

Confirming speculation that has been out there for some time now, the Plain Dealer announced massive layoffs this morning, whacking over 17% of their newsroom staff. Included in the "buyouts" were sports writers Roger Brown, Bob Dolgan, Burt Graeff, George Sweda, and Bob Roberts. Inside, I provide my analysis of the carnage at the PD, and what newspapers have done wrong in their fight to compete against websites like this one.



ROGER BROWN

Faced with the sad reality of declining revenues and readers, The Cleveland Plain Dealer announced today that 64 of their 372 newsroom employees have accepted a buyout, thereby reducing the newspaper's staff by over 17%.

The staff reductions come at a time when Americans have many news outlets that didn't exist 20 years ago. Between cable television news channels, Internet sites like this one, and email and cellphone alerts, the daily newspaper has become somewhat of a dinosaur to newer generations. Newspapers have failed miserably in their efforts to market to those younger readers, and have not been adding paying customers nearly as fast as they've been losing them.

In addition, many newspapers have free online sites offering much of what is in the printed paper. These sites might not hurt readership overall, but have severely eroded their paying audience. According to [this recent article in the USA Today](#), the Plain Dealer has the 19th largest average weekday circulation in the United States at just over 343,000 readers.

The PD [made their announcement](#) in their own paper this morning, saying ...

*"The departures are being staggered through Dec. 31. The staff reduction is intended to help Ohio's largest newspaper reduce expenses. Like most of the nation's 1,400 daily papers, The Plain Dealer has been dealing with declining revenue and circulation for several years."*

*"Among the most recognizable writers who will be leaving are Columbus reporters Ted Wendling and T.C. Brown, sportswriters Burt Graeff, Eddie Dwyer, George Sweda, Bob Dolgan, Bob Roberts and Roger Brown, auto editor Chris Jensen, obituary writer and columnist Richard Peery, food writer John Long, dance critic Wilma Salisbury, travel editor David Molyneaux and gardening and pets writer Suzanne Hively."*

The announcement triggers a mixed reaction from me personally. I've been reading the Plain Dealer sports page since I was four years old (literally), and it is a big part of my daily life cycle. On the other hand, my perceived inadequacies with the Plain Dealer sports page are a big part

of the reason I started this website. Many of the Plain Dealer's sportswriters are people that grew up in other cities, and are jaded bittermen with the same old agendas and tired routines.

With more and more people every day going to the internet for their sports news and sports coverage, free websites like this will continue to chip away at the readership of newspapers like the Plain Dealer that are no longer innovative or light on their feet. Bill Livingston is from Dallas and worked in Philly before coming here. Bud Shaw is from Denver. I'd rather hear opinions and commentary on the teams we love from fans that have lived and died with these teams their whole lives. And not from someone who was paid to move here to do it.

Chief bittermen Livingston and Shaw survived the purge, while solid reporters like Bob Dolgan and Bob Roberts did not. Also soon to be gone is the controversial Roger Brown. Love him or hate him, he was the first thing 90% of you went to read when opening your morning papers.

Tony Grossi and Mary Kay Cabot, who do a good job covering the Browns, will stay on. As will the solid Paul Hoynes, the PD's Indians beat writer. And amazingly, Branson Wright, who may be the most talentless hack in the history of Cleveland sports journalism ... will remain as well. PD subscribers can look forward to many more years of Branson penning mindless articles lacking any substance or insight whatsoever. The Cavs are THE team in town right now, and the fact that the Plain Dealer continues to employ that know-nothing as the teams beat writer is a microcosm of the Plain Dealer's downfall.

It sounds as if I am eulogizing the PD. Clearly, it's not going anywhere. But the announcement today signals the beginning of the end for papers like the PD, who will never again see the circulation numbers they enjoyed pre-internet.