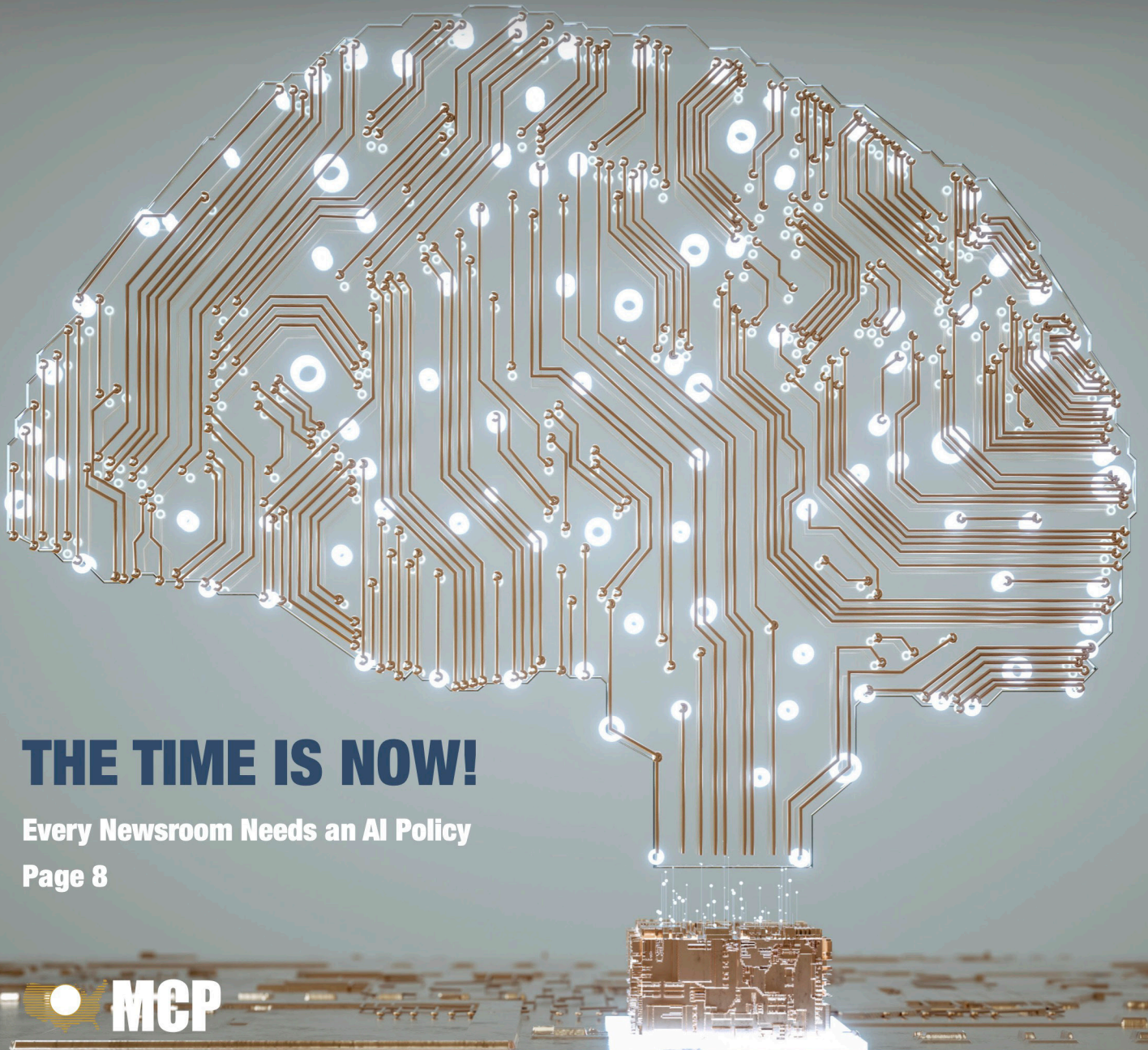


PAPER CLIPS

Midwest Community Publications

Official Newsletter | September 2026



THE TIME IS NOW!

Every Newsroom Needs an AI Policy

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EXPLORE. CONNECT. DISCOVER. | ACP ANNUAL CONFERENCE | OCTOBER 7-9 | BACK PAGE

President's Corner

Are You Promoting Yourself?

Recently, I was at a wedding venue where we were given a seating chart. I was making conversation with the couple placed beside me. She asked me what I did for a living. I told her I was in the community newspaper business. She looked at me and said, "I didn't even know there were still newspapers." I proceeded to tell her that she just broke my heart. Understandably, she was from a large community right outside of Chicago. Needless to say, an interesting conversation started and continued for quite some time. She does now know we are alive and well.

This did get me thinking about promoting our publications. We haven't always been given a good rap as an industry. However, we hold the key to promoting ourselves and somethings we simply sweep it under the rug. All of us have the ability to promote ourselves through our print product. We also have digital readily available. It should be top of mind for all of us. Yet we are some of the worst at promoting ourselves.

Last month I mentioned the national conference hosted by Association of Community Publishers that is coming up in October. The conference starts out with a professional education class focused on influential communications. One of the key outcomes of this class is to organize your thoughts and ideas to deliver extemporaneous presentations persuasively and clearly. All of us should learn and utilize this skill in order to develop a plan to promote our publications in all forms of communication.

On the second day of the conference, Rob Golub is presenting a class on emotionally-engaged community journalism. His description states, "this session explores how journalists and publishers can ethically and powerfully connect with a community on an

emotional level to deepen trust, strengthen audience engagement, and sustain journalism's civic role." Again an excellent opportunity to learn how to focus on your publication for effectiveness within your community.

The final keynote of conference is "Long Live Local News" presented by publisher Kenny Katzgrau. Kenny is going to demonstrate how to stay connected to the "why" behind the work, even when the challenges of local journalism can feel overwhelming. What a great opportunity to learn crucial insight to our industry.

These three classes are just touching on what is going to be offered right in our backyard in Minneapolis. Our colleagues are some of the best sources available to us. Three packed days to interact is priceless.

I encouraged you last month that it was time to represent. ACP does not come to the Midwest often. It is time for you to take the time for your publications. I dare you to learn just one thing. I am pretty positive that will turn out to be so much more. I would love to talk to all of you about how we can promote ourselves!

Explore. Connect. Discover. October 7-9 Minneapolis.

Lisa Miller
MCP Board President



From the Office

A Little Help from Friends

If you've attended a conference, member meetup, publisher roundtable, manager's summit, or fall training, you've likely benefited from the hardworking volunteers who make these opportunities possible. They're your peers and fellow publishers, giving their time to serve on committees, the board, or simply share their expertise.

These are people who understand the value of participation, building community, making connections, sharing ideas, and discovering new opportunities.

Getting involved can be as simple as joining an

MCP Zoom call, or it could mean serving on a committee or the board of directors. We currently have a couple of seats open.

If you're interested, reach out and let's find a place where your interests and talents can make a difference.



Cory Regnier
Executive Director



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MVP at Work

Everyday Leadership

When you think of a leader, what comes to mind? A CEO? The president? Your boss? While these can all be examples of leaders, often everyday leaders are forgotten about in this conversation. In August's MVP meeting we discussed a TED Talk by Drew Dudley that covered everyday leaders.

My greatest takeaway was that we devalue the things that we do every day, our potential to be leaders in the lives around us. Leadership isn't just being in a position of power over other people, that's management, rather leadership is being a good example to others around you and making positive impacts in other people's lives.

I wouldn't be where I am today at Citizen Publishing without the influence of a leader in my life. Before I worked here, I was doing cashier work at Hy-Vee. It wasn't really where I wanted to be in life, I had a degree in Studio Art and I was feeling regretful that I had wasted so much time and money for what I was starting to see as a useless degree. That's when my manager, Shannon, pointed me to an ad in the paper for a graphic design position. She knew who I was

as a person and knew my skillset and interests, and so she told me I should go for it, what's the worst that can happen? That's a leader, someone who knows people and pushes them to positive change in their lives.

We all have the capability to be leaders to those around us. Even small acts of encouragement can be huge for our friends, family, coworkers and even strangers.

It's scary to know that your actions can hold so much power over other people's lives, but that's why you should put your best self forward whenever you can. Go out into the world and be the best you that you can be and show people what an everyday leader looks like.

You've got this!

Rachel Sajban
MVP, Windom Shopper



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MCP

midwest community publications

YOUR AD HERE!

Ad-Libs

Where's the Beef in Your Advertising?

Wendy's ran a series of TV commercials in the mid-1980s which featured actress Clara Peller, as she disapprovingly observed the size of the burgers in fast food places. I remember one which showed Clara and two of her friends at the counter of a place called "Home of the Big Bun" (according to the sign behind them). Her friends commented on the size of the "big fluffy bun," but Clara sternly said, "Where's the beef?" when she saw the tiny burger inside. The voiceover included the statement, "At Wendy's, you get more beef and less bun."

Wendy's received a lot of publicity from the campaign and Clara became an instant celebrity. In fact, "Where's the beef?" became a popular catchphrase.

These days, as I browse through printed pages and online media sites, certain ads make me wonder, "Where's the beef?" or "Where's the message?" Those ads have generic words and pictures, but nothing else. Nothing of interest. Nothing that makes me want to conduct business with them.

How can advertising contain substance – real beef – that is worth noticing and remembering? Let's take a look at three important ingredients:

1. Information. Although some ads have an entertainment element, they are primarily for information. Even Wendy's humorous commercial provided information at the end.

Glance at the articles in your paper. They are loaded with information about what is happening in the world and in your community. Now take a look at the ads. Do you see rock-solid information or puffed-up claims?

2. Value. Don't make the mistake of thinking that value is limited to price. Value is in the mind of the consumer. It's a matter of perceived benefits. People who buy Bentleys are just as interested in value as people who buy economy cars.

I remember a blurb in Readers' Digest which described the evolution of a classified ad. The first ad read, "Boat, motor and trailer for sale - \$200." Nobody called. So the ad was changed to read, "Boat and motor for sale - \$200. Will throw in trailer for free." The phone rang off the hook.

What was the difference? Value.

3. Urgency. An ad can have the first two ingredients – information and value – and still not work. Without urgency, there's no motivation to buy now.

Urgency can be created with time or quantity limitations. In either case, the message is the same: "Buy now or miss out."

A sale is the most common offer in using time to create urgency. ("Half-price sale ends Saturday.") And a limited inventory is frequently used to create urgency with quantity. ("Only three lakeside townhomes left.")

Urgency can also be created by emphasizing benefits which could be enjoyed now, instead of later. ("Get ready for football with your new big-screen TV.")

If one of your advertisers has ads that Clara Peller would complain about, maybe it's time to add some Information, Value and Urgency.

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John Foust
Dale Carnegie Training



Ryan Dohrn

Sell Value in a Price-Focused World

One of the things I coach salespeople on all the time is how to sell value when we live in a very price-focused world.

Buyers are looking at price. Comparing price. Questioning price. And when your product, advertising package or service costs a little more than the competition, it can become very easy for the conversation to turn into, “Why are you more expensive?”

That is exactly why value selling is such an important skill.

If you are serious about selling, you need to become very good at helping buyers understand one simple idea:

Price is what they pay. Value is what they get.

There are three things I want you to focus on to become better at communicating value.

To find out what they are, read the whole post at:
www.salestrainingworld.com

*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.*



Ryan Dohrn
“Mr. Revenue”

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Kevin Slimp

Fighting the Negativity

I had a really nice experience speaking at a convention over the past few days. When word got around that I probably wouldn't be returning after this year – I've decided to leave the road to focus on two companies I'm supposed to be running – the response shocked me. A couple of people even shed tears as they told me I was the reason they attended this convention each year. I heard from two publishers who didn't make it, saying they would have found a way to come if they'd known it would be my last convention with them. Six staff members who had started their own news organization (which is doing great after six years, by the way) after leaving a metro paper that had been sold to a large venture capitalist group a few years earlier took me to dinner and embarrassed me by constantly reminding me of what my work has meant to the industry.

I guess that's why I care so much. Of the 6,000 or so printed newspapers in the U.S., not to count those in Canada, Europe, and Australia, that I still write for now and then, most are still locally-owned community papers. They're run by people like these, who were sorry to hear I wouldn't be back. Even the publisher of one of America's daily metros has written to me multiple times, trying to persuade me to change my mind.

So, when I hear a speaker, as I did recently at a newspaper convention, tell the audience that newspapers were woefully behind in adopting AI and were surprised that most papers aren't using AI to create content, I realize there is still much to do. This speaker obviously has no idea that our top priority is not adopting AI or other technologies. Our job is to serve our communities and create content that informs the public.



I'm still shocked that so many people, even "experts" in our industry, don't realize that our number one job is to create great newspapers and to constantly improve the quality of what we do.

So, with that in mind, I'd like to share some of what I learned in my August survey of 300 newspaper managers (mostly publishers) in the U.S. and Canada concerning the role of AI in their newspapers. The responses came from publishers of major metro papers, tiny community newspapers, and every size in between. In line with the North American newspaper industry, 56 percent of respondents were publishers of locally owned community newspapers.

In an effort to stay within my 800-word (self-imposed) limit, I will share a few of my findings here, then share more in a later column.

Interestingly, 45 percent of newspapers reported they use AI in some way in their newsrooms. Digging deeper, these were primarily for two purposes: transcribing interviews and meetings, and using Grammarly to proofread for grammar errors.

The second most common way newspapers reported they use AI is in ad creation. I was surprised to see that 22 percent of respondents reported they've used Canva. I think I'll stick to reporting the findings and sharing my thoughts on them later.

The third highest reported use of AI was in advertising sales. Following sales, the numbers were small (3- 6 percent) for circulation, bookkeeping, and page

• **POSITIVITY**
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The Fourth Estate

Every Newsroom Needs an AI Policy

This summer, I led a three-part AI Summer Series for MCP and every session pushed toward the same aim: to give news organizations like us useful, practical tools without the hype.

In the first session, I unpacked what has truly changed in Google search—SEO, AEO, and GEO in plain English—and explained why AI Overviews are steadily reducing organic traffic for us (our own figures show a 15% drop over two years, with obituaries affected the most). The second session, “The Model Landscape,” sorted through the confusion around Claude, ChatGPT, and open-source models: what they cost, what they do well, and how to use them to build real tools, such as a property-tax calculator or a scheduled agenda-watcher. The closing session, “Design & Sales,” demonstrated how one correctly built ad can adapt to every size you sell, and how your circulation audit can also serve as a ready-made prospect list. If you’d like to view these, you can email Cory at MCP, they were recorded.

What I want every publisher to take away is this: if your paper still hasn’t put its AI policy in writing, that needs to happen now and readers should be told how you use it. A peer-reviewed 2026 audit of 186,000 U.S. newspaper articles found that 9% already show evidence of AI involvement, with the pattern appearing more often in small papers than in large ones, and only 5 in 100 of those pieces included any disclosure at all. It is already here.

There is another reason to act quickly: the tools themselves are beginning to watermark what they create. OpenAI and Google now place SynthID, an invisible and tamper-resistant signal, together with C2PA “Content Credentials” metadata on AI-generated images, audio, and video, so provenance can remain intact even after cropping or compression. The EU

now mandates this sort of machine-readable labeling by law. Plain text remains a tougher challenge and is still not reliably watermarked—which is precisely why your own disclosure policy, rather than a vendor’s tool, is what your readers are depending on.

If you’d like to see how we tackled this and informed our readers, I’m glad to share it. Just email me at trevors@quadd.ai.

Trevor Slette
Founder of Quadd.ai



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design. Seven percent of newspapers reported they use AI only with Adobe products, which have built-in AI capabilities but are optional.

When asked, “Which of the following comes closest to describing your feelings about the use of AI at newspapers?” answers broke down like this:

- Strongly opposed: 16 percent
- Very skeptical: 12 percent
- Somewhat skeptical: 29 percent
- Neutral: 12 percent
- Generally positive: 1 percent
- Extremely enthusiastic: 7 percent

I can’t help but think back to a New York Press Association Convention around the turn of the century, when I walked into a packed room with hundreds of publishers to speak to them about incorporating online news into their publications. The room was silent when I walked in, every seat taken.

Before I got up to speak, a publisher in the center of the front row asked, “Are you going to say the last thing the last guy said to us?”

The room was silent as everyone waited for my response. “I didn’t hear the last speaker. I have no idea what he said.”

The publisher continued, “He said we would all be out of business within a couple of years if we didn’t drop print and move everything online.”

“I’m sure he didn’t say that,” I responded.

It was like a choir shouting, “Yes, he did!”

I assured them I wasn’t going to say anything like that.

A few weeks later, I was in downtown Denver, speaking at a convention. At one spot on the schedule, I was supposed to speak to the publishers about customer service. Before I could say a word, a hand went up.

“Can I ask a question before you start? What did

you think about what the lunch speaker had to say?”

I suppose I should listen to more speakers, because once again I had to admit I had no idea who the speaker was or what was said. I quickly learned it was the same speaker, the CEO of one of America’s major metro newspaper groups, that I had followed in New York.

“He said we were all going to be out of business within a year or two if we didn’t stop printing newspapers.”

That’s when I said something that I’ve been quoted on several times since: “When someone stands on a stage and tries to convince you of something, whether it’s the speaker at a convention, the preacher at church, or even me, I want you to ask yourself something. Just ask, ‘What will it benefit that speaker if I do what they say I should do?’”

There was thunderous applause, and the press association director came running into the room to see if there was a riot.

I wrote a column a few weeks later and named that speaker. I mentioned that I believed he had a problem with telling the truth. Afterward, I received several messages from folks thanking me for writing it. One wrote to ask, “Aren’t you afraid he will sue you?”

Honestly, I hadn’t given it any thought until I received that message.

Fortunately, at least for me, the CEO was fired less than a week after my column was distributed. I felt like I had dodged another bullet.

My final thought today: Don’t believe everything people tell you. Your most important job is putting out a great newspaper that serves your community. That’s it. Do that and, like me, when you’re nearing the end of your career, you will be able to sleep at night.



Kevin Slimp
News Guru

ACP Annual Conference Minneapolis | October 7-9

Explore Community Publishing This Fall with Help from MCP

As a member benefit, Midwest Community Publications wants to help send you to the Association of Community Publishers (ACP) annual conference in Minneapolis on October 7-9.

Not an ACP member?

MCP will pay your \$99 ACP first-year membership. For 2026, ACP has a special \$99 first-year membership to join their association which includes registration to the conference.

Already an ACP member?

MCP will cover your admission to the Thursday evening celebration at WhirlyBall Twin Cities, a \$99 value.



HAVE QUESTIONS?

Contact: Cory Regnier
888-899-6327
director@mfcg.org

Limited to one deal per membership.

MCP will coordinate with ACP to issue checks after conference attendance.

