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TechNewsLit Explores: Making local media viable

4-5 minutes



The Daily Iowan at University of Iowa's journalism school (A. Kotok)

Making local media more viable

Summary: For local news media to enjoy true press freedom, they need to be independent financially, with support from their communities. I'm supporting an intern at two weekly newspapers in Iowa to help make that happen.

1 Jan 2025. Freedom of the press is a fine idea, enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. While press freedom is often talked about as a legal issue, the idea remains hollow unless the media are stable financially and not beholden to whims of benefactors.

Boosting the finances of news media begins at the local level, which have been hurt more than the national media by online competition. Yet, local media have advantages over national outlets, namely their community connections often forged over many years. The people who report and produce the news on the local level are people that readers, listeners, and viewers see everyday in the store or park or church. It's these community links that local media can use for support against thugs and bullies.

And by support, I mean financial as well as moral support. Before the emergence of online commerce, local newspapers served as community marketplaces, particularly through classified advertising. Reading the want ads was part of the regular newspaper ritual for many people; readers actually turned to the ad pages as well as the news to find out what's going on. Plus, placing a want ad was easy and inexpensive, turning classified advertising into a cash cow for many newspapers.

But by re-establishing the role of local media as a community marketplace, they can bring back some of the revenue they lost earlier. This won't solve all financial concerns of local news media, but it could supplement subscriptions or donations, and provide a base for expanding regular advertising sales.

My small part to help local media is a business internship at two weekly newspapers in Iowa. This past year, the *Daily Iowan*, the independent campus newspaper at University of Iowa, bought the [weekly newspapers in two nearby communities](#). The university's journalism school, where I got my BA degree, offers paid internships for students to gain real-life experience with community media. I'm supporting a business intern to work with advertising and circulation at the two weeklies.

[Applications for the internship](#) are now open. If you're a UI student, here's a chance to learn and earn.

Alan Kotok

CEO, Technology News and Literature

Alan Kotok is the founder and CEO of Technology News and Literature, a provider of visual storytelling services to companies and organizations. Kotok sold classified advertising for the Daily Iowan in his first year in journalism school at University of Iowa, becoming advertising sales manager of the newspaper the next year. He later served as managing editor of Science Careers, the online career development portal of Science magazine that

displays employment advertising.

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