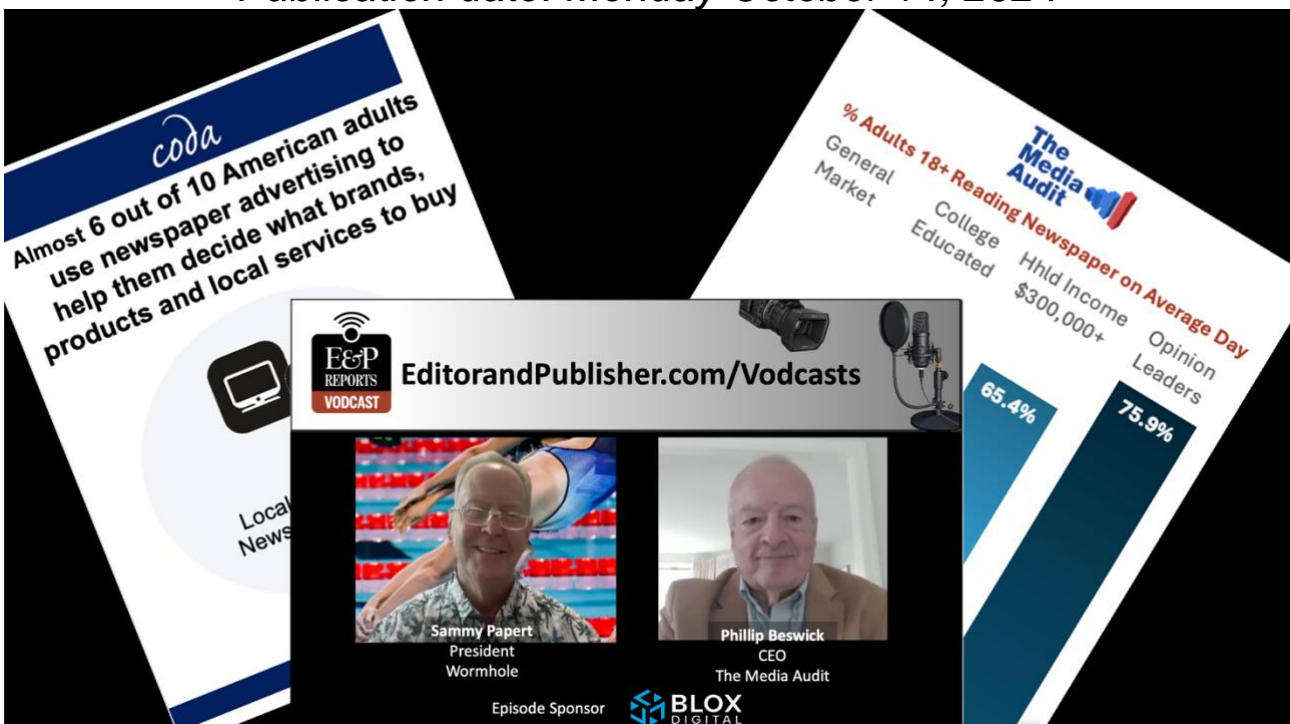


Audio Transcript

Episode 256 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with Mike Blinder
Publication date: Monday October 14, 2024



[Unlocking the value of local news consumers: Data-driven strategies for media growth](#)

As the digital age reshapes the media landscape, local news publishers face a crucial challenge: staying relevant and profitable. At the heart of this challenge is the ability to deeply understand and engage with their audiences. Sammy Papert, President of Wormhole and sales representative for [Coda Ventures](#), and Phillip Beswick, CEO of [The Media Audit \(TMA\)](#), recently shed light on how their audience studies are helping local news organizations thrive in an increasingly competitive environment. Their research offers powerful insights into how consumers interact with local news platforms and why these insights are pivotal for media companies seeking to monetize their content.



0:00:03.0 Announcer: This is in E&P Reports, a vodcast from Editor&Publisher Magazine, the authoritative voice of news media Since 1884. Serving newspapers, broadcast, digital and all forms of news publishing.

0:00:18.4 Mike Blinder: And greetings once again. This is Mike Blinder, publisher of the E&P Magazine. As always, we start off by urging those that listen to us on podcast platforms to follow this program. Those of you that choose to watch on our YouTube channel, subscribe. It's the little thing below. Hit the bell to the right. You'll get an update each and every time we upload a new episode of this weekly vodcast series dedicated to the news publishing industry, we affectionately call E&P Reports. I can now say I have two old friends, or I could say old friends, but these are both gentlemen that I've known for decades. Phillip Beswick, CEO of the Media Audit. Phillip, you and I go way back. I was using some of your data when I was in markets in the early aughts, 2001 and '02. It's good to have you on the show, sir. You should have been on before. But thank you for joining us.

0:01:10.2 Phillip Beswick: I wanna thank you for inviting me.

0:01:12.9 MB: You are the CEO of Media Audit. Media Audit, I'm taking this from your website. I'm gonna let you augment it in a second. You state that you stand out as the most comprehensive local syndicated audience measurement company in the country. Your firm provides advertising in media companies with consumer insights needed to make more informed decisions. Is that a good elevator pitch, sir?

0:01:34.0 PB: It is.

0:01:36.6 MB: Alright, good. And you do a good job marketing yourself. Sammy Papert. You and I go way back as well to my... I met you at my first NAA, I remember years ago, and you were wearing Hawaiian shirts then. Do you still do that, Sammy, or not?

0:01:51.5 Sammy Papert: Yes, I do. And I'm glad your younger brain remembers that 'cause I couldn't have told you where we met.

0:01:58.2 MB: Sammy Papert at the time was running Belden. You've gone off now and you list yourself as President of Wormhole which you can talk about or not, but you're here representing Coda Ventures, is that correct?

0:02:11.8 SP: Correct. I got out of the corporate world. I'm an independent contractor. I'm proudly representing several companies and have been working with Coda starting this year. And I'm thrilled to represent them.

0:02:23.3 MB: Coda local market audience studies measures the total market coverage of your media brand across all of your platforms. Print, web, social apps, video, e-newsletters, and more, collecting detailed information about the purchase profile and buying behavior of your audience. Now, the reason I set up this interview was interesting. I reached out to a number of media research companies to put together some content for various presentations E&P was doing for newspaper



association managers. And both of you sent some really great data that we have since presented. John Newby did in the Chicago Advertising Conference. I recently took this data to the executive director conference in Oklahoma City, and I wanted to share it with the E&P audience. And most of it centers on back to the basics of what our audience really is. So with that being said, I'm gonna let these two gentlemen sit for a second as we watch this message and we'll be right back.

0:03:26.3 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 2000 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.

0:04:31.6 MB: Okay, Sammy, let's start with you. You sent me kind of an aggregate look at the 2023 local newspaper study. Before we dive into it, this is a study that Coda did with America's newspapers. Can you just quickly give us the elevator pitch, what the survey was and what its objectives are?

0:04:50.6 SP: Absolutely. So it's a 2023 study. Coda was contracted, engaged by America's newspapers, and assuming everyone recognizes their America's newspapers, but just briefly, I did a double check before our session. 1200 newspapers are members. So it is far and away the largest organizations. These are large and small organizations. And the objectives were pretty simple in this study, threefold, to really measure both large and small at a national level. Where are we reaching? What are newspapers reaching? Not just the traditional print product, but their websites, their e-newsletters, their social media. We wanted to understand the reach of the newspaper... The newspaper world. We wanted to compare against not everything, but most of the other media within the communities. And finally to document, to try to document the role newspapers play in a host of what... Just the way public assets, advertising, trust, really try to quantify those measures so that newspapers could do a better job of marketing themselves.

0:05:58.8 MB: To our audience, two things I wanna add. Number one, all of these slides that they submitted to me for E&P to use in our presentations recently will be available to our audience. If you tripped over this broadcast on Spotify, head to editorandpublisher.com/vodcasts, go to the landing page for this episode. You'll be able to download this deck 'cause we're gonna race through 'cause it's really interesting. And now, the second thing I wanna say to our audience, which varies. We have a lot of broadcast, we have a lot of people that are digital only. Sammy used the word newspapers a number of times because this study was work in conjunction with America's newspapers. But how do you define newspapers, Sammy? 'Cause this... You're looking at all forms of their delivery. Not just the printed product. You're looking at their website, looking social media, all that. Am I correct?

0:06:46.1 SP: You're a hundred percent correct. And the point I would've made if you hadn't, but literally, newspapers is a term everybody understands, but it has also created some



misunderstanding. In some cases, people think it's only print, distributed twice or thrice or once a week, and that is not the case anymore. Newspapers have a fantastic story to tell because of their growing audience amongst all the other channels they're going to market with. All the other channels to distributing content with.

0:07:17.8 MB: Okay. So you click off with reasons people use local news. So you see, this is what you dive into. When I say newspaper, I like to say news publisher. Because it's just someone who, I mean, it's a great name and I'm still E&P, but I'm, vastly different ways that we send out our content. But you're basically saying, what... First of all, why do people want local news? And you basically, can you just give us the quick one minute? Why people go to these websites?

0:07:47.3 SP: Sure. So news consumers go to newspapers and all of that means websites, social media, print. 79% of the time they're going to stay informed. I mean, far and away, the greatest reason is to stay informed. And that could be about events, that could be about high school, that could be about advertising, that could be about public services, that could be obits, to stay informed with what's going on in their community. And even though there are occasional news deserts now, if there is a local newspaper, it's far and away the best only true source of local content, local news and information about that community.

0:08:31.4 MB: This is kind of the year of content. I mean, I say that because everybody's screaming now, including Gordon Burrell is moving his conference to the J School in Arizona. That it's... Content will rock. If you don't have local content, you will fail. He's actually predicting death of broadcasters who don't have local. So everybody's trying to get into the space now. Radio is launching local news sites. You're saying that even if it's a 150-year-old brand, I'm looking at some data here that I was proud to show, a newspaper brand is considered the most accurate and reliable. Is that a fact?

0:09:04.9 SP: Absolutely. It is certainly the most trusted. Not a part of the deck I sent you, Mike, but a part of the questionnaire was to talk about whether you would trust representatives of radio or television or social media or newspaper into your house, literally into your household. If a representative a banged on your door and if they were representing media newspapers again, were the most trusted, more likely that a consumer would let a newspaper representative or a company, an advertiser represent that they found through a newspaper into their home.

0:09:41.4 MB: You see, this is fascinating because those brands are strong and they're being sold right now for pennies on the dollar. I mean, there are people now claiming, now's the time to buy these brands. You're looking at Carpenter Media picking up papers left and right. You're looking at Cherry Road. Am I right? So, I mean, this is not a bad time when you look at this data to say, I wanna own that brand in the market. Of course, we have to monetize it. That's the whole different story. But these brands are strong. And then what you also say in this research, it's not just the paper anymore. Like, how do people access? What platforms are they getting this news on?

0:10:18.0 SP: Well, they're getting it on social media. They're getting on an e-newsletter. They're getting on the owned and operated website. Newspapers are far and away. I mean, I think it's 43% versus 33% for television. When you combine their printed products, their digitally distributed products, their website, 43% rank newspaper as the most accurate, reliable source of local news and

information.

0:10:50.5 MB: It's amazing. And you also... You gave me one slide, which I love because it backs up, I think, where a lot of Congress is today with advocacy and helping local journalism survive. 74% of local respondents said it's important to have this news come from the newspaper. Correct?

0:11:04.9 SP: Correct. 74%.

0:11:07.3 MB: That's amazing. And then here's where we turn the corner. That's why this is... We're gonna go to Phillip in just a few seconds, because then you talk about advertising utility. And this is how you... I mean, again, selling the audience. So six out of 10 adults use newspaper advertising to help them decide what brands. Do I have that right?

0:11:27.9 SP: Yeah. You're exactly right. And so remember, this is how you leverage that, I think. If I'm a representative representing newspaper, I am gonna talk about the total reach, not just my original once upon a time newspaper product, but the total reach. I'm gonna leverage the fact that I'm the most trusted medium in the community. And oh, by the way, there's not a digital solution that I cannot provide. And sometimes you'll find that the local newspaper seller is gonna lead with digital because they know that advertiser has already got a big digital footprint. So you lead with digital and say, oh, by the way, I'm the only representative who can provide a trusted local medium like newspapers as well.

0:12:11.5 MB: Phillip, I reached out to you for data because as everybody calls digital, digital, digital, digital, you're still showing now a strong legacy media presence, which is buyers are still buying legacy media. We know that for a fact. I mean, Gordon's latest new research shows they wanna mix back in the paper, the radio broadcast, the TV branding is back and all that and more. But you're showing still a strong affinity for legacy media. Am I correct, sir?

0:12:41.8 PB: Absolutely. There's no doubt that we've got fragmentation with our traditional media because of the digital world. But at the same time, traditional media has embraced, as Sammy was just talking about, has embraced the digital world, and it's part of the whole package. But we go out and we ask people, have you listened to the radio? What radio stations have you listened to? And right now, on average, 60% of the US population is listening to the radio. Now, you could sit there and you'd say, well, wait a minute, but how long? And the answer is about two hours and 15 minutes on the average day. And if you're to take a look at it on the period of a week, you're going to find out that it's broaching 90% of the population. Now, some people will look at that and say, well, but I don't listen to the radio that much. Oftentimes you don't realize that you are because you're in an environment that you didn't necessarily tune in to listen to it. It is part of the ambient environment that you're in.

0:13:49.7 MB: I remember those days selling that to advertisers. And people are still watching broadcast TV. I mean, again, a fragmented media with all the streaming going on, but you're showing strong numbers still for, just sitting down and watching the tube, right?

0:14:03.8 PB: Right. 90% of the population tunes in to TV. Now, is it TV over the air? Is it TV via video streaming? Okay. How do people classify the TV? To them, it's a screen, okay? And they're

watching it.

0:14:21.8 MB: And they still want that local TV channel. They're still craving that content. Now you go to newspapers. I remember the days when I was selling in the streets about a decade ago, we were talking about a 72% reach for print. You're saying now it's about 40%, correct? According to the latest and greatest aggregated data from Media Audit. Do I have that right, sir?

0:14:40.6 PB: That's correct. Yeah.

0:14:42.4 MB: But that's still a healthy damn number. Excuse my pontificating here. That's not something to sneeze at. 40% of the population still touches a print newspaper.

0:14:52.4 PB: And as Sammy says, it's a very influential part of the media mix out there.

0:15:00.2 MB: Unbelievable. And you... I remember selling with your data for years, and we got to a point where we felt like we were just broken records, affluent, educated. Affluent, educated, and influential. You're still saying the same thing here. You say 50% of college educated adults read the newspaper, one out of two, 65% of the adults, 300,000 plus household income. And in a world of targeted media and niche, and 76% of opinion leaders, describe to me Phillip, what you call an opinion leader. Who is that?

0:15:30.1 PB: An opinion leader is somebody who influences others. And they're critically important to marketers because it's like dropping a stone into a pond. That wave goes out from there. And that's what an opinion leader is. They're influencing. How did you like that movie that you went to see? How do you like the car that you're driving? What's a good restaurant to go to? Those people are critically important. And as you rightfully said, three quarters of the people that are opinion leaders read the newspaper or are news consumers.

0:16:07.0 MB: It took some time then. Thank you for this, to dive into some critical advertising categories. One of the top local categories to go after, and the toughest to get in the door with is home improvement, because it's hyperlocal, the decision makers are usually behind the wheel of a truck, with his dad running one and the son and the other. But you gave me some indexes, which I'm gonna share with our audience obviously, for home improvement. I call paint and body work, laser cosmetic surgery, appliance buying, home buyers, furniture, healthcare. What are you seeing in critical advertising categories when it comes to that local news consumer?

0:16:45.7 PB: They index well above the market average. News consumers are people who crave information. They research what they're doing, and they get that from the local media that they're being exposed to.

0:17:01.7 MB: So there's... If you're generating local news content, you're hitting an amazingly advertising rich demographic. I have that right, correct?

0:17:12.3 PB: Absolutely. Like people who are planning on buying new cars, they're 30 to 40% more likely to be a news consumer than the general marketplace.



0:17:23.2 MB: Which ties into the affluence as well. News consumers are great targets for advertisers for education, correct? You're showing high indexes there?

0:17:31.6 PB: Yep. People who are in households of \$300,000 a year or more, they're off the chart.

0:17:40.1 MB: Alright. All three of us are sales guys. Sammy, I mean, regardless of what we're selling and where, Sammy, you and I have engaged with thousands of local ad reps over the years. I know you train them up, and I trained in over 350 media companies over the years. If you had, with this influential data, this data from both Coda and Media Audit, if you were running a media property today, Sammy, what would you do if you... With the seller sales team. How would you leverage this to monetize that critical news content?

0:18:11.1 SP: A couple of things. First of all I would beat the streets. Literally, well, one of my worries about the newspaper space is we don't systematically prospect very well. So I would take some of this data. I wouldn't take a lot of it because you don't want to ask a seller to be a researcher. But I'd take some of the key trust points, some of the key shopping category points. I would bang on a door at 10:05 in the morning right after they opened, before they got busy. And I'd say, Mr. Owner, Mrs. Owner, do you have two minutes, Sammy, from the Bugle. Would you like to reach households who are gonna buy the things you sell? And they say, of course I would. Well, 72% intend to vote, or 70 or as do you use a Philip or 40% of the households we reach are more likely to buy a car.

0:19:06.3 SP: Well, they're interested in that. So you peak their curiosity from the get go with data that proves the value of the medium. And they're always gonna say, well, tell me more. How do I reach them? Then you follow up by saying, let me understand your business a little bit better. Let me do my customer needs analysis. Find out if you have co-op dollars, all the things which you might do to better craft a proposal and say, listen, based upon the information you provided, can I come back tomorrow? At the same time, I'm gonna bring my digital manager, since you're interested in digital, we can provide all those solutions so we can manage your whole campaign for you. And do you have sister companies, by the way? We could take care of them as well. And I'll be back tomorrow with my digital director to do a comprehensive presentation about why you should consider us as your total solutions provider. And I'll get a sale.

0:20:00.5 MB: Phillip, same question. When you're, engaging with hundreds of media companies every year through the Media Audit. What would you do if you, someone said, here, run this media company for me, Phillip, and start making some money. What would you do with this data?

0:20:15.3 PB: I would focus on the target categories out there. Sammy's, right. You go in, you say to somebody, I can tell you something about your business. And if that's of interest to you, I can tell you more about your business. And it's laced through... That a lot of media over a period of time have built their brand capability on helping the advertiser in the marketplace achieve their goals. The thing is that nowadays, digital's taken over in many ways and is growing very fast. Why? Because they've got numbers. It confuses the hell out of most advertisers, particularly small businesses. They don't understand all of that. But there's numbers after numbers, after numbers.

0:21:04.4 PB: And so the credibility in the marketplace has moved over to digital rather than what's



going on with the news consumer media, like the newspapers, like the TV stations, like the radio stations. So I would really focus on my brand. I would focus on the salespeople getting them up to speed. As Sammy said, you don't wanna make them researchers, but you wanna make them resources in the marketplace. And you can do that with research like Sammy's got and like the Media Audit's got.

0:21:34.8 MB: There you go. Phillip Beswick, CEO of the Media Audit, Sammy Papert representing Coda Ventures, President of Wormhole. I thank you both, gentlemen, for your valuable time.

0:21:44.6 PB: Thank you.

0:21:44.7 SP: You're welcome.