

# E&P

EDITOR & PUBLISHER®

The Authoritative Voice of #NewsMedia Since 1884  
NEWSPAPERS | BROADCAST | DIGITAL

## Audio Transcript

Episode 253 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series  
with *Mike Blinder*

Publication date: Monday September 23, 2024



### [An inside look into the newsroom of the Springfield \(OH\) News- Sun](#)

In a recent interview on *E&P Reports*, Josh Sweigart, Senior Editor of Investigations and Solutions Journalism at Cox First Media Ohio, shared insights into the local media's role in addressing misinformation. The focus was on how his newsroom at the [Springfield News-Sun](#) handled the recent surge of false claims about Haitian immigrants, amplified by Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump and Ohio Senator JD Vance.



[music]

[automated voice]

**0:00:03.0 ANNOUNCER:** 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.

**0:00:18.3 MIKE BLINDER:** And greetings once again, Mike Blinder, publisher of E&P magazine. As always, we kick off episodes with housekeeping, listening on a podcast platform, we urge you to follow us watching on a YouTube channel, please hit the subscribe button below, smash the bell to the right, you'll get an update each and every time we upload this weekly vodcast series dedicated to the news publishing industry we call E&P Reports. And my guest today is Josh Sweigart, Senior Editor of Cox First Media Ohio, which includes of course the flagship newspaper of the Cox Empire, Dayton Daily News, and also just a few miles away, the Springfield, Ohio, New Sun, and everyone knows that Springfield, Ohio has been thrust into the limelight 'cause of the election cycle going through now, and red or blue, left or right, right or wrong, I think everybody knows that this is an extremely important election in American history, and rather than focusing on some of the issues, we're focusing on the pets, and Springfield, and I know it's not funny, but I gotta ask Josh just to kick it off, how are your pets? Everything okay?

**0:01:30.4 Josh Sweigart:** We have two cats, and they're well accounted for, they're safe and accounted for. [0:01:34.7] \_\_\_\_ it's sad to say, but...

**0:01:36.4 MB:** It's sad to say that we're doing... I had to start with the joke because, correct me if I'm, Josh, you're allowed to challenge me, but I believe we're going into one of the most important elections in the last 100 years. Maybe the last time was 1860, and whether you're right or left, or right, good or bad, it doesn't matter Because there are two opposing philosophies coming from two opposing parties. We should be discussing those issues, those major issues impacting the American people. You as a journalist, me as a journalist, we should be shining that spotlight in the corners, that final check on power, but most networks and papers are still leading with a story that changed your culture there locally completely. Am I right? I mean, it's not died down, am I correct?

**0:02:23.6 JS:** Correct. So, as you mentioned, we're the, Cox First Media is the Dayton Daily News. We celebrated our 125th anniversary last year, actually. Dayton Daily News, the Springfield News Time, which was purchased by Governor Cox himself, and the Journal News in Butler County. So we have three papers, we share a news, we're one big newsroom with three different offices. Part of our election coverage, I think that we do intentionally, is we survey our audience about what issues matter most to them. So we do surveys about when we're doing our reporting on the election, what do you wanna hear the most about? Actually, immigration was by far the number one response. Our readers said, we care a lot about immigration.

**0:02:57.7 JS:** So I mean, I think what we're seeing is an attempt to frame the debate about immigration in a certain way. And that's kind of how this is playing out. I mean, while it's funny, there are darker undertones that are of concern to a lot of people. And those undertones do have policy implications for immigration and how immigrant communities are perceived and are they put



in danger. So yeah, it's interesting, in that, it seems like a joke, but it actually is a big part of a major issue within this year's election, which is immigration.

**0:03:35.7 MB:** Well, tell you what, we're gonna break down what's it like to be the leading news entity of a community that's instantly thrust into the national election ecosystem, dialogue, controversy, what have you. And we'll do that on the backside of this message.

**0:03:51.8 ANNOUNCER:** This episode of E&P Reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly Town News. 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 Town News, now reimagined to help meet the news publishing challenges of tomorrow and beyond. Learn more at [bloxdigital.com](http://bloxdigital.com).

**0:04:56.5 MB:** All right, let's talk about covering local misinformation, or how is your newsroom handling the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories, if any, regarding the Haitian immigrants in Springfield. Correct me if I'm wrong, but what we hear is they are legally there. The city has welcomed them. You have challenges within the community, but they're hardworking and they're providing a part of the growth of the economy. Am I painting too broad of a brush? What's the report? Go ahead.

**0:05:27.7 JS:** The Springfield News-Sun... Yeah, the Springfield News-Sun has been reporting for years on this issue. This has been a major issue in the community for several years now, and we actually did a week-long series on it last fall, that won some local Ohio awards, looking at what sort of drove this and some of the challenges that come from it. Controversy surrounding this is not new, and there have been legitimate concerns brought up that it's a large influx of a community that does need a lot of resources. Many of them don't speak English. There have been identified issues with cultural differences pertaining to driving and people driving without a license. Most infamously, there was an accident last year that took the life of a young child when a driver crashed into a school bus.

**0:06:12.5 JS:** So this has been an issue, this is not a brand new issue for Springfield. What's new is the misinformation 'cause we have been reporting on this and we've been very conscientious in our reporting. Over the last couple of weeks, over the last few months, I'd say, it's percolated up. JD Vance brought it up in a Senate hearing, I wanna say a couple of months ago as there was some renewed attention around the topic. But it was just the weekend before last, we started seeing this spike in traffic on our website. We started seeing like, this is weird, like some of these stories from two years ago are suddenly popping way up.

**0:06:51.4 JS:** People are searching and finding all these stories, anything with the word Haiti and Springfield in it. And so by Monday morning, Jessica Orozco, a reporter, a lead reporter at Springfield had figured out this is probably because of these tweets about, that JD Vance had shared



at that point, alleging that Springfield Haitians were capturing and eating people's pets. So she quickly got ahold of the city police department, was able to find out there had not been any confirmed reports of this happening. She was the first person to get a story up, debunking that claim and saying, look, there's just no evidence of this. Not even reports of this happening.

**0:07:29.0 JS:** The original report was a woman who, and I'm gonna get this wrong, it was her neighbor's friend's sister, it was like four people removed from the actual person whose alleged cat went missing. And no one can find anyone who actually made that original story that before the game of telephone or whatever it was. So yeah, we were able to get that story up Monday morning and it was the number one story on all of our websites. I mean, it was, luckily, it felt good to know that lots of people were finding this true information, but it was terrifying how many millions of people were seeing the misinformation through other outlets.

**0:08:12.1 JS:** And so that's been our last week and a half, has been some fact-checking and some just sort of like trying to be conscientious and intentional, not knee-jerk in reporting things because we as the local newspaper, we as the newspaper of record for Springfield, Ohio, wanna make sure that we get our facts straight, damning what anybody else reports.

**0:08:35.3 MB:** We have a challenge when we're reporting on media at E&P, news media because the grand audience out there, a news consumer thinks that news media, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC throwing in maybe the Washington Post and the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, where most of our coverage are communities like yours. Local journalism, that final check on power, your commitment to the community. With public trust of media now at an all-time low because that is painted with a big brush, right? How do you feel the trust is of your brand in that market now? Has it diminished? Has it grown? Are you getting any feedback from your audience? Are people canceling subscriptions? What's going on?

**0:09:23.0 JS:** It's similar to the phenomenon of people and their local politicians, right? People hate politicians, but mine, I like mine. I think that people do exempt us. I mean, we get lots of haters, no question about that. But when people talk about the media, they're thinking about these larger outlets. They're often thinking about opinion pundits and people who aren't even real news journalists, but people mistake them for such or they come across as such. So I think there's still a lot of trust. And that's what we offer. We are the local news. We are your trusted source of what's happening here in the local community.

**0:10:02.7 JS:** We don't try to compare ourselves to some of these other outlets because they have a different mission, different agenda. There's so many of them. But I believe, and I have to believe, and I do believe, and I hear from the community, that they do trust what we're reporting. And you see it on all the social medias. I mean, when something will come up and people are like, well, look, here's what the journal news is reporting. Here's what the state news is reporting about this community. And I think people do trust us because they know we're here. We're not just Googling stuff. We actually know the community. So I do believe that there's still a lot of trust in local news.

**0:10:35.7 MB:** All right, what about political pressure? Has the governor reached out to your publisher for insights or help or the Republican mayor of Springfield, to your knowledge?



**0:10:48.2 JS:** No, I mean, we've had a good relationship. I mean, it's obviously any relationship with a politician, it's...

**0:10:53.6 MB:** It's worse, right?

**0:10:55.6 JS:** Right, it is what it is. No, I mean, we did a story about, I mean, Governor Mike DeWine has personal connections to Haiti and a family. There's a school there named after his daughter who died in a car accident. And so we did a story about sort of how because I mean, we, decades ago when the school opened, we sent a report with him to Haiti for the school opening. And so that's a story we've written about. The governor is actually local to us. Governor DeWine started his career as a Greene County prosecutor, and Greene County is where Beaver Creek is, where your wife's from. So, I mean, Mike DeWine is a local guy, and we have a good relationship with him. So the only time he's reached out is yeah, about that story about his daughter. And it was nothing, maybe just noting, yeah, thanks for noting that.

**0:11:43.8 MB:** So you're rising above all that, at least on a political level. What about safety? I have to ask because we know all we hear down here in Tennessee, I'm in Nashville is bomb threats, bomb threats, evacuation. The poor kids on picture day had to be evacuated from school. We just hear about threats and all that kind of stuff. Have you guys had any hate mail, email threats? Have your reporters had to go through any coaching? Have they felt unsafe?

**0:12:12.6 JS:** I mean, so yes, there's clearly been, I mean, this has made national news. Reporters getting angry emails is not new to the age of email. I mean, as long as we've had email, we've gotten vicious emails by nameless people.

**0:12:30.3 MB:** I get them too. I got you. Yeah.

**0:12:32.4 JS:** People can be vicious. We had a story a couple of days ago that said there were 33 bomb threats around the city. There have been more since then. Just yesterday, I was in Springfield talking to the reporters there. We were planning. We're trying to plan some of this longer-term stuff. Hey, we wanna fact-check this. Let's investigate that. Trying to do some of this bigger reporting around this topic. And as we're talking, the two Walmarts and the Kroger in town all had to shut down because of bomb threats. And so the reporter I was talking to and the photographer both had to run out and talk to people and confirm that both Walmarts were closed because of bomb threats. That has made it hard to do reporting because schools keep closing. Wittenberg University has gone virtual. Clark State Community College has gone virtual.

**0:13:21.8 MB:** Right.

**0:13:23.6 JS:** Constant security threats. That's taken away 'cause obviously that's extremely important to our local audience each time that happens, more so than some of these larger debates. Safety is the number one concern that people have. Reporting on that has been difficult. We always tell our reporters, don't do it. Don't go anywhere where you feel unsafe. We are conscientious of making sure that their safety is taken into account. We keep our newsrooms locked and stuff. We have safety protocols in place that I won't go into great detail on. But there are threats out there and we strive to keep our reporters safe above anything else.



**0:14:07.0 MB:** Thank God. Final question. I know the people who run the Aurora Colorado Sentinel. Assume they're listening to this now or any other future local news team that might instantly be thrust into the national spotlight thanks to all this noise that we have in our national election news cycles. What advice would you give to other leaders in the news industry to prepare for possible misinformation bringing the spotlight to your community?

**0:14:47.3 JS:** Well, one thing you had mentioned is the media circus. And we've dealt with that. The Pike County massacre a couple years ago, the Dayton, Oregon district shooting in 2019. You have these scenarios where national and international media descends upon a market. It sours the local population quickly.

**0:15:08.5 MB:** Yes.

**0:15:09.2 JS:** Especially Pike County when I was there. It's such a small community that everyone got interviewed and almost everyone got misquoted by somebody within a week and so everyone you talk to has a bad experience with the media within days because there's just... And then people who are podcasters and claim they're media influencers. There's just this constant. So from a journalism standpoint, when there's a media circus, you get a challenge because you're trying to do local reporting. Meanwhile, these national and international outlets are calling and sometimes they're extremely pushy and they misquote people or take things out of context. It makes it harder to do reporting.

**0:15:53.3 MB:** We had the publisher of the Uvalde newspaper on this program just three weeks ago, and he said the same thing. He said it got to a point where media companies were breaking down our door demanding our time as if it's, we have to... You have your own [0:16:08.6] \_\_\_\_\_.

**0:16:09.0 JS:** Oh yeah, no, we had several media outlets just show up at our newspaper yesterday and had to tell them, look, we're in the middle of bomb threats we're responding to right now. We just don't have time for this. And so yeah, we've been conscientious about responding to that. The other thing that I will add to your point about, because there are so many people who need to get their five cents in, need to get their piece of this, there's so much reporting out there. Some of it might be true, some of it might be false, especially we're a small newsroom. We don't have... If we're trying to respond to other ongoing things, there's an election coming up. We also have local elections that we're trying to do candidate profiles for. You can't expect to be first on everything. The social media rumors are going to happen faster than you can. National news outlets are gonna swoop in. They have people who specialize in parachuting into a community and in three days cranking out an ADM story that may have some details that in the five days it's happened since you haven't included. That's fine.

**0:17:15.5 JS:** As the local media, we're not trying to compete with those people. We're trying to be accurate. We're trying to move not, obviously quickly is important, but not so quickly that we lose sight of the facts. We're not gonna Google a stat and then say, here's what the trends have been. We're not gonna make one phone call and say, here's what the trends have been. We're gonna get the data and look at, I mean, 'cause there's legitimate issues about crime trends, disease, traffic concerns. I mean, we're gonna get the data, analyze the data, report, here's what's actually going on,



not rush to get something out because we're trying to beat the news cycle.

**0:17:53.3 MB:** Josh Sweigart, Senior Editor, Investigations and Solution Journalism for Cox First Media Ohio. We at E&P wish you and the entire team well and urge you to keep your sanity through all this and keep doing your job. We appreciate... And we know how busy you must be right now. We appreciate your valuable time. Thanks for sharing your story with us.

**0:18:16.0 JS:** Thank you, Mike.