

Extra, Extra! Newspapers aren't dead!

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“Extra! Extra! Newspapers aren't dead!” This is quoted from a recent headline in *USA Today*. The article, by Rem Rieder, reports a new business model has taken shape that makes newspapers a mature industry and, at the same time, an emerging industry.

And who doesn't love the local newspaper? Where else will we find a picture of our grandchild hitting a baseball over the fence or our daughter receiving an award for winning the spelling bee? Who doesn't love the special features only newspapers offer, such as a Church News Bloopers column with items like: “The evening service tonight sermon will be ‘What is Hell?’ Come early and listen to the choir practice.” Or, “Rev. Jones wants you to remember many who are sick of the community.”

The good news is that newspaper revenues are increasing because newspapers are now charging for content searched on the web, and they are increasing revenues through e-commerce and hosting special events that recognize charities and community leadership.

Magazines have avoided much of the negative impact of the internet because they are more designed for institutional advertising, while the main business model for newspapers is item and price advertising. So now, newspapers are producing their own magazines and reaping new profits from for their efforts.

There are indications that many of the websites that challenged newspapers are slipping, becoming fads have no long term prospects. Monster.com and its help wanted site are now for sale with no takers. Groupon.com is now a bust. A recent article documented how Facebook “can't sell soap,” saying people do not click on ads as they are visiting with friends.

Digital advertising, once promising the Holy Grail, has been a huge disappointment in the advertising world. And if people don't look at advertising on their computers or lap tops, why would they look at ads on the mobile phones?

There is an elephant in the room for internet hopefuls, those young startups that promise such hope for entrepreneurs and venture capitalists. Their ideas will depend on super high speed wireless internet. The pipeline they will need to deliver their ideas is not generally available because only 48 percent of the country has high speed internet at home. And it's only available in the metro areas of the U.S.

Because of the expense, this internet pipeline is not being built out in the state or in the rest of the U.S. For instance, it's long been a dream idea that a physician who is a specialist could beam on the internet in real time from Emory Hospital to talk with doctors in rural areas to solve a specific medical issue. There are internet systems designed to carry this out, but high speed internet is not available to show internet video and provide other services to almost 50 percent of Georgia communities.

What about the popular Apple iPad? Only 31 percent in the U.S. own the device. And its popularity is waning because reading books, magazines and newspapers online, on iPads and Kindles, is proving to be boring. Apple's stock is down 25 percent at the time of this writing.

The lack of high speed internet availability for a major segment of the population, the disappointing advertising results on internet and social media sites, and the efforts of print media to adapt to the internet, charge for content on their own web sites, and print new niche products has given print publications new life as an "emerging" industry.

After all, in the small town of St. Simons, Georgia, population 12,000, there are nine print publications? Among the count are two big magazines in addition to *The Coastal Illustrated*, *Bulldog Illustrated*, two real estate magazines, the *Brunswick News*, *The Georgia Times-Union*, and the local St. Simons newspaper. All of these are being published during the biggest recession since the 1930s, and many of the publications are owned by the Brunswick News.

If you go into your favorite grocery store anywhere in the state you will see the same sorts of publications. Niche newspapers and magazines are all over the place. There is even a print product for dentists, dog lovers and cat lovers; and small local newspapers have cropped up in many neighborhoods cities all over Georgia and throughout the U.S.

We all love our newspapers. How can we do with out blooper headlines like: "Rally against apathy draws small crowd." "City unsure why sewer smells." "Man with 8 DUI's blames drinking problem." Or my favorite, "Fort Benning Army vehicle disappears after being painted with camouflage."

But beyond entertainment, newspapers and magazines have a serious and important responsibility – and unlike many internet sites – they are accountable to their readers.

Without good, strong newspapers, who is going to look after the interest of everyday citizens when it comes to political events? Who will report on the bad guys and celebrate the good guys. Who will give power to people who have no power?

Only newspapers and other print media can do that in the accurate, fair and true way that has worked for hundreds of years. The internet has not killed newspapers or print media, but it certainly changed it, and maybe saved it for all of us, forever.