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Audio Transcript

Episode 262 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with Mike Blinder

Publication date: Monday December 2, 2024



[Woolsey and Robinson on why local spending starts with a \\$2 bill](#)

In Galveston County, a simple yet powerful idea is transforming how residents support their local economy: the \$2 Shopping Challenge. Spearheaded by The Galveston Daily News under Publisher Leonard Woolsey and Chief Revenue Director Michelle Robinson, the initiative encourages residents to collect \$2 bills from local banks and spend them at participating businesses, creating a visible ripple effect of community support. What began as a quirky concept has quickly evolved into a movement, showcasing the impact of local spending while fostering stronger ties between businesses, residents, and the newspaper itself.



Announcer

This is E&P Reports, a vodcast from Editor and Publisher Magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 18/84. Serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

Mike Blinder

And warm greetings once again, Mike Blinder, publisher, E&P Magazine. As always, we kick off asking those that are listening to us on various podcast platforms to please follow this program. If you choose to watch the video version on our YouTube channel, there is a subscribe mechanism below. We urge you to do that as well. Either way, if you interact that way, you'll get an update each and every time we upload.

Mike Blinder

A new episode of this weekly vodcast series we dedicate to the news publishing industry we call affectionately. E and P reports, I got a very good old old good friend. I've got Leonard Woolsey back on the show. Leonard, this is your 3rd appearance, believe it or not. You gotta do 5 before you get a jacket.

Mike Blinder

Welcome to the program. Good to have you on board. Uh, Leonard, you're, uh, president of America's Newspapers, publisher of the Galveston Daily News, president of Southern Newspapers. And I I I I know your accolades go on and on, and you were also, uh, last year's, uh, E&P Publisher of the Year. So welcome aboard.

Mike Blinder

It's good to have you.

Leonard Woolsey

Well, thank you, Mike. You know, I hope I'm not too old to earn that 5th jacket or earn that jacket someday, you know. So I'm gonna

Leonard Woolsey

Well, Mike, you've been a great friend to me, to the industry, to my colleagues, and what you and Robin do is just so so important and so valued in our industry. So I wanna say thank you if we start that off tonight.

Mike Blinder

Alright. Well, hashtag blushing. Now the one that does the real heavy lifting at the at the operation now that it's been exposed is a woman by the name of Michelle Robinson. Michelle, you have two titles that are massive. 1 is your director of all digital revenue for Southern Newspapers, the parent company, which is so congratulations on that, but you're also head revenue officer for the the Galveston Daily News.

Mike Blinder

Do you ever get home at night, or you're always working? What's the story?

Michelle Robinson

Well, I never call it work. It's a lot of fun, so I can say that. You know? It's we have fun.

Mike Blinder

I I know you guys do. And and one of the reasons we're doing this well, the reason for this interview is I was scanning my Facebook page. There's Leonard talking about this \$2 challenge. This is exciting. I'm I I I immediately I love this one on so many levels.

Mike Blinder

I'm gonna try to give it the quick elevator pitch. Let me see if I describe it wrong. What you're doing at the daily news is you've launched this \$2 shopping challenge where, um, and this was all created by Michelle, it looks like. And you can see if I'm wrong. And you did a partnership, uh, through Moody Bank, uh, the Texas City Economic Development Corporation, and a lot of businesses.

Mike Blinder

People go to the bank, they get \$2 bills, and they walk into the businesses to have, like like, some kind of signage or what have you and and spend that \$2 bill in a number of ways. Hey. I'm bolstering the economy, but I'm saying to this local business, I care about the local economy. It's like local for local. Am I saying that right, Michelle?

Michelle Robinson

You've nailed it. Thank you. I should take you with me everywhere I go. It's always like, gets you better. So, yes, that's exactly it.

Michelle Robinson

It's about showing the local business in our community that we are there to support our communities. They're supporting them, and it's you don't see the \$2 bills very often. So it's kinda nice to to take \$2 bills and spend them.

Mike Blinder

Well, we're gonna unpack You'd be surprised go ahead, good litter.

Leonard Woolsey

You'd be surprised at the faces of some younger clerks when you go into stores and you have a \$2 bill and they go, what is this? They go to their manager to see if it's real.

Michelle Robinson

Yeah. Make sure it's not fake.

Mike Blinder

I haven't seen one in in ages, but this is all good. We're gonna unpack this after this commercial break. But right after the break, I wanna tease this. We're all gonna watch a reel that I that that turned me off. This is Leonard in a store doing a promotional video with a store owner.

Mike Blinder

So stick around on the backside of this, and we're gonna watch Leonard together.



Announcer

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Mike Blinder

Okay, Leonard. You were in a business with a local influencer in that video. How did this all come about?

Leonard Woolsey

Well, I was actually I I think part of being a publisher is going to coffee shops a lot. You know? I really do.

Michelle Robinson

We get

Leonard Woolsey

a lot of business done in coffee shops. I think we're fueled by caffeine, but I was down there to meet with another client to talk about another video project, and the social media influencer walked over and introduced himself, and he heard he had already talked to the business about being a part of the \$2 program, and he had read about it in our papers. He says, hey. Would you come on my show and let me just do a promo with you? And I go, yeah.

Leonard Woolsey

Sure. So that's how this whole thing came about. I didn't I had never met him before I did that. But, fortunately, the guy I was with said, yeah. He's legit.

Leonard Woolsey

So I went for it, Mike. I walked out into the total influencer world.

Michelle Robinson

It was fun.

Mike Blinder

And that coffee shop was one of the participants in the program.

Leonard Woolsey
Absolutely. Yep.

Mike Blinder
So let's swing it to Michelle. Michelle, what inspired you to come up with this \$2 challenge idea? Where did it was you in the shower just thinking? What what what?

Michelle Robinson
No. No. Uh, this this idea is an idea that, um, you know, I took it from another, uh, newspaper back in, like, 2,006. Um, so, uh, so this is something that and I've evolved it and changed it and made it more um, work in our times. But, um, I was working with a chamber of commerce that was trying in a small town that had 72% leakage that was leaving to go do all their shopping.

Michelle Robinson
And we were trying to figure out how we were gonna keep people there. And they wanted to do, like, credit card charges, and there would be a special credit card. It just got too complicated.

Mike Blinder
Right.

Michelle Robinson
And I used to always get \$2 bill for the kid, and I saw this promotion that was happening. I think it was in Pennsylvania. Um, and I looked at that and thought how cool would this be because then if you took the \$2 bill into a business then they would see it, you know, a credit card charge, they wouldn't see as well or, you know, some kind of a money exchange. Um, and it's just kind of has gotten legs from there. Um, and we've had a lot of good success and this community has so adapted to the fun.

Michelle Robinson
I love watching. I got people calling me up saying my name is not on the list yet because we're running everybody's names. Um, I have businesses that are asking how do we get involved. Um, I have people asking how do we help support this. It's been a lot of fun.

Leonard Woolsey
Yeah. I was in with the, um, bank rep last week and the bank president is marketing team just came out and go, oh my god. This is the coolest, most buzzy thing we've done. We can't we can't imagine how much fun we're having with this thing. So it's just really cool.

Leonard Woolsey
I mean, here a local bank now is saying, wow. The newspaper has influence and power over the market. So that's that's great to partner with local businesses like this.

Mike Blinder
When she pitched the idea to you in the conference room originally, Leonard, did you say, what is she smoking, or were you on board instantly?

Leonard Woolsey

Yes. That's almost verbatim, Mike. Because But she has such a good darn track record. I was smart enough to go, yes. So I'll figure it out later.

Leonard Woolsey

But, you know, it it's a it has the elements of fun. It connects with community. It ties businesses together, and it shows when we walk into a small business and you hand them that \$2 bill, it identifies you as a local. And that's important, particularly on this area where we live, which is kind of a higher tourist area. You've got the summer, but those businesses need the locals to get through this what they call the shoulder seasons, off-site prime time.

Leonard Woolsey

And this is just like a calling card says, I'm a local. And this is the this is the magic of this program that she came up with.

Mike Blinder

Here comes my next question, Michelle. I mean, you're in charge of revenue. Is there some money attached? Are you making any money? Oh, yeah.

Mike Blinder

Okay. I mean Oh, yeah. I mean, tell I mean, no offense, but, you know, we're not a we're not a charity. Are people paying to participate? Are they calling you now saying I want in?

Mike Blinder

Yeah. How is this how is this rolling?

Michelle Robinson

So that's been kind of the fun thing, but just to start out, I don't think Leonard would have let me continue it if there was a new time to do it. Um, so we have sponsors. Uh, we just started out with a couple sponsors and then we've had, uh, we had some other edcs that came in and said, well, we wanna be we wanna sponsor it. So we kinda figured out, kinda made this we made it work. So we have the seed money from all of them.

Michelle Robinson

And then on top of that, what we did is we put packages together. Um, and I and I I say this, the best way to word it is kind of at a, um, the the seed money or sponsors helped our pain for some of it. So the packages are more of a long term, you know, running more than one time. They're, like, 6 and 12 and 24 times throughout this season to really help those businesses drive the traffic in for them. So and we're getting a lot of people jumping on that.

Leonard Woolsey

And, Mike, the scale is what was interesting. This is what I didn't expect. I related We're talking again. Yeah. You're right.

Leonard Woolsey

Okay.

Mike Blinder
Yay. You

Leonard Woolsey
know, I understood the advertising package program, but then when these groups came forward, these economic groups in cities saying, we wanna participate. We'll give you \$5,000. And another one says, we'll give you \$5,000, and it just kept snowballing to the fact that it has become a significant revenue tool for us to help promote and and create attention for local businesses. These partnerships came in asking for nothing other than we wanna be a part of this, and we want you to help promote our communities. And so it's it's been a almost an altruistic view that they've come in with and it's necessary because we run full pages in the paper listing all the people who've signed up, all the businesses have signed up, and then they're getting the prime time credit for being a stir of economic activity in the county.

Mike Blinder
And people are getting the \$2 bills. Right?

Michelle Robinson
Oh my goodness. Yes. Yeah. In fact, I was just I was just telling Leonard yesterday that I got my first call this season, uh, of somebody very upset because they went to their bank and they were out of \$2 bills. And they wanted me to know because I list all the banks, all the branches.

Michelle Robinson
So I told them that they will be getting them in. They get them every week. So, yeah, we're

Leonard Woolsey
Yeah. Our local banker had to call in a favor to the Federal Reserve to get them in.

Mike Blinder
So how you get them? I was gonna ask. I mean, I also do that offline. Yeah. How does a bank get a \$2 bill?

Mike Blinder
I mean, do you

Leonard Woolsey
think He he has the app.

Michelle Robinson
He does. And he has to let him know what's going on before the reserve app. Why are you asking for so many \$2 bills?

Mike Blinder
Right. You gotta tell them why.

Speaker 6

Why. Alright. So so this is this is not this is just

Mike Blinder

in its infancy. This is gonna create a full year program. It's not just a Christmas

Michelle Robinson

thing now. I mean, a holiday.

Mike Blinder

Yeah. Because, you know, I I when I train, I say media is all about reach and frequency. You don't do one hit wonder media. Right? It's frequency, frequency, whatever.

Mike Blinder

So now what the other reason I love this in so many levels, the next level is you're selling 2 things combined. I always say when you break down media and, Michelle, I hope you agree with me. You're not really selling 2 things. Either branding, brand lift, or results. Uh, action.

Mike Blinder

You know? Mhmm. I always say the 3 6, call click or customer through the door. And those 2 campaigns are separate, and you need to convince advertisers sometimes you need to do branding to brand your business, you know, top of mind awareness, whatever the heck you wanna call it. This this package does both.

Mike Blinder

It takes the brand of the business, combines it with yours. So in a way, it's kinda like a, you know, whatever you wanna call it, sponsored content, branded content. It's you're giving they're blessing the business under your masthead, but then the business is showing its support for the community and how it's part of a thriving fun community. On all levels, I mean, do I have

Speaker 6

this right, Michelle? You're you're you're nailing it. I mean

Michelle Robinson

Yeah. I mean, that's it. I mean, the content is king. Right? So and I think this is this is helping those businesses see that.

Michelle Robinson

So they're not not only are they getting it in return, but they're also sharing and exposing themselves to an audience they might not have known that it was there. And I think that is kind of the key. Um, I I've been really excited to watching the people that are coming out with the woodwork that have wanted to support this and be a part of it and jump on the on the bandwagon with it, you know. Those they're gonna be long term clients because now we built a relationship with them now or we are building a relationship with them.

Leonard Woolsey

And so, Mike, on a whim, we just thought of, well, how do we also use this to build our data, first party database to get more subscribers? So we went on social media and started offering offering a stack of a \$100 worth of \$2 bills each week if you'll register and give us this information and blah blah blah. We had the first time out a 150 people give us all their information to be in this drawing and, you know, we gave away our first stack of \$100 bills this week.

Michelle Robinson

\$2 bills. \$2 bills. \$2 bills. We're Sorry. We're not rich.

Michelle Robinson

We're not rich. We're not rich.

Leonard Woolsey

But on social media, it just kinda blows up. And, again, it's just another way for us to use this program to even help us, uh, build our first party data to go for both marketing promotion and subscription messaging.

Mike Blinder

Alright. So Southern Newspapers has other cities where you have media companies. Michelle, you are you're a corporate officer running you know, trying to drive revenue not just for your own operation, but others. Have are others, uh, Southern papers picking this up? Are you are you sharing the the idea among the company?

Leonard Woolsey

This this is the first time out here that we've had several already say, we wanna do this next year. So I think you're gonna see this across Southern next year. It's already proven itself.

Mike Blinder

Which begs the question, is your phone lighting up, Leonard? Are other markets calling you and friends and other publishers saying, what the heck's going on? I saw this on social media, Leonard. Tell us how you're making money.

Leonard Woolsey

Well, I've had I've had some good number of acquirers, but I'm pretty sure when mister Mike's podcast drops, it's gonna light up big time, Mike.

Speaker 6

You know, but you're you're gonna this I I I it this is brilliant.

Mike Blinder

I mean, again, I and kudos to you guys because, again, it it's on so many levels. It's checking all these boxes and it's fun. And the other thing it's doing, correct me if I'm wrong, Michelle, is I you're getting reps excited about their their what they do for a living again. Am I right?

Leonard Woolsey



When she brought this idea up and the quiriness of the \$2 bill, and it was like, wow. We can we can do some good stuff with this. And it has it has far exceeded any of my expectations. They really have. Michelle's terrific to work.

Mike Blinder

And the and the reps must be just going gangbusters with this, having fun with it. Right? I mean, this is

Michelle Robinson

They they really are. You know? I think that I I I feel like there was probably a little hesitant as as Leonard, it was even kinda just trying to figure it all out too. Um, but once they start seeing how fast everybody's coming on board and not even have a question and getting excited about it, I think it's like, everybody's like, woah. What do we do?

Michelle Robinson

What what's our next thing? What are we doing? So it's been it's been really fun.

Leonard Woolsey

Building it out. I mean Yeah. Original idea she brought just seems pale compared to where it's just organically grown like the subscription outreach part. Now we're doing videos, commercials for customers and it's like stuff we never thought of 2 or 3 weeks ago when we said we're gonna do this. So it's just been again, we're just trying to listen to the market and have fun and make money along the way.

Michelle Robinson

And reaching audiences. Audiences that we might not be reaching out to already and making sure that they understand that, you know, we're in your community and we are

Leonard Woolsey

Here's one of my favorite, Mike. You know, every town has their little name of town talk or whatever and it's where everybody goes and complains and blah blah blah.

Michelle Robinson

Yeah.

Leonard Woolsey

And one of the post this week was, what's the deal with the \$2 bill? What's everybody talking about \$2 bills for? And then everybody starts chiming, oh, the daily news is doing this blah blah blah. And then somebody puts a link to our website and this so here we are in an audience that doesn't even use us much. And now we're getting all these questions because organically people in the community going, what's the deal with 2 all these \$2 deal bills floating around?

Leonard Woolsey

So it's just kinda cool.

Mike Blinder



And you can tie this into every seasonality. Right? You can, you know Yeah.

Michelle Robinson

Oh, yeah.

Speaker 6

Valentine's Day, back to school. Any time.

Mike Blinder

Home improvements, summer fun. I mean, I could Yeah. There is there is absolutely no stopping this, and it's all based on buy local, shop local.

Leonard Woolsey

Absolutely. And Absolutely.

Mike Blinder

And I'm familiar with Galveston. You're the right city for this. You actually have a

Speaker 6

vibrant local, you know, presence. Right? Yeah.

Mike Blinder

I mean, this is this is amazing. Alright, guys. So congratulations. Um, let's let's see. If anyone wants more information, it's michelle.robinson.

Mike Blinder

Am I right, Michelle? Is that your email address?

Michelle Robinson

Yes, sir. Yep.

Mike Blinder

And, uh, and it's at, uh, Galv or is that the one you use? Which one? Yep. Galvnews.com. Galvnews.com.

Mike Blinder

I'm sure you have a southern newspapers one as well, but we'll stay with that. And Leonard, you're still leonard.wilsey. Right?

Michelle Robinson

At You bet.

Mike Blinder

For today. You might be surprised.

Leonard Woolsey



For today. For today.

Mike Blinder

It's called the \$2, um, Challenge. It's that simple. And it's amazingly successful. We're only at the infancy. This is something that I think everybody should start thinking about in some way, shape, form, or size.

Mike Blinder

Either do it exactly the same way or morph it, change it, and find a way to jazz up the local community in a fun way while helping local businesses prosper and, God forbid, make a buck or 2. Am I right, Michelle?

Michelle Robinson

Right. Right.

Mike Blinder

Uh, Leonard Woolsey, president of, uh, Southern Newspapers, publisher of the Galveston Daily News, Michelle Robinson, director of Digital Revenue for Southern Newspapers and chief revenue director of The Daily News. Thank you both for your

Michelle Robinson

time. Mike. Thank you, Mike.

Leonard Woolsey

Pleasure. Thank you, and best wishes to you for the holiday season.