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## Columbus finding a new print world?

By Chuck Moozakis editor-in chief Nov 19, 2011

As the newspaper and commercial printing industries prepare to travel to Chicago for this year's Graph Expo, print is again taking center stage.

As it should.

Even as digital distribution grabs much of the spotlight, newspapers can ill-afford to avert their attention from their printed products. As much as the Internet Advertising Bureau and its allies would like everyone to believe, the real truth is this: Digital advertising alone will never pay the bills of a professional and well-staffed news organization.

The numbers don't lie: During the first quarter of this year, more than 85 cents of every advertising dollar a U.S. newspaper collected was generated by a printed advertisement. The newspaper's greatest asset - its brand and its commitment to the community it serves - is exemplified not by an electron floating across a person's smartphone, but by the physical newspaper sitting on the kitchen table.

Don't get me wrong: I understand that the Web and mobile audiences are important. But in order for newspapers to serve those audiences - at least for today and for the foreseeable future - print is the engine that must be carefully nurtured and maintained.

That's why it's gratifying to see The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch shake up the industry with its decision to convert its presses to three-around printing and transform its broadsheet edition to a compact one.

The Dispatch is the first newspaper in the world to take the step, using Pressline Services Inc.'s 3Volution press conversion service (see our story on page 6).

For too long, U.S. publishers have been sitting on the sidelines, watching as their compatriots in Europe, South America and Canada make bold decisions to retool their printed products. As consultant Sam Wagner told News & Tech last month, "We seem to want to leave the broadsheet here to die; in the States nobody

wants to take the chance to really shake up their product and really try to redo it, whether it's content, size or shape. Circulation is declining, page counts are declining, but people are afraid to change. To do nothing seems to be on a path to death to me. I don't want to be pessimistic, but what do they have to lose?"

By making this move, The Dispatch is telling readers and advertisers - and the industry - that it's willing to do what's necessary to revitalize its core product even as it prepares to do business and serve its community in the decades to come.

It's about time a U.S. publisher took as bold a step as this, and we certainly hope this will fuel other publishers to take a long, hard look at what they can do to bolster their own printed products.

Just so you don't think I'm down on all things digital, it's also gratifying to see that papers' strategies to charge for their online content appear to be paying off.

The New York Times, for example, said it's attracted more than 225,000 paying subscribers since it instituted its metered paywall this spring. The Financial Times has also chalked up some impressive digital subscriber numbers.

Dozens of other publishers have followed suit, the most recent MediaNews Group, Lee Enterprises and GateHouse Media. In all of these cases, newspapers are saying it's no longer business than usual.

And for those who complain that newspapers should not be charging for their content - that their right to free information is sacrosanct?

Tough. You're already paying through the nose for Internet and smartphone data plans. The Internet is not free, so get over yourselves.

We'll be speaking a lot more about the power of print in the months to come. In the meantime, we hope you'll be able to join us at Graph Expo, where News & Tech will sponsor a seminar devoted to covering technological investments a number of publishers have made over the past year to boost their printed editions.

The seminar, "Reinforcing Print in a Time of Transition, will feature Dow Jones, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, The (Toronto) Globe and Mail and Tribune Direct. It's free and open to anyone registered at Graph Expo, and will be held on Monday, Sept. 12 between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. in room 504S in McCormick Place.

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