



Editor Bob Zaltsberg leads a discussion in the Herald-Times training room.

SUCCESS STORY

The Herald-Times in Bloomington, Indiana: Growth in Print, Online Audiences Reflect Changing Culture and Attention to Readership

RESULTS

The Herald-Times in Bloomington, Ind., is a small daily newspaper that thinks much larger than it is. Located in a college town in southern Indiana, it has a daily circulation of nearly 29,000 and a newsroom of about 45 employees.

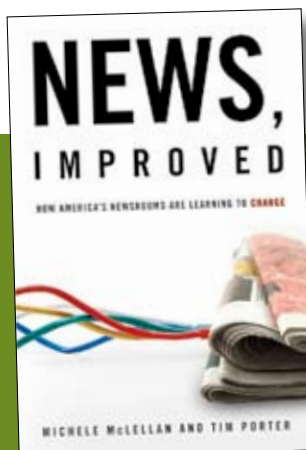
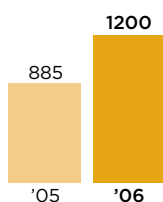
The Herald-Times' size certainly did not deter it as it set out to make important changes and look at ways to grow print and Web audience.

As 2006 unfolded, the newspaper had some very good news on both fronts: single copy sales and Web usage increased.

Results include:

- A steady increase in print circulation, especially single copy numbers. "We've been up at least 11 months in row," Editor Bob Zaltsberg said. Single copy numbers for October showed an 11.5 percent increase daily and a 12.5 percent increase on Sunday over the year before. Overall circulation also increased slightly.
- Improved content drew more traffic to HeraldTimesOnline.com, which posted a 52 percent increase in the number of unique visitors over the year before. "Our site usage increases coincide with becoming much more Web-first in our publication strategy, layering on lots of additional content and promoting it heavily," Zaltsberg says.
- A more constructive newsroom culture. A staff culture survey, reflecting an 18-month period, showed improvement, particularly in staff response to training and in improved communication.
- More reader-driven newspaper content, following a 12-point readership plan that borrows heavily from Readership Institute suggestions.

AVERAGE TRAINING HOURS PER YEAR:
36% Increase



FROM NEWS, IMPROVED:

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— Editor Bob Zaltsberg

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— Editor Bob Zaltsberg



TOP: Consultant Pierre Meyer discusses newsroom culture at The Herald-Times.

BOTTOM: The original Learning Newsroom steering committee (4 people) in a planning session.

STEP BY STEP IMPROVEMENTS

“I pay particular attention to single copy numbers and online numbers, because I think that’s where our changing culture and attention to readership has the most impact,” Zaltsberg says.

The changes came after an intense focus on training and improving newsroom culture in partnership with The Learning Newsroom at API. “The Learning Newsroom has been a tremendous way for us to sort of outline what we needed to do and then do it,” says Zaltsberg.

The newsroom’s improvements have been a result of keen focus on training and a step-by-step approach to change.

“Training is essential to get our staff members the kind of skills that we need to succeed in the future,” says Zaltsberg, who has been at the newspaper for 30 years, 21 as editor. “These include skills in communication, how to think more creatively and how to work in a change environment.”

“The fact that we’re training and talking about training is a real signal to our staff that we’re willing to invest in them.”

Change was not painless. “It’s a lot harder to implement than it is just to talk about,” Zaltsberg says. “What you really have to do is go one step at a time. You have to show people what the next step is going to be on the way to whatever the vision is. If the vision is ‘we’re going to be the most creative newspaper, the most successful newspaper in whatever the market turns out to be in three years or five years,’ what’s our next step going to be to get us there?”

The newsroom had been fairly insulated from the rest of the building and the industry, with staff members “doing jobs of the past,” Zaltsberg says. “Now we’re doing a better job, and it’s a better atmosphere of teamwork in terms of serving our readers.”

Zaltsberg says it is crucial to help staff members overcome resistance to change. “It’s important that you explain why change is necessary,” including what your competition is and what the future looks like. “Convincing people that change is necessary if we’re going to succeed is the No. 1 priority in trying to overcome this resistance that we have.”

Beyond helping people understand the need for change, The Herald-Times also refined its vision and learned how to communicate better. “You have to be able to communicate that vision,” the editor says, even if you are not quite sure what might unfold. “If you’re saying, ‘I’m not sure exactly where you’re going,’ you need to say, ‘Here are some of the steps I think we need to try to take to get there.’”

How does an editor do that? “Through conversation after conversation after conversation.”

And his advice to other editors? “It’s important to listen to people on your staff, what they need and what they want to do the job right, talk to them about the issues that we’re facing. ... What are the issues that people in the rest of the building are facing that are having an impact on what we in the newsroom are facing, and how are we going to work on those issues together?”

“It can’t be done without commitment from the top newsroom leaders.”



Online growth, Oct. 2005 – Oct. 2006:

Unique visitors	133,811	up 52%
Visitor sessions	348,519	up 96%
Pages views	2.62 million	up 138%

“Because of a more open workplace, we’re getting better stories in the paper. We’re getting more innovation and creativity than we were getting when everything was running up through a manager.”

— Editor Bob Zaltsberg

The Herald-Times

JUST THE FACTS:

Newspaper:

**The Herald-Times,
Bloomington, Ind.**

Daily Circulation (M-F):

28,886*

Number of Employees:

45

Ownership:

Schurz Communications Inc.

URL:

www.HeraldTimesOnline.com

* Reported by newspaper 12/1/06



The Learning Newsroom
at the American Press Institute



John S. and James L.
Knight Foundation

NEWS, IMPROVED: HOW AMERICA'S NEWSROOMS ARE LEARNING TO CHANGE

As news organizations adapt to a changing media landscape, strategic learning is critical for organizations that want to increase their audiences and maintain journalistic quality. *News, Improved: How America's Newsrooms Are Learning to Change* looks at research and development from \$10 million in training projects sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to show how leadership, goal-setting and staff development improve the culture of the newsroom and the content of the news product – both key drivers of audience appeal. Learn how American newsrooms are becoming more adaptive and creative, fueled by continuous, strategic training.

TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

With support from more than 50 journalism organizations, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation created Tomorrow's Workforce in 2003 to demonstrate how investments in training and professional development for mid-career journalists can improve the quality and appeal of journalism. Working with 17 newspapers, the project has developed a strategic approach to training that has helped newsrooms train more effectively and document the impact of training.

THE LEARNING NEWSROOM

The Learning Newsroom, sponsored by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the American Press Institute, received a grant of \$1 million in 2003 to work with 10 print newsrooms. Through an intensive one-year program of training and facilitation of committee work, the project demonstrated how training could improve newsroom culture, which has been shown to be a key driver of innovation and greater audience appeal. Learn more about the project at www.learningnewsroom.org.

KNIGHT FOUNDATION

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes excellence in journalism worldwide and invests in the communities where the Knight brothers ran newspapers. Learn more about the Knight Foundation at www.knightfdn.org.