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## Audio Transcript

Episode 212 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series  
with Mike Blinder

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### [16-year-old launches a news site that is out-reporting the local Gannett "ghost paper."](#)

In this episode of "E&P Reports," we go one-on-one with 16-year-old Hutchinson, Kansas high school student Michael Glenn, who became frustrated when his local Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper, The Hutchinson News, was sold to Gannett and downsized over a few years to a "ghost paper" of two local employees, with most content being generated from out of state. So, in the summer of 2023, Glenn recruited a team of journalists and started the competing Hutchinson Tribune at HutchTribune.com, which now out-reports the HutchNews.com site 36 local stories to six (on the day of this posting).



**0:00:04.0 Speaker 1:** This is E&P Reports, a vodcast from Editor and Publisher Magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

**0:00:19.7 Mike Blinder:** And greetings one more time, Mike Blinder Publisher, E&P Magazine. As always, we urge you to follow us. Should you be on a podcast platform, watching on our YouTube channel, subscribe below. That's the little button bell to the right. Make sure you interact with those things. Hit them, smash them, click them, and you'll get an update each and every time we upload this weekly vodcast series, E&P Reports. Michael Glenn, welcome to the program. I assume you're in Hutchinson, Kansas. Am I correct, sir?

**0:00:50.3 Michael Glenn:** Yes, yes. I'm here in Hutchinson, Kansas.

**0:00:54.0 MB:** You are 16 years old? That's what I saw?

**0:00:57.1 MG:** That is correct. I'm a junior in high school currently.

**0:01:00.0 MB:** I've been to Hutchinson, Kansas back in the old days when the Hutchinson News was owned by Harris. They were a customer of mine. I drove there. I went there four or five times. That newspaper was a highly... And I'm saying "was" now in past tense, serving a community. It was a highly respected, actually won a Pulitzer Prize, I think, in the '60s. And now my sources say that your community, Hutchinson, Kansas, has lost its voice. In other words, we call that a ghost paper, if you want to use all the euphemisms we use in this industry. There's like one reporter left, the editor's in another state. Am I saying that correctly as a guy that's growing up and going to school in Hutchinson? That's kind of the feel of the community, at least one person's opinion?

**0:01:51.2 MG:** I would say so. I grew up in... I say grew up, very, very young when we still were owned by the Harris family, and "we" being Hutchinson News. This great chain of newspapers that seemingly went away within a few years back in 2015, '16, '17 with the buyout of a lot of small chain newspapers. But I agree with everything you said, the Hutch News used to be a fantastic news source.

**0:02:23.3 MB:** Oh wow.

**0:02:24.3 MG:** It was... For a town of 40,000, we are in the middle of nowhere, Kansas, it had name recognition and that's something that we're still proud of.

**0:02:33.0 MB:** You started your own online newspaper, which I have gone to, and it's great. You call it the Hutch Tribune, correct?

**0:02:42.7 MG:** That's correct, yes.

**0:02:45.2 MB:** And you're running it in high school. Is this correct?

**0:02:50.6 MG:** Yes. Well, it's not just me. You'll see plenty of other bylines in there as well. But



yeah, I was the one who started it, yes.

**0:02:57.6 MB:** We got a 16-year-old who is trying to fill a news ghost paper desert voice, whatever, in an amazing community and we're going to unpack all of this for our audience on the backside of this message.

**0:03:09.4 S1:** This episode of E&P Reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever. BLOX Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management and more. Join the over 2,000 news publishers worldwide that power their ongoing digital transformation with BLOX Digital, serving over 141 million monthly users who view over 6.5 billion pages of content each year. You can trust BLOX Digital to empower you, to connect you at scale with the community you need to reach. BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews, now reimagined to help meet the news publishing challenges of tomorrow and beyond. Learn more at [bloxdigital.com](http://bloxdigital.com).

**0:04:13.7 MB:** Okay, Michael, question. Were you always nerdy? [laughter] I'm sorry, I don't wanna hit you with the ball. Were you reading news and doing things when other kids were just playing with models? What is your passion when it comes to serving a community and providing journalism? How did this all come about?

**0:04:33.1 MG:** Yeah, so I've always been a big fan of the humanities, whether it be history or English. And so I've always been a decent writer, [0:04:41.9] \_\_\_\_ it was in a different format. But then I'm also a debater. So with debate, you get to read the news. And so my debate teacher got us the New York Times every day. It's still a pretty huge paper that you can read. And I questioned her, and she's actually a big voice in our community as well. I said, "Well, why don't we get the local paper if we're gonna be dealing with local news?" And this was in fall of '22. So the Hutch News had been re-acquisitioned by GateHouse, now Gannett, and no longer locally owned. And so she told me about how the Hutch News back in... Not even the '70s, in the 2000s, the early 2010s, still used to be this behemoth of a news source. We used to have news bureaus in Dodge City, which is two hours west of here, just to fill this paper of 40,000 people. And however, when the Harris family sold to GateHouse, there was a dramatic drop in not the quality of news, but the amount of news. And it's been a slow downfall into where now there's only one reporter left in that huge building and now the editor lives out of state. And so it's really sad what's happened. And I got to thinking, well, I can write. [chuckle] I can put pen to paper.

**0:06:18.1 MG:** So I went to the library and I got the... We have a newspaper stand as all libraries do, and upstairs is one of my friends who goes to the philosophy book club that I attend as well. And we got to thinking, well, why don't we just write the news? So I grabbed a notebook and I went to our city council meeting that we have on Tuesdays, and this was during the summer, and I just took notes. I'm familiar with a couple of the council members, and so I just took notes and started writing. And my first article was published on the 4th of July, about, I think it was a city council power replan. It was the most boring story ever, but it got the ball rolling. And since then, we've gotten a lot of community support with the Tribune. We've gone from maybe 100 views a day, now we're getting 1000, 1500 clicks a day. We're becoming a community voice, which is what we wanted to do.



**0:07:25.1 MB:** You have a paywall. I went down and looked at your pricing, 8 bucks a month, \$80 a year, and you can also donate, it looks like. You can be a founding member. Where's this money going? I have to ask, is this a nonprofit? Are you just putting it into trust? Are you spending it on motorcycles? [chuckle] What are you doing? Where's this money going? How do you run this business?

**0:07:51.1 MG:** Yeah. So, we are a for-profit LLC. I am majority owner of the Tribune, 40% is owned by Gina Long, who is... She kind of runs the... I call it the fun beat, kind of the culture, the arts, the more, I guess, soft news.

**0:08:06.9 MB:** Is Gina a high school student too?

**0:08:09.0 MG:** Gina is an adult. She's a adult.

**0:08:13.7 MB:** Alright, go ahead.

**0:08:13.9 MG:** I was encouraged to get as many adults on board as possible, and so I did that. And Gina's been a good mentor as well, not only with this, but just in general. And so with our paywalls, about 70% of that money goes directly to freelancers. You see, John Mesh, he covers our sports beat. I could not go to Friday Night Lights everyday and report on that, but if I can afford someone to go and cover that, then that's great. Basically, what we tell our readers is that if you buy a paid subscription, you're going to see a return on investment on the amount of content, the quality of content, and in general, just the Tribune will become... Not the Hutchins, but the Tribune will become a quality news source, the more paid subscribers we get. And we do that by paying more freelancers. If we can get more people on contract, then it's a snowball effect, essentially.

**0:09:11.8 MB:** Okay. You're smart. So you've studied history, and you might be just like me, I'm like a closet historian. I'm constantly dissecting different areas of the world. Where am I [0:09:22.2] \_\_\_\_\_ gorging? '20s? Am I back in another century? Our very fragile republic was designed by a bunch of imperfect men who put together a perfect document. And in that document... This is one man's opinion, but it's my show, I can say whatever the hell I want, Michael. [chuckle] In that document, it says we are to have a free and unfettered press as a final check on power. You get that, right? Do you understand what you're doing? It's not just having fun. You are providing a final voice, you're shining a spotlight into corners that others might ignore. Do you feel that way about what you're doing? Is that the background that you're trying to achieve here? What is your motivation, sir, if I may ask?

**0:10:05.8 MG:** Yeah, no, it's a good question. And we understand that there's a lot of responsibility in owning a news source. We are one of the only news sources in this area that covers these meetings, and this is more for hard news, of course. But that's correct. We have to have smart... Not necessarily book smart, but common sense smart as well, which I lack, and I'll be the first person to say that. But in terms of motivation, I feel like I have a duty to give back to my community. That's kind of a cliché answer, but Hutchinson gets a lot of... It gets a bad rap. And well, our last voice of that was the Hutch News. And without a quality news source in the community, it allows for governments to do a lot of things that they wouldn't be able to do without... Kinda like somebody's

always in the room where it happened. That was probably my motivation. So I would say that's my motivation.

**0:11:18.4 MB:** Have you studied journalism? And again, this is the biggest problem in our society, at least in my opinion, when it comes to our function. In Canada, the government supports local news. We got this document that says there can be no government intervention. Ergo, there was no definition of journalism. There's no license to do what you're doing. Do you understand? You're not sanctioned by anyone. You have to have that journalistic integrity to source your stories and then separate news from opinion, if you wanna follow what the society professional journalists try to define as our jobs. Are you studying that? Do you have any mentors that help you with that as you do this content that's growing an audience and having an impact on the town?

**0:12:03.8 MG:** Yeah. So in terms of academics, I do not. Well, actually, I take that back. Brad Hallier, he is professor at Hutchinson Community College, also used to be the sports guy at the Hutch News. I've spoken with him a few times, but he's the only academic that I would talk with. Joey Young is probably my biggest mentor.

**0:12:28.7 MB:** Ah, we know Joey. Yes, we know Joey.

**0:12:31.6 MG:** Joey and his managing editor, Adam Strunk, they believed in me. It's funny. This was back in May when the Tribune didn't even have a thought of existing. We just grabbed a coffee. I was interested in local news and I saw that their paper was in our library. It was still called The New... No, it's Harvey County now. So we just grabbed coffee at a coffee shop and we just talked about local news. Joey's from Hutchinson, so we just talked about the Hutch News and his experiences back how it was in the '90s and '2000s and me now. And he was like, "If I were you and if I was to start a new paper in Hutchinson, I would probably do it on Substack and I would have just online contributors. I wouldn't have a print product. I'd just streamline articles as much as I can." And he didn't know that I was going to do that. He just thought he was gonna talk with some high schooler who was interested about newspapers.

**0:13:36.7 MB:** This is just great stuff, so I got to ask this question now. What's next for Michael? You're definitely gonna go to college, right? I mean, you're not stopped... Are you gonna stay in Hutchinson? Are you gonna try to run this at a distance? What is your plan? You're graduating at the end of next year, correct?

**0:13:54.1 MG:** Yeah, in 2025, that's when I will be graduating.

**0:13:55.0 MB:** What's your plan? May I ask? You can change it. I'm...

**0:14:00.2 MG:** Yeah. No, no. So before this, it was to major in political science and get a BA and work in the Kansas legislature, in something.

**0:14:08.8 MB:** Wow. You can't do that now. That's the dark side. You're a journalist. Go ahead. [laughter] You gotta watch them. Go dust off your old copy of Who Shot Liberty Valance and see that old character that runs the newspaper. Scream at them when someone tries to nominate him for a public office. Go ahead. I'm sorry. Keep going.



**0:14:30.9 MG:** It's funny 'cause the news editor of the Hutchinson News is now a Kansas State legislator, Jason Probst. [laughter] So, no, but the plan was to go into some sort of politics and government. I still think that that's a valid option.

**0:14:49.5 MB:** There are people in government offices, as you likely know, that have come through journalism very successfully, state senators. But go ahead.

**0:14:58.5 MG:** And with... Now, with the Tribune, I have more options now. I've spoken with a couple academics from... Not as mentors, just as I'm a 16-year-old who is interested in journalism at your school, with Missouri and then a couple other institutions. But there's been a lot of good feedback from the community, as well as the community college. We actually hosted our... We hosted an in-person forum for the USD 308 board of education and our city council races at the community college. And we were fortunate enough to have everything paid for by the college. So, we have a lot of support. But in terms of myself, the goal is to get a BA in either political science or journalism. But I don't... And for me with the Tribune, if I don't stay with the local community college and I'm going to move away, then I don't want to become who... I don't want to become who we're trying to get rid of. And by that, I mean I don't want to try running the news from 300 miles away. So I would most likely sell my portion of the company, which is... It's sad, but it's still awesome.

**0:16:30.0 MB:** Michael, I gotta call this because it's going on... I think you are amazing. And I'm just so proud I could watch. It's just a wonderful story. And everything you're doing is right. And I don't know how you're finding time for all this. And God love you, keep it up, okay? I mean, just drink it in and enjoy this amazing career or industry that you're either dabbling in before you become president of the United States or end up becoming a billionaire. But either way, sir, we're honored to have you on this program. And if anyone wants to explore your paper, it's Hutch Tribune. Correct? H-U-T-C-H, hutchtribune.com. Is that correct?

**0:17:21.2 MG:** Yes, yes, that's correct. My email is mglenn with two n's, @hutchtribune.com.

**0:17:28.9 MB:** Here we go. Joey, I was going to say... [chuckle] Michael, I was gonna say Joe. Michael, thank you for your valuable, valuable time. Thank you so much for being on the program. Keep up the good fight, sir.

**0:17:41.4 S1:** Thank you very much. It was an honor and a pleasure being on this vodcast. Thank you very much.

[music]