Katie
Lee

Rural communities continue to depend on traditional communication methods, such as newspapers and newsletters, to enhance civic engagement, provide reliable information exchange and facilitate community development (Bruce et al., 2007). For Emke (2007), communities with functional newspapers are the sign of a vibrant community.

Seniors living in rural settings use newspapers as their primary source of information and include the reading as part of their routines. Senior populations are especially high in rural communities. With little or no internet service, lack of technological skills and access to technology, seniors prefer to read physical copies of the local newspaper (Long, 2019d). In Lot 16, a rural community in P.E.I, all seniors, regardless of age, read their local publication (Bruce et al., 2007). An American study found "adults 65 and older who pay for news are five times more likely to buy print than digital" (Long, 2019d).

"Seniors need to know 'What am I going to do this Tuesday afternoon?'"

-Judy Wells (Deloraine Times & Star)

Challenged by the rush to adapt to digital communication methods, local newspapers struggle to remain prosperous and viable. Large corporations often purchase local newspapers, which leads to restructuring, job losses and eventual closures. In many instances observed in the following precedents, locals with a passion and commitment to maintaining publications have decided to purchase the papers themselves. Owners of The Prince Albert Daily Herald recognize the importance of the local newspaper in communities, "I've been in communities where they've lost all this stuff, and they don't recover...to lose something big like a newspaper, it's something you never want to see" (CBC News: The National, 2018).

The Watrous Manitou - Watrous, Sask.

Figure 1: Owner Daniel Bushman, outside the office of The Watrous Manitou.

Daniel Bushman purchased The Watrous Manitou at the age of 29 (see figure 1). The weekly paper combines traditional and digital means of creating and promoting the publication (Long, 2019b). The award-winning newspaper serves a town of 1,865 and boasts 2,224 followers online with a circulation of 1,459 (Long, 2019b). The paper continues to innovate by adding new sections, covering hyper-local news stories and giving back to the community.

The Prince Albert Daily Herald - Prince Albert, Sask.

Employees of The Prince Albert Daily Herald bought the paper in Spring 2018 due to concerns the newspaper would go out of business. Operating without the corporate overhead costs, the employees have the freedom to decide what kind of stories and special editions will maximize profitability. News stories are centred around local issues, to allow the community to see themselves in the paper (CBC News: The National, 2018).

The Valley Voice - New Denver, B.C.

The Valley Voice is published twice a month, free, and run by two owners who also serve as publishers, editors, reporters and paperboys (Long, 2019a). Due to poor internet service around the mountains, the paper is focused on producing print copies (see figure 2). To remain profitable, the owners must maintain good relationships with their existing advertisers and foster relationships with stores and services.

Photo Credit: Long, 2019a

Figure 2: Mountains in New Denver, B.C. cause poor internet service in the area.

Strategies to Maintain Newspaper Viability

Maximize Revenue Sources

Newspapers rely on advertising revenue to cover printing and employee costs to remain operational. To attract advertisement interest, newspapers can sell special editions, such as graduation or anniversary versions of the paper. These unique copies act as keepsakes, drive interest from community members, and appeal to advertisers (CBC News: The National, 2018). Maintaining good relationships with existing and potential advertisers is vital to maximize advertising dollars. Owners can foster this relationship by hand-delivering their papers to businesses and interacting with them face-to-face (Long, 2019a). Also, various grants and funding streams have been made available by the federal government, including the Canadian Periodical Fund (Long, 2019a).

Focus on Hyper-Localized News Stories

To maintain reader interest and investment, newspapers can focus their stories on issues happening directly in town, i.e. council meetings, public meetings or regional district meetings (Long, 2019a). Newspapers have found success in telling stories that matter the most to people and reflect the rural perspective. People want to read about their neighbours or friends in the newspaper (Long, 2019b). Adding sections for healthy aging, physician recruitment, or promoting age-friendly social events speak to the senior population's needs (Long, 2019a).
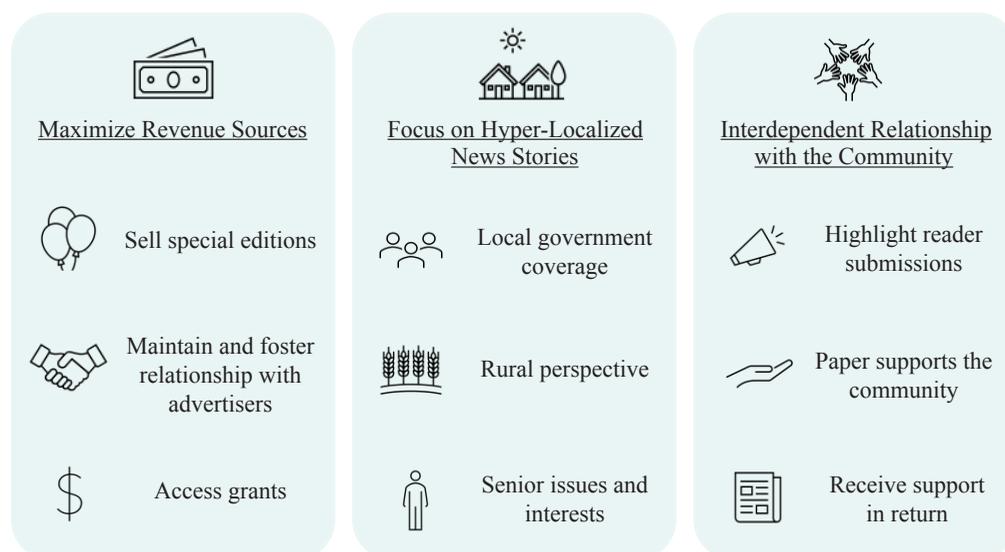
Foster Interdependent Relationship with the Community

Fostering the community's interest and maintaining an interdependent relationship is key to local newspaper success. Newspapers can provide space to highlight its citizens. For example, The Watrous Manitou (see figure 3) encourages readers to travel with a copy of the paper, take a photo and submit it for inclusion in the paper (Long, 2019b). The Watrous Manitou owner gives back to his community

Photo Credit: Long, 2019b

Figure 3: Community submitted photos from trips are published in The Waltrous Manitou.

by providing fundraiser prizes, donating to local organizations, offering discounts to local organizations, and patronizing the businesses that advertise in the paper (Long, 2019b). This creates a feedback loop; the community supports the paper through purchases, and the paper supports its community in various ways.

Maximize Revenue Sources	Focus on Hyper-Localized News Stories	Interdependent Relationship with the Community
Sell special editions	Local government coverage	Highlight reader submissions
Maintain and foster relationship with advertisers	Rural perspective	Paper supports the community
Access grants	Senior issues and interests	Receive support in return

Accessibility for Digital Publications

As stated by the Deloraine Times & Star's sole employee, seniors "get the paper until they can't see any more" (Long, 2019d). Although digital publications may not meet every senior's needs, there are opportunities within websites that may increase the accessibility of the traditional print format. As evidenced in The Senior Paper (2020) online version, there are simple instructions for navigating the website reader, adjustable page layouts, and is touchscreen-friendly. This flexibility allows users to adjust the text size so that it meets their vision needs. Additionally, The Prince Albert Daily Herald's website features an audio reader.

Final Thoughts

Despite an increasingly digital news media world, rural communities in Canada continue to focus operations on print versions. The precedents studied reveal a continued preference for physical copies amongst its readers. In Watrous, the digital version of the paper is available three days earlier than the print version. However, only 160 readers opt to subscribe to this version (Long, 2019b). The Iorì:wase (Kanesatake, Quebec) was conceived as a website and app. As a response to reader and advertiser demand, the news outlet now produces a print version as a weekly newspaper (Long, 2020). The Valley Voice remained with the print version, as it did not make sense to rely on a digital version considering the area's poor internet service and high levels of senior readership (Long, 2019a). However, many of these publications complement the print version with an online presence. Websites, Facebook pages and Issuu versions of the newspapers are available as additional resources for readers.

In rural communities, newspapers continue to be integral pieces of the community's fabric. Years ago, in the Yukon, Dawson City's Klondike Sun was on the brink of going out of business. The GoFundMe, organized by the paper's owner, raised $7,500 to save the paper, an excess of what was asked (Long, 2019c). The near closure of the newspaper triggered renewed interest (Long, 2019c). This demonstrates that revitalization of community newspapers can be achieved with the right group of people that are passionate about their community.

Local Newspapers

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