

# Changing times in the news business

by Julian Sereno

It's been 10 years since the bottom fell out of the newspaper business. One of the high profile casualties of the Great Recession, metropolitan dailies lost advertisers galore: real estate with the collapse of the housing market, cars dealers with the collapse of the auto industry, and classified advertising, which all went online to sites such as craigslist.

Reporters and editors were axed by the thousands, papers got smaller and went online or shut down completely. It took billionaire oligarchs such as Carlos Slim to save the New York Times and Jeff Bezos to save the Washington Post. It got so bad that Warren Buffett warned investors to not buy newspapers under any circumstances.

In the Triangle, both dailies, the Raleigh News and Observer and my alma mater, the Durham Herald-Sun, shed staff and newsprint, but survive. The Chapel Hill Herald and the Carrboro Citizen didn't.

Metropolitan dailies believe their future is online, and that is where they are putting their money. That is where they break their major stories and investigative pieces. That is because online is where young people go for all their information. Millennials and even Generation X members rarely read words printed on paper; all they read is on their computers, tablets and smart phones.

The same forces roiling the dailies roil niche publications as well. Which brings us to some changes at your community newspaper and niche publication, Chatham County Line.

The papers have gotten smaller. Last year, eight out of our 10 issues had eight pages, and only two had 12 pages, the norm heretofore. Ads were down as were articles.

But less turned out to be more. Amazingly, and unexpectedly, unique hits on our website, [www.chathamcountyline.org](http://www.chathamcountyline.org), exploded, from less than 1,000 a month in 2016 (9,577 total unique hits) to more than 2,000 a month in 2017 (24,068 total unique hits). I have no idea if the two phenomena are related. It is certainly an interesting coincidence.

Meanwhile McClatchy, which owns The N&O, recently bought the Herald-Sun. Warren Buffett would have approved; he changed his mind about newspaper ownership, said newspapers were still essential, and started buying them up himself—including the Omaha World-Herald, his hometown newspaper. It has a beautiful website.

For me personally, for the first time in 40 years, I no longer subscribe to a printed newspaper. It is now all digital. I know I'll miss my printed paper. After all, you can't use a digital subscription to start a fire in a wood stove, wrap valuables, clean fish or line the bottom of a bird cage.

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