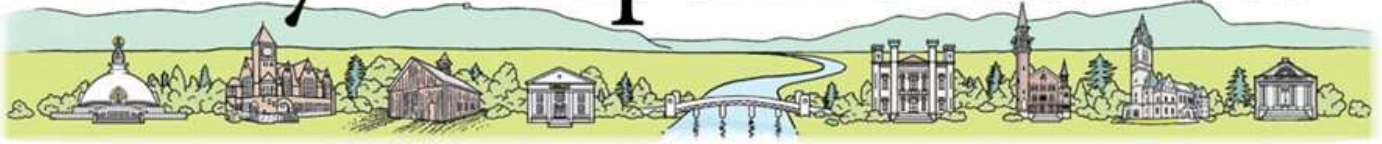


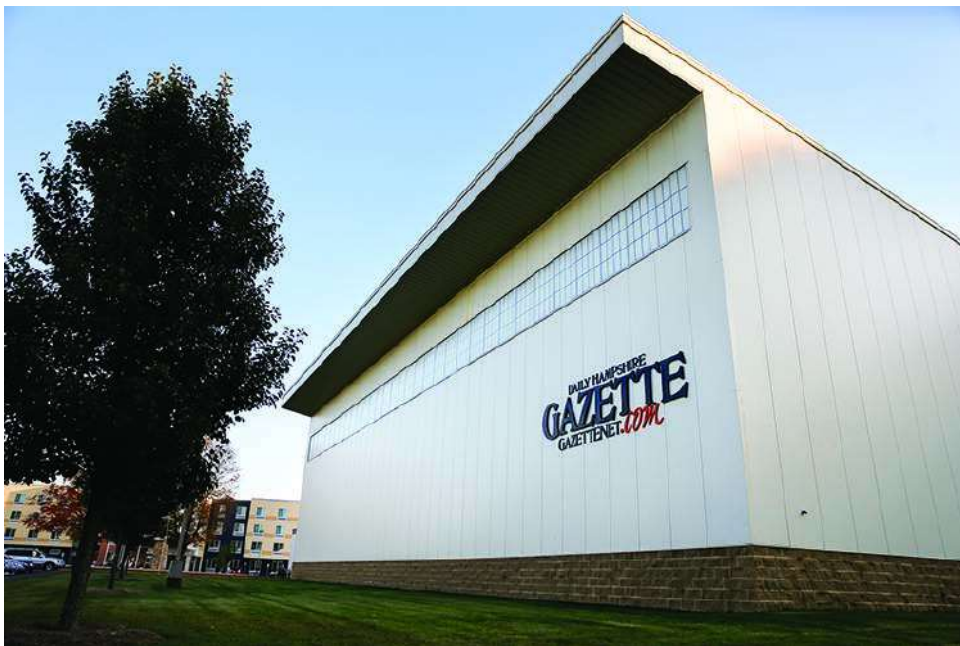
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Guest column Robert Weiner and Zachary Filtz: What's good in newspapers, what needs to change



[By Robert Weiner and Zachary Filtz \(/byline?byline=By Robert Weiner and Zachary Filtz\)](#)

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The American newspaper industry has struggled and evolved significantly in the last several decades. The Daily Hampshire Gazette is no exception to this, and has been one of the valuable small town papers that has stood the test of time during its existence.

As many papers have closed as a result of the changes to the industry, the Gazette has made it, especially during the nearly 40 years of leadership of now-retired editor and publisher Jim Foudy. Established in 1786, the Gazette provides an excellent source of all things Hampshire County and is truly a national model for all smaller papers to follow.

The newspaper industry had shrunk by 462 papers from 1970 to 2016, dropping from 1,748 dailies to 1,248, according to Statista. That is a 26 percent decrease.

With so many fewer newspapers, one might think that the American newspaper is doomed to die a slow death. Those who think that are not thinking about a reasonable alternative — the newspaper needs to continue to adapt to changes in culture.





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According to the Pew Research Center, in 2017, advertising revenues for the newspaper industry were \$14.5 billion, while revenues for circulation was \$11 billion. Digital advertising accounted for an average of 35 percent of newspaper advertising revenue for publicly-traded news organizations.

People are also looking at newspapers online in smaller increments per day. The average time per day of people visiting newspapers on the web was only 2.3 minutes for the fourth quarter of 2018. That number was down 15 percent from the same quarter in 2017.

People are getting more news from blogs and other internet sources than newspapers. A survey in an article by PR News Wire found that more than half of teens (54%) get news at least a few times a week from social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and 50% get news from YouTube.

In terms of recent data, Pew also calculated that estimated total U.S. daily news print and digital circulation combined was 28.6 million readers for daily and 30.8 million for Sunday, which were down 8 percent and 9 percent, respectively, from 2017.

The newspaper industry as a whole is struggling, but not necessarily for the three largest papers in the U.S. Data reported to the Alliance for Audited Media reports that from 2017 to 2018, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal posted 27 percent and 23 percent increases in digital circulation, respectively. So some bigs are getting bigger — at the expense of small papers.

While the news takes the form of several different applications, the printed newspaper has taken the hardest hit of all of these applications. The website Editor and Publisher shows how some newspapers have found ways to cope and even turn the trend around into increasing circulation, community involvement and revenue.

The Register-Guard of Eugene, Oregon, decided to use a different approach to take on a difficult problem: using editorial articles to expose and study homelessness. Longer in length, the paper published 50 articles through the course of one year. "Local government officials and people who work for agencies that work with the homeless population often told us they were pleased that the newspaper was examining the issue and that it gave them information they did not have before," Register-Guard editorial page editor Jackman Wilson said.

The homelessness series concluded with a registration-required public forum. The forum included 170 in attendance, with more than 20 people speaking.

Newspapers currently do have some things going for them. Take the Daily Hampshire Gazette, for example. The paper features active sports and opinion sections. Opinion pages generally have a "letters to the editor" section, as does the Gazette. Taking the time to read opinion articles — known as "op-eds" — enlighten the reader's mind, especially if it's on unfamiliar subjects. In turn, the reader of the op-ed will be exposed to a well-reasoned solution to some type of local or state problem.

A newspaper feeding its readers same-old, same-old can only stomach so much of it for so long. What about introducing a more visual way of telling a story? A new focus on video journalism could bring some much needed assistance to an otherwise bland industry.

Another idea is to give the humble town newspaper a department for investigative work. Give the audience who craves serious, in-depth investigative work something to chew on. Finally, using the editorial type of article yields more strengths than many newsrooms realize for readership, especially on pressing, local issues.

The newspaper industry has two paths it can pursue. One is the continued, status quo of spiraling downward and cutting costs. The other is pursuing innovation in video, re-invigorating investigative work the editorial style article, and other innovations each paper can uniquely create. It's an essential decision that is up to America's newspaper publishers to decide the fate of such an important industry.

Robert Weiner, a former Amherst resident and political activist, was a Clinton and Bush White House spokesman, among other politicians. Zachary Filtz is a senior policy analyst for Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change.