbs and outlying regions.

These strategies apply to newspapers striving to be broadcast media within their markets. It's not easy maintaining a paid magazine serving a large mass type market but niche magazines reportedly do well. In the newspaper business, it seems like free distribution newspapers are being used more to serve large, specialized markets like subway riders, young adults (alternative newspapers). As news clips went to press, CanWest Global was announcing Dose, a free weekly newspaper targeting young readers in five Canadian cities. The movement toward free, large niche publications is changing the face of the newspaper industry.

It pays to monitor new trends to see other ways of serving the market early. One thing is for certain, the landscape will continue to change and therefore it's important to keep abreast of the trends.

## OCNA launches new web sites

<http://www.ocna.org>

is for advertisers, the government and the general public.

<http://members.ocna.org> is the Members' Only Intranet site filled with information for community newspapers.

Check it out...

## Keyboards make a difference

*...continued from previous page*

opinion, LaCie makes the best DVD writers. The LaCie d2 DVD+RW drive writes single and double layer DVDs, as well as CDs. Listing at \$179 (US), It connects via FireWire and USB 2.0 and works well with both Macs and Windows-based PCs. For more information, visit [www.lacie.com](http://www.lacie.com).



### Mac Keyboard

Think keyboards don't make a difference? Think again. The Tactile Pro keyboard takes Mac users back to the days of old, when keyboards provided a tactile feel, with a clicking noise to boot. I started using a Tactile Pro several months ago and there's no turning back. For more information, visit <http://matias.ca/tactilepro>.

There you have it. My list of hardware favourites for 2005. Next month, we'll debate the merits of Quark 6.5, InDesign CS, Creator 7 and more.

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member news

# Phyllis Brebner, respected and involved journalist

**P**hyllis Margaret Brebner, former owner, publisher and editor of The Meaford Express, passed away in November at the Errinrunc Nursing Home in Thornbury Ontario. She was in her 90th year.

Mrs. Brebner was born on October 10, 1915 in Swansea, (Toronto) and moved with her family to Meaford in 1962 when she and her husband Walter purchased The Meaford Express and published the community newspaper together until Walter's death in 1972.

At that time she took over as publisher and editor, also writing a popular weekly column 'Expressly for You.' Her journalism career spanned four decades and continued after 1977 when her son, Rod purchased The Express.



**Phyllis Brebner**

She continued to help with proofreading and other tasks at the newspaper, including researching and writing the 90th Anniversary Section of The Meaford Express, and publishing two books, The Alaska Highway, and a children's book, The Call of the Eagle.

Before moving to

Meaford, she studied journalism in the evenings at the University of Toronto, where she met her future husband. She also worked in Fort St. John, B.C. and Chicago while continuing as a correspondent for the Toronto Telegram.

In 1944, she married Lieutenant RCNVR Walter Brebner. Following the war they purchased the Geraldton Times Star as co-publishers and a year later moved back to Toronto.

In early 1950s the couple moved with their two sons to Arnprior to work at The Chronicle. In 1954 they moved to Montreal and during this period, Phyllis worked as a columnist for the Montreal Gazette, and wrote articles for a number of trade publications and children's magazines.

She was particularly pleased to work on a special

national committee to help establish Aboriginal community newspapers. She was a very strong supporter of Meaford on a continuing basis and was recognized by the Ontario Community Newspapers Association with the President's Award for her tireless push with the town to establish a proper harbour development plan for Meaford.

She was a member of the Meaford Museum Board, Meaford Public Library Board and the Meaford General Hospital Auxiliary.

Mrs. Brebner is survived by her sons Lee (Lois Anne) of Oakville and Roderick (Betty Jane) of Meaford and three grandchildren. She was predeceased by her parents, her husband Walter Bruce Brebner, and five sisters.

# Tim Baker-Pearce remembered by family and friends

**B**enjamin (Tim) Baker-Pearce, former Alliston Herald owner, volunteer and a person who made a lasting impression on his community and those who knew him, has died. Mr. Baker-Pearce died at his home in Adjala-Tosorontio January 15 after a brief illness. He was 77.

Although he was born and raised in England, his contributions to his Alliston area community will live on.

He served in Africa with the British army. He moved to

Canada and met Jean (Livingston) in Toronto before they moved to Aurora and eventually settled in Alliston when they took ownership of The Alliston Herald in the late 1970s.

He was always busy. He had a background in construction and carpentry. He was very involved with the Royal Canadian Legion, the Rotary Club of Alliston, and Alliston's Probus Club.

Even into his 70s he enjoyed playing badminton once a week. But it was in the



kitchen when he really shone.

Mr. Baker-Pearce was a strong family man, and extremely proud of his family, including his six grandchildren. And, when it came to his wife, his friends say "they made a good team".

Catherine Haller, who has worked at The Herald for two decades, said first and foremost, he was a dad.

"Of all the roles he had in his full and colorful life, dad was where he truly excelled. It was also where he found the

most joy."

A pioneer in dad's being the full-time caregiver, both he and Jean discovered very early in their marriage that he was the most suited to the role. While Jean went on to great success in the business world, Tim stayed home with their three daughters.

"I have had a great ride," he said just a week ago. "It has been truly wonderful, thanks to this woman here (his wife Jean). I have no significant regrets, all in all it's been great. Remember me kindly," he concluded.

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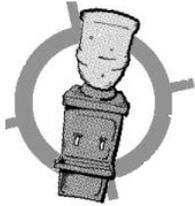


**by John P. Maclean**

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## Water Cooler

• Diane Banks has been appointed associate publisher of the **Kemptville Advance, Kemptville Weekender and Iroquois Chieftain** community newspapers and will be responsible for their day-to-day operations. This group of papers was recently purchased by Runge Publishing Inc. in June of 2004.

Banks, who makes her home in Osgoode village along with her husband Joe and two daughters, brings over 20 years of experience to her new position.

As former publisher of the Manotick Messenger group of newspapers, and most recently Communications Assistant to former M.P. of Nepean-Carleton and Minister of National Defence, David Pratt, Banks brings with her a strong background in community newspapers and media relations.

Prior to her time at the Messenger, she was an advertising sales representative for the daily Cornwall Standard-Freeholder for four years. She also has graphic design experience, having worked at the Glengarry News and the Almonte Gazette in the early 1980s.

• **Chatham This Week** has a new reporter. Larissa Barlow joined the community newspaper's newsroom on January 4. Larissa is a graduate of the journalism program at Wayne State University in Detroit. She replaces Andrew Bergland, who left **Chatham This Week** in October 2004 to join the newsroom at **Nepean This Week**.

• **Walkerton Herald-Times** editor John McPhee has been appointed to the position of General Manager. McPhee joined the newspaper's staff over two years ago and has been editor since June 2003. Continuing as editor, McPhee will also be responsible for the overall operation of the newspaper. Prior to joining Metroland, he had several years of newspaper experience in both editorial and circulation. This included several years at the Toronto Star, as well as at newspapers in Edmonton, Niagara, Owen Sound and Hanover.

Among his first duties was to hire a new reporter to replace Derek Turner, who resigned earlier in the month to pursue his musical career and to freelance. Christine Brandt has been hired as reporter. She comes from the **Port Elgin Shoreline Beacon** where she has worked as a senior reporter since 2000.

send updates to [newsclips@ocna.org](mailto:newsclips@ocna.org)

## Dates to Remember

**February 16** - OCNA Better Newspaper Awards Finalists Announced

**February 22** - Final Recipients Announced for the Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Awards

**April 8-9** OCNA Spring Convention and Trade Show

**April 9** - Community Newspaper Career Fair

**April 9** - OCNA Better Newspaper Awards Gala

**June 1-4** - CCNA Convention, Banff Alberta

## CLASSIFIEDS

### EDITOR WANTED

Parry Sound North Star / Beacon Star, Parry Sound, Ontario

A well established community newspaper, published twice a week, situated on the shores of Georgian Bay, requires a full time editor. The successful candidate must be a team player with a keen sense of community, excellent interpersonal and communication skills and be well organized with the ability to work in a high paced deadline oriented environment.

A journalism degree/diploma with solid experience in editorial capacity, with excellent research, reporting, writing and editing ability is essential.

Previous experience in pagination in QuarkXpress, Photoshop, Digital Photography and desktop publishing is a must. You are required to have your own transportation, be able to work evenings and some weekends as needed as well you must reside in the area.

Remuneration for this position includes competitive salary, benefits and vehicle allowance.

We would like to thank all applicants, but only those to be interviewed will be contacted.

Apply in writing to:

Fred Heidman, Publisher, Parry Sound North Star, Parry Sound, Ontario, P.O. Box 370, P2A 2X4  
e-mail: [fredh@parrysound.com](mailto:fredh@parrysound.com)

### Used Equipment

OCNA is offering a Used Equipment section in news clips to encourage members with redundant equipment to place free classified ads with us, c/o OCNA, 103-3050 Harvester Rd. Burlington ON L7N 3J1. Your 'trash' is someone else's 'treasure'.

### Life 101

Guaranteed laughs means guaranteed readership. Give your readers ANOTHER great reason to open your paper. Life 101 by Mark Thrice. E-mail: [jhollingsworth@bowesnet.com](mailto:jhollingsworth@bowesnet.com).

### Buying & Selling A Business Column

Are you looking for punchy articles from an Ontario author who specializes in mergers and acquisitions?

Doug Robbins is your solution. Doug writes columns to capture interest. Your circulation gleans valuable, useful tips regarding buying and selling a business. He is a member of the editorial board of a GTA newspaper.

His fees are nominal. Call Joyce Hansen, Class Act Connections, 905-278-0952 today to book Doug for your column.

### Columns available online

Looking for regular or semi-regular columnists for your newspaper? Check out the OCNA website. Columnists William Thomas, Eric Dowd, and now John Maclean upload their column for your use at a nominal charge. John Maclean is a veteran observer in the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

Go to <http://members.ocna.org> and go to the Syndicated Works folder.

### Newspaper for Sale

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## editorial

# Real people need to be in real stories

By Jim Stasiowski

Writing Coach

**H**ere is the height of frustration for a writing coach: I counted the words in a story. Counted them. Counted every single one.

I didn't have a computer to help me. I was reading an actual black-ink-on-white-paper newspaper, and I got so bloody angry as I read the story, I absolutely had to know two things: How many words were in the story? When would I come to a word referring to actual people?

The answers: 312 and 267.

The story was about -- this should come as no surprise -- a program. Not a TV program, not a computer program, but -- another non-surprise -- a government program. And not just any government program, either. It was a story about a government outreach program.

Please, can we expel from our language the word 'outreach'? Can we go back to the good old standby 'recruitment'? Here's the lead of the story, which I have fussed up slightly so as not to embarrass the newspaper, the reporter, the editor, the publisher or any of the innocent newspaper carriers: 'Madison State University and Spinnaker County will begin a research-based outreach program intended to stimulate economic development in economically depressed communities.'

Can you picture a reader shouting to his wife, "Hey, Gladys, this is awesome! An outreach program intended to stimulate economic development! Wake the kids!" Before my sarcasm overwhelms whatever shred of good judgment I have left, I ask this question: If a state university and a county government collaborate on a 'program,' whom would you guess such a 'program' will try to help?

How about 'students'? (Sorry, but you were too slow, so I had to step in.)

Well, the story's 267th word is, in fact, 'students', and it is the story's first and only mention of actual human beings who may benefit from the program.

(Paragraph 2 does mention "a higher-paid technical work force," but I prefer 'workers' and 'students,' even 'people,' you know, those antiquated terms that were popular before 'work forces' and 'programs' even existed.)

In seminars, whenever I mention the need to get real people into newspaper stories, someone will scoff and say, "Sheeeesh, Stasiowski, we know that."

We know it, but we don't do it. We rely so heavily on official sources (the story quotes two from the university and one from the county's school system) that we follow wherever they lead. Plus, in this story, the reporter may legitimately ask me: "What people should I have interviewed?" After all, if the story were about paving streets downtown, the reporter naturally would interview downtown merchants, drivers or pedestrians. But the 312-word story is about a program that doesn't yet exist. How, then, can the reporter find real people to write about?

Sorry, you're too slow again. The reporter should ask a university official, "Can you point me to students who have participated in this kind of program elsewhere? I'd love to interview them, see how things worked out for them."

If the official gives the reporter names, the story comes alive: Here's how a similar program trained students, or failed to train them, in Adams County.

"Stasiowski, you lummo," I can hear some of you saying, "what if this is the very first time Madison State has tried such a program? What then, big shot?"

Ahhhhhhh, you have fallen into my trap. Sometimes, the absence of real people is the real story. If Madison State has never tried this program, how can anyone reasonably predict it will work? How can readers have confidence that the money spent on this program -- and the story doesn't mention the program's cost -- is going to solve the problem?

All government is personal. A program has worked, has failed, or hasn't been tried. In all three cases, you have a story about people, even if the third option is about the lack of people.

Here's one more illustration of how distant this story is from real people. The story has three quotations, all equally awful. An example: "We will use our resources, including faculty expertise, for the economic and social well-being of this community."

So we settle for the easy route, listing information handed to us by official sources.

(And no, you newsroom lawyers out there, the story wasn't in a tiny paper with a one-person staff. It is from a daily with a circulation of about 200,000, a number that refers to people.)

We need to use our ingenuity. We need to look inside the story and wonder where the people are. And if we're not using real people until Word No. 267, we should be concluding the first 266 words don't have

much value.

THE FINAL WORD: I hate e-mail, but I sent one recently to a columnist who used some insider talk that I didn't understand. Graciously, he e-mailed back an explanation. Then he apologized and said he tries to avoid being 'obtuse.'

He meant 'obscure.' 'Obscure' means not clear; 'obtuse' implies dullness, insensitivity, and its usual context is in referring to a person's lack of brainpower.

*Writing coach Jim Stasiowski welcomes your questions and comments. Call him at 410 247-4600, or write to 5812 Heron Drive, Baltimore, Md. 21227.*

## Dealing with holiday struggles at office

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about 10 years ago. They operated out of the old Legion club room for a few years until the landlord built a new office on the south side of the building.

The fire that nearly happened December 24 was in the paper's previous office which had been converted to an apartment.

Meanwhile over on the eastern side of the province, the staff at Kawartha Lakes This Week in Lindsay came back to the office after Christmas to find that their skylight could not deal with the amount of snow and ice accumulated on the roof. Editor Lois Tuffin told us the sight of six large cans catching the steady stream of water was reminiscent of the flooding in their Peterborough office earlier this winter. Then at the beginning of January they arrived to a cold office for a day when the furnace broke down.

It rains, it pours, and life at community papers just keeps on...

### Community Newspaper Career Fair Sat. April 9, 3-5pm

You are invited to set up a table at this Fair which will be attended by journalism, advertising, photography and graphic art students from community college and universities from across the province. Promote your newspaper and community to potential new employees. Exhibits only \$25 for members, \$40 for non-members. E-mail [anne.lannan@ocna.org](mailto:anne.lannan@ocna.org) for more information.

## design

# Listening is key to redesign success

By Edward F. Henninger  
OMNIA Consulting

**T**he conversation occurred years ago but it will always live with me. I was working into the evening at the office of a redesign client, just tying up some loose ends. An ad sales rep approached me and mentioned that she had a small criticism of what we were doing with the redesigned nameplate.

"I'm just an ad sales rep and you really don't want to be troubled with what I have to say..."

"Oh, yes, I do," I replied instantly. "If you have something to say, then it's my job to listen to you."

She made her point about some details on the nameplate. And months later, when we introduced the new look, the design of that nameplate reflected her thoughts.

That brief conversation comes back to me time and again when I remember that one of the most important qualities a consultant must have is the ability to listen well.

Really, I'm just like most people I know: I want to monopolize the conversation. Just give me the opportunity and I will regale you with tales from the road, impress you with my knowledge of newspapering and amaze you with my ability to solve all of the world's problems.

Yeah. Right.

I suppose we all fall into that trap occasionally. I have to be reminded occasionally that God gave me one mouth and two ears and that there's a logic to that: I should listen twice as much as I speak.

I don't know how a consultant can do good work without proper listening.

- Before he can know which way to take a redesign, the consultant must listen.
- Before he can begin to work on mockups, the consultant must listen.
- Before he can make changes to those mockups, the consultant must listen.
- Before he can know how a client's newsroom functions, the consultant must listen.
- Before he can offer suggestions on structure and staffing, the consultant must listen.
- Before he can teach others about long-term planning the consultant must listen.
- And before he can hope to have any answers, the consultant must listen to the questions.

Author Somerset Maugham said of writing: "There are three rules for writing well. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." I think the same is true of listening.

There must be some sort of art to listening. I have no idea what it is. I usually don't realize when I am listening—but I do know when I'm talking too much.

And I refuse to take credit for those times when I do listen well. That credit goes to those clients who come to me with their concerns and questions and comment. Their stories are compelling and their needs are clear. More important, their desire to succeed is so overwhelming that I can't help but listen.

And there's an added benefit to listening well: most often I learn something new. I will sometimes joke with my

clients that it's fun having them pay me to learn from them. It's true: I rarely work with a client who hasn't got something to teach me.

After more than 15 years consulting, I know this much is true: if you're working with a person who has all the answers—or who doesn't even have the time to sit and listen to you talk about yourself, your staff, your hopes and dreams for your newspaper—you're not working with a consultant.

You may have hired an expert—but you haven't hired a consultant.

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## advertising

# Want more sales? Do the math

By John Foust  
Raleigh, NC

**A**n acquaintance Al told me about a visit with one of his clients, the owner of a mattress store. His story illustrates how numbers can be used to breathe life into selling points.

The client explained that 1,600 mattresses had been ordered from a manufacturer, but 3,200 were actually delivered. Temporary space was being rented to store the extras, and according to Al, the store owner had never before been so eager to advertise.

"What kind of ads do you have in mind?" Al asked.

The advertiser proudly announced, "Five hundred dollars worth."

Since this client didn't advertise very often, a lot of sales people would have gladly taken the order and run. But Al sensed there was more to the story than the advertiser realized. "That's great," he said. "But before we allocate your budget, I'd like to learn more about your business. If you don't mind my asking, what's your average profit on mattresses?"

"Taking into account the different sizes and models," the client said, "it's about \$100 per mattress."

Al made notes on his legal pad. "Let's see, you have 3,200 mattresses to sell and you'll make around one hundred dollars on each mattress. That's a potential profit of \$320,000. And your advertising budget is \$500?"

"When you put it like that, \$500 doesn't sound like much."

Al resisted the temptation to say, "That's the biggest understatement I've heard all week." Instead, he mentioned there were approximately 100,000 households in their county and asked, "How many beds are in a typical household?"

The store owner thought for a second or two. "Including sofa beds, I'd guess three."

Al looked up from his legal pad. "Three beds per household in 100,000 households amounts to 300,000 beds. Now, to get a handle on your potential audience, let's say one per cent of those mattresses are worn out. I mean, they're in such bad shape that they'd curl up around your ears. Is that a fair percentage?"

The advertiser laughed. "I see where you're going with this. We see a lot of mattresses like that. Actually, one per cent is low."

"It may be low, but let's think conservatively for now," Al said. "One per cent of

300,000 is 3,000. That gives you 3,000 potential sales, 3,000 mattresses that badly need replacing. Do you think \$500 of advertising will generate enough traffic to sell 3,000 mattresses?"

"No, not really. And I'm worrying myself to death over these mattresses."

By the end of their discussion, the client agreed to spend \$5,000 on a seven-day advertising blitz - ten times more than his initial budget. In those seven days, the store sold 1,600 of the 3,200 mattresses. That's a profit of \$160,000 on a \$5,000 investment.

What about the other 1,600 mattresses? Remember, that's what he had ordered in the first place. But with his new belief in the power of advertising, those mattresses didn't stay in stock for long.

And he's sleeping a lot better now.

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*John Foust conducts on-site and video training for newspaper advertising departments. His three new video programs are designed to help ad managers conduct in-house training for their sales teams. For information, contact: John Foust, PO Box 97606, Raleigh, NC 27624 USA, E-mail: jfoust@mindspring.com, Phone 919-848-2401.*

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