

Are Daily Newspapers Still Relevant With Sports Fans?

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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It is a rare day where we don't run into someone, either in person or online, who isn't complaining about the state of sports media in Cleveland.

The complaints could be about the hoople head on talk radio who hasn't had an original thought since Dave Garcia was running the Cleveland Indians dugout at the old stadium, or a beat writer who stopped caring about his beat a decade ago, someone is usually disgruntled about the coverage afforded the Indians, Browns and Cavaliers.

It has gotten so bad at times that we have heard people ask why anyone would even read a newspaper.

Which makes us wonder if traditional media – daily newspapers in particular – can meet the needs of today's sports fans.

It's no secret that the newspaper industry is facing an ongoing crisis regarding circulation. According to the [Pew Research Center's State of the News Media 2012](#), print circulation of daily newspapers continued to decline in 2011, especially on weekdays, but circulation stabilized, and at some papers increased, on Sundays.

Corporate ownership of newspapers is partly to blame, as anyone who watched season 5 of *The Wire* knows. While series creator David Simon obviously had an ax to grind against *The Baltimore Sun*

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in particular, and the industry as a whole, that doesn't mean what he said was wrong.

In a quest for even bigger profits, corporations cut newspaper staff, which means circulation declines, which leads to a smaller news hole each day. With less news in the newspapers, circulation continues to decline and the viscous cycle continues.

But people still want news, as the most recent [Pew Research Center news consumption survey](#) (in 2010) found that the average time Americans spend with the news on a given day is as high as it was in the mid-1990s. The big difference is that 44 percent received their news online. At the same time, the number of people who get their news from traditional media platforms like newspapers has been stable or edging downward.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that more people are going online to get their news – after all, if you are reading this you are part of that group – and that the days of “Extra, Extra, Read All About It” are long gone. And there are several high-quality sites available that deal with Cleveland sports which we read on a daily basis (we'd list them but we know we'd inadvertently forget someone).

So how can newspapers lure back the readers they have lost and regain their relevancy? We have the answer in two easy steps – and we won't even charge a massive consulting fee.

The first step is to stop telling us *what* happened.

Cleveland is a rabid sports town; even the most passive fan out there probably knows when they get up in the morning whether or not the Indians, Browns or Cavs won the previous day. Most likely, they watched the game or listened to it on the radio (unless it was a West Coast game on a weeknight).

So telling us that the Indians won 4-1 and giving readers what is essentially a box score with words, for example, doesn't add value and bring readers to the table.

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Take for example the last World Cup, held in South Africa in 2010. As soccer mad as the rest of the world is, even having the biggest tournament in the world wasn't enough to drive newspaper sales. According to [this article](#), "Although kind to the advertising coffers of most papers in SA, the 2010 Soccer World Cup surprised many by not delivering the anticipated circulation increases for newspapers during that time while TV-viewership figures hit record highs. And the editors of *Rapport* and the *Sunday Times* – Bokkie Gerber and Ray Hartley – told Journalism.co.za that last year's Rugby World Cup in New Zealand didn't do much for the sales of the two papers either."

Cleveland fans are as over-hyped as any soccer fan, so it should be clear that we need more than the old game story standby.

Which leads us to our second step: more important than telling us *what* happened is telling us *why* it happened.

"The internet and television (coverage), as far as I'm concerned, creates interest. But we've got to steer away from match reporting or just giving results," Gerber said. "Apart from breaking big sports news stories, I think opinion is the main thing. Your readers still like to compare their views of their teams to that of a well-known rugby or soccer writer. It's a talking point on the Sunday so I think sports is still very important."

"You've got to bring something else to the party like a big-name columnist," Hartley said. "People aren't out and about buying newspapers in great numbers when there's a big sporting event (like a World Cup) on but if you have the analysis and the opinion on their favourite sport in the paper, they might make an effort to go and buy it."

Bingo.

Why did Indians manager Manny Acta have a certain pitcher face a particular batter? Is it because that batter is 0-for-20 lifetime against that pitcher? Then tell us.

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Why do the Browns throw so many five-yard passes on third-and-nine? Is it because the receivers can't get open? Can the line not hold their blocks for more than 1.5 seconds? Is the quarterback having issues? Then tell us.

Being able to go in-depth on a subject and really analyze it is one thing that good newspapers can still do well. Newspaper reporters and radio talk show hosts are set up to do this because they have one thing that regular people like us don't – access. We can't call up Acta, Cavs coach Byron Scott or Browns coach Pat Shurmur and ask them why they did something. If we approached general managers Tom Heckert, Chris Gant or Chris Antonetti with a question we'd be more likely to be facing a security guard rather than receive an answer.

That access is what sets mainstream media members apart from fans like us who write because we enjoy it and are passionate about our favorite teams. But too often they squander that access and end up telling us things that we already know.

(On a side note, one thing that continually gets on our tits is when media people make mistakes. Not typos or the occasional error, those are obviously going to happen even to the best of us. We're talking about when people don't understand how the salary cap works in a particular sport, or how the Traded Player Exception works, or why the NFL schedule is set up the way it is. There is absolutely no excuse for that. If you don't understand it, call the local team or the league office. You are a credentialed member of the media; they will take your call and help you out).

OK, rant over.

We admit we have a soft spot for the newspaper business; after all we were in it for more than a dozen years. We also still take three papers on Sunday and enjoy being able to take some quiet time out of an otherwise busy week to give them a read (in fact one of the worst parts of working a Saturday night on the sports desk is you have already read the Sunday paper before you leave work).

So we hate to think of a world without newspapers and believe they can still be relevant,

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especially when it comes to sports. But unless newspapers start giving readers what they want, it's not hard to imagine a day when we no longer hear the thump of the paper hitting the front door on a Sunday morning.