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## Audio Transcript

Episode 229 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series  
with Mike Blinder



The banner features the E&P Reports Vodcast logo on the left, the URL [EditorandPublisher.com/Vodcasts](http://EditorandPublisher.com/Vodcasts) in the center, and a camera and microphone on the right. Below the banner is a video call interface with two participants: Manuel Karem on the left and Mike Blinder on the right. The E&P logo is visible in the top right of the video frame. The episode sponsor, Blox Digital, is shown in the bottom right corner.

**E&P REPORTS VODCAST**

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### [The “whats, whys and hows” of The Association of Community Publishers \(ACP\)](#)

In this episode of "E&P Reports," we speak with Manuel Karem, the general manager of Featured Media in Avon, New York and current president of The Association of Community Publishers (ACP). We explore the ACP's mission, why this media organization differs from others and how local news publishers can benefit from membership. We also get a sneak peek at their upcoming May conference in Norfolk, VA.



[music]

**0:00:03.9 Announcer:** This is ENP reports, a podcast from Editor and Publisher magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

**0:00:20.4 Mike Blinder:** Sincere, wonderful, warm greetings again, Mike Blinder, publisher, ENP magazine. As always, we kick off the program urging our podcast listeners to follow us, those watching on our YouTube channel. We urge to subscribe with a button below me. There's a bell to the right. Smash the first thing, ring the second you'll get an update each and every time we upload a new episode. This weekly vodka series dedicated to the news publishing industry, ENP reports. Manuel, welcome to the program sir.

**0:00:52.5 Manuel Karam:** Thanks. Excited to be here.

**0:00:54.6 MB:** You're coming to us from Avon, New York, is that correct?

**0:00:58.7 MK:** Yes, actually Avon is what we say in Western New York here.

**0:01:02.3 MB:** Alright, so that's one strike against me already. Alright. I mean, and I get that Houston Houston different pronunciations for different things. So, Avon, New York, Manuel Karam, is that correct, sir?

**0:01:13.4 MK:** Yep. Manuel Karam. Yep.

**0:01:15.0 MB:** Is that the last name? Right? General manager at Featured Media. Penny Lane Printing. I did a little digging into your pass sir. I was looking, you're also an attorney, is that correct?

**0:01:26.4 MK:** That's correct. I went to law school. I practiced law for about six years. I did some litigation, I did some corporate work, and then my wife's family biz came calling and that's how I ended up here.

**0:01:39.2 MB:** And that's featured media, penny Lane Printing in Avon, New York. But you have another job that you're not getting paid for, which is president of ACP, those that don't know ACP, the Association of Community Publishers. I was honored to speak at your conference, was it a year or two years ago in Iowa ENP sponsoring it this year. We're excited to be part of it and we're gonna talk about, not just the conference coming up, but what ACP is, what it does, and why it's vital or important to our industry on the backside of this message.

**0:02:12.5 Announcer:** This episode of ENP Reports is exclusively sponsored by Blocks Digital Formerly Town News. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever. Blocks Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management and more. Join the over 2000 news publishers worldwide that power their ongoing digital transformation with



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**0:03:19.6 MB:** Okay, Manuel, I did a little digging into members of ACP. I looked at your website for this. We had this interview and I saw what you focus on in your world. I mean, you have a gorgeous lifestyle magazine I see you published, that's what we call them, right? Glossy, Beautiful. And it's really neat. And you also do directories. And what else do you publish out of your operation in Avon, New York?

**0:03:45.5 MK:** The biggest thing we do is Penny Savers, actually. And we have a 76 year history of our flagship piece, which is the Genesee Valley Penny Saver. And we have 10 additions of that that come out weekly, but like you said, we've absolutely grown our glossy magazine presence, our directories and now digital's become a big focus for revenue for us.

**0:04:07.6 MB:** Okay, so you're president of ACP and that is your focus. I took a look at your Vice President's website and her name is Joyce Friedrich Star Publications in Sauk Center, Minnesota. Is that Joyce, right?

**0:04:23.0 MK:** Correct. Yep.

**0:04:23.0 MB:** And she is a local community newspaper. And now you do Penny. I know the Penny Saver world. I mean, I love it and it goes way, way back [laughter] to a buy, sell publications. It can still be vibrant and profitable for a publisher, but you're not financing a newsroom right now except for the journalist you may outsource or what have you for the Glossy magazine where Joyce, correct me if I'm wrong is running an operation where she still has to cover school boards and church suppers and be a hyper-local news entity? You're going from completely different sides of the publishing industry. Is that what ACP is all about?

**0:05:03.8 MK:** It is. And actually it goes back to the history of free publications. And this is something I've learned over the years here. There was a big push, I think, and someone will correct me if I'm wrong here in the '70s for these total market newspapers that are not subscription based, but every home, every week kind of models, which is what the Penny Saver is too. So there was a nice marriage of total market. It makes our association focused on revenue generation because there's a big bill to pay for printing and publishing every week when you're covering every home in the market. And I think that's what has brought the members of our association together. And it is many times the focus of our conferences, sales, training for sales and sales managers, revenue generation, and being able to finance a big printing and postage bill every week.

**0:05:57.6 MB:** All right, so rather than go for reader revenue, your association is into open content and then selling the ads around that content. In other words, when you say revenue, of course there at penny saver, there's a lot of DIY revenue comes in, right? People can post ads on their own, but you're selling a lot of display ads around that. This is about basic media sales. Is that what I'm hearing?

**0:06:24.5 MK:** Yeah, That's correct. That really is the focus of ACP and it still is, even in today's market, I think a lot of our members have had a lot of success focusing on the sales, there's sales driven organizations more so than, what I hear is the need to fund the journalism rooms. It's more sales first and the rest kind of falls into place. But I think a lot of our members have still had to pivot over the years, and we've all felt the revenue crunch of changing times. So that has been one thing that ACP is now focusing on, is how to help our members keep their revenues up. And one thing we are really doing this year is teaching, adding digital revenue as a lot of, I think...

**0:07:07.9 MB:** That was my next question. I scouted a, I love your website 'cause you show a lot of logos that crawl across the boardroom bottom from your members, and they're so diverse. Okay. When I went to the ACP website and I looked at the staff, I mean, I saw the board and then I saw the staff, I didn't see advocacy in there. And I'm assuming that's not a major part of why you have this association. And it's like you're letting the advocacy that on, well, first of all, maybe that's not a focus of yours to worry about big tech comp or those kind of advocacies or supporting journalism. But I'm sure you guys are focused on the postal system, right? I bet many of you rely on postal delivery. Am I correct?

**0:07:51.7 MK:** Absolutely. We have talked about advocacy as being an important part of what we could do. Where we've run into roadblocks is having the funding to do it or be a player there. So at our last strategic planning session, there was a big discussion around how we could partner with other associations or get involved in some way where we're not taking on the lion's share of heavy lifting because it's not in our wheelhouse, but we would we really feel like we should be in that space. And you're right, that the postal discussions, we have had a link there with Donna Hanbery. And Donna has been a tremendous resource. I'll give a plug to Donna.

**0:08:32.5 MB:** Good.

**0:08:33.3 MK:** Thank you for all you do, Donna. It means a lot and definitely helps us keep our postal cost down.

**0:08:41.5 MB:** All right. I'm gonna ask the got you question if I'm allowed.

**0:08:45.5 MK:** You haven't got one of those yet. Okay.

**0:08:47.8 MB:** Oh, No, no, no, no. This has been a softball so far. Here comes the guy. I did an editorial, I don't write that many, 'cause I do the show, but I was really Valentine's Day, I put out one called my New BFF and it was about Benjamin Franklin because he had put together that beautiful editorial cartoon many, many years ago that it said a join or die The snake, you remember? Benjamin Franklin was a newspaper publisher primarily before he became a statesman and an inventor. Well, he was all those things. And I was saying, there's too many associations. It's driving me crazy. I don't think there's this many associations in the airline industry. But we have every, every just too many, your biggest, I don't wanna say competitor, but similar association of smaller operations would be the NNA, would you agree? The National Newspaper Association?

**0:09:42.2 MK:** Perhaps, perhaps, I guess.



**0:09:43.8 MB:** What's your differentiator? I mean, how much are your dues? You're talking now to a big audience of little big medium publishers. Why the ACP? Why should you continue to exist when money's tight? And this is the got you question. See you. And there's, you gotta make choices of where your dues go today.

**0:10:04.4 MK:** Right. Good question. In the history of the free publication world, not only were there multiple national associations, there used to be AFCP, IFPA but multiple regional and state associations as well. MFCP, FCPNY in New York, MAGPA in the Mid-Atlantic, and so on and so forth. But what we've seen is over the years I've been involved here, consolidation, some closures of state and regionals and ACP was born out of the merger of the two national associations, AFCP and IFPA. And I think we continue to see that trend. There's just too many in the free publication world alone. And I'm not sure why there were so many historically, but more and more ACP is becoming, I would say, the major resource for those in the free publication world.

**0:11:01.8 MK:** Now, when it comes to how we differentiate with other associations outside of the free publication world, I think it really comes down to sales training, revenue generation, which has always been the bread and butter of the free publication world. And the other thing that we've said is we're not as strong on the journalistic mission. We're not as strong on how to serve communities with paywalls or reader revenue and things of that sort. So I guess I would say for any publication out there, if you're looking for a way to learn how to make money, that is a major focus of our association and where we feel like we can help publications across the country.

**0:11:47.1 MB:** Well, you've segued beautifully to our last content area, which is, I'm assuming that will be a major focus revenue generation of your upcoming May conference, Norfolk, Virginia. And we're sponsoring that, which we're honored. I've gotta say, I've been to your conferences, I think three or four times over the last few decades, and I've been done the IFPA and all that, but I think there's an excitement and vibrance and energy in your association. It's not all doom and gloom when I...

**0:12:21.6 MK:** No, we have a little fun with it, I would say.

**0:12:21.7 MB:** But it's 'cause you guys, your models are so focused on revenue that the operators are making some money, right? [laughter], I mean, it's not as easy as it was 20, 30 years ago, but the margins are there and they wanna grow and they wanna sustain, and they wanna turn these companies over to their kids. But I feel that energy and it's really a lot of local people, right?

**0:12:42.0 MK:** It is.

**0:12:45.2 MB:** That's conference owners.

**0:12:46.2 MK:** Correct. Most of the people that attend are family owned publications or the managers of those publications. We really don't have a lot of presence of gnet, or any major corporations or players there. So it is local people that know their markets, that know their customers, that have a customer service mindset, and I think that customer service mindset is the reason that they have been successful in revenue generation.





**0:13:12.1 MB:** Talk to me about your, the conference then. What will the major topics be and why should someone attend? And it looked like it wasn't very expensive. You're keeping the fees low, it looks like.

**0:13:23.5 MK:** Yeah, we really try to subsidize the cost of the conference. We are also, we do have a special for anyone out there that has not come before but would like to. If anyone would like to sign up for membership to ACP, there is a free conference registration that goes with it this. So not only do you get to join our association, but the conference is free other than paying for your travel and hotel.

**0:13:51.3 MB:** And you get the steak knives too. No, I'm just kidding. Go ahead.

**0:13:55.7 MK:** Yeah, right. [laughter] Yeah. We'll drink and dunk. So.

**0:13:55.7 MB:** What about the content of the conference? What are the dates and what do they go to? Do your pitch. Go ahead.

**0:14:01.5 MK:** Sure. Okay. So the focus, and I have to look up the dates here so I make sure I say the right thing, [laughter] But it is the very beginning of May. And it is May 1st through the third.

**0:14:09.0 MB:** Yes, it is.

**0:14:11.7 MK:** In Norfolk, Virginia. And you had that there. I should have had that on hand. But the focus is again, we are trying to keep the best of our traditional our products and sales, but also recognizing that every year we see more change and we wanna help our members continue to pivot and make money in different ways that includes digital. We do have a terrific speaker that's gonna be focusing on seeing challenges as opportunities and what you do with those kinds of things. So I feel really excited. We have a lot of members that present. We're really not vendor, presentation focused. We are, us, those that are in the trenches presenting back to membership. And it's a very lively, it's a two-way discussion. We share what's working, what's not. I don't think there's a lot of fluff, pretending that things are working that aren't, very straightforward, very honest. If something's not working, we say it and then we move on and we figure out what can work. So that's really the focus of this conference, and I think it'll be a really good one.

**0:15:20.8 Announcer:** Go to [communitypublishers.com](http://communitypublishers.com) if you wanna learn more about joining the association or attending the conference. The keynote speaker is someone I think is amazing. You got Meridith Elliott Powell, and she's good. Turn uncertainty to your competitive advantage so to be motivational and I've seen her speak. She's very interactive with the group as well. Good job getting her. What else do you need to say? If anyone wants to reach out to you personally as the president, would you be turning over the gavel in North folk? Does a new guy take over a woman or something?

**0:15:55.3 MK:** No, Joyce takes over in the next calendar year. So we have this conference, we have another one coming up in Phoenix in the spring time, or sorry, fall, September timeframe. And that's a little bit more of a publisher's round table. So that's another good one coming up for us. We're trying to do two a year. The one in the spring is our bigger, bigger flagship conference. And



then once we get through that second conference, then I become a lame duck. And then Joyce starts to take the reign. So.

**0:16:25.0 MB:** I've got a couple gavels on my wall here from the '80s, '90s. So I've.

[laughter]

**0:16:30.6 MB:** I always say it's a second job, no income. Anyway, Manuel Karam, general Manager at Featured Media penny Lane Printing. What's your email address if there's anyone who wants to get some more information from you, the president of ACP?

**0:16:43.7 MK:** Sure. It's my first name, Manuelk@featuredmedia.com.

**0:16:53.4 MB:** Manuel, thank you so much for your time.

**0:16:53.5 MK:** Mike. Thank you. And thanks for all your support. We really love what you're doing at EMP.