

THE ORIGINAL SOCIAL MEDIA

By John Hewitt

Almost everyone is active in some sort of social media these days; whether it's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, Flickr, Pinterest or any of the many other sites.

We use social media as a way to stay in touch with family and friends; share photographs; keep up with news; look for jobs; announce engagements, births, marriages, deaths and other life events; and virtually anything else that is part of our collective lives.

Today's social media role, other than the instant nature of it, is no different than the roles community newspapers have played for hundreds of years.

In smaller communities, prior to the days of the Internet, the local newspaper was often the only form of communication other than word of mouth.

The local newspaper was the go-to source for political news, sports scores, obituaries, school lunch menus, church news, items for sale at the local markets, and even, as was the case in my hometown, hyper-local community news.

Our community newspaper featured contributing writers from the various communities who would report on such things as who visited whom, who hosted a party and possibly even what a family or group would have for Sunday dinner (dinner was the term used to describe the midday meal, particularly on Saturdays and Sundays).

Sunday dinner was usually the biggest meal of the week and family and friends would often drop by after church to socialize. It was often an all-afternoon event with foods left out for hours so that whoever visited needed only to fill their plates, and this was newsworthy.

I think the first time I appeared in our local newspaper was my graduation from elementary school, which at the time was completing the seventh grade. I was so proud to have my picture in the newspaper, and I'm sure my mother bought additional copies to share with family members. My older siblings had often been featured in the newspaper for either academic or sporting accomplishments but not me. For the first time in my life, my name and likeness was shared with people that I didn't know, and I thought it was awesome.

My sisters would often make scrapbooks; these scrapbooks always contained clippings from the local newspaper. Clippings of photos and stories about their school, their friends, craft ideas that they wanted to try, recipes, hairstyles they liked, boys they swooned over...you know; the sort of things high school girls now post on Pinterest and share on Instagram. Family albums would almost certainly have clippings from the newspaper that showed a family member or neighbor.

Things really haven't changed that much over the years. We still like to share the important things in our lives with others. We still like to see our pictures in public view (assuming nothing illegal has transpired). We still like to know what's going on with others. We just do it differently now.

Your local newspaper was the first medium to serve this purpose and will be for years to come. We often have people come into our office asking for back issues that friends or family members were featured in. They still want that dingy piece of newsprint and it often gets framed. Sure they will also request a PDF of a page so they can share it on electronic social media but that PDF can't be pasted into a scrapbook.

Support your local newspaper, we've always been a vital link to the community and we always will be.

Newspapers have withstood the test of time. As other forms of communication have come and gone, we've survived and no parental controls are required. We are the original social media.