



Audio Transcript

Episode 271 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with *Mike Blinder*

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[Post and Courier's strategic print shift: A new era for South Carolina journalism](#)

As more newspapers rethink their print schedules, *The Post and Courier* is making a bold move—scaling back to five-day print delivery while doubling down on digital engagement. In this exclusive interview, PJ Browning, president of the newspaper division at Evening Post Publishing, breaks down the strategy behind the shift, how they're preparing loyal readers for the transition, and why she believes the future of local journalism is both digital and deeply rooted in community trust. Watch now to hear how *The Post and Courier* is navigating this pivotal moment in publishing.



ANNOUNCER::

This is *E&P Reports*, a podcast from *Editor & Publisher* magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

MIKE BLINDER:

And greetings once again, I'm Mike Blinder, publisher of *E&P Magazine*. As always, we urge our audience listening on their podcast platform of choice to follow us. For those watching the video version on our YouTube channel, hit that subscribe button below, ring the bell, and you'll get an update every time we upload a new episode of this weekly vodcast series we call *E&P Reports*.

The *Post and Courier* is making a bold move. Some might think it's bold, some might think it's normal. I don't—that's why we're having this episode. They are reducing their print delivery schedule to five days a week from seven. PJ, I assume that seven-day-a-week print schedule has been around for over a hundred years?

PJ BROWNING:

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MIKE BLINDER:

I wish I knew someone who had a legacy magazine that's been printing for over a hundred years... Oh, wait, that's me!

I can feel for you. When I took over *E&P*, it was losing money, and some of my advisors—this small group helping me through the due diligence—suggested I just stop printing. And I kept thinking, *I can't stop a hundred-plus-year legacy*. This must have been a hard decision, right?

PJ BROWNING:

Well, it was certainly a hard decision, but, you know, the economics of it... It's one of those things we've been evaluating since 2018, 2019. When we went through the Google News Initiative, we started talking about the frequency of print and mapping out the runway. When do you have enough print readers who are digitally active that you can flip the switch?

And so here we are.

MIKE BLINDER:

We're already into the meat of this interview, and I have yet to introduce you properly for those who may not know. PJ Browning is the president of the newspaper division at *Evening Post Publishing*.

PJ, I know you know this, but if we go to ChatGPT and ask who you are, it says:

"PJ Browning is the president of the newspaper division of Evening Post Publishing, publisher of the Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina. She is highly respected as a media executive with extensive experience in newspaper leadership, audience development, and revenue innovation."



If I may add to that, you're also a keynote speaker at Borrell Phoenix this year, right?

PJ BROWNING:

Yes, yes.

MIKE BLINDER:

I'll have a minor panel, but you'll be the one revving up the audience. But the most important distinction, I think, and the best feather in your cap—you were *E&P's* Publisher of the Year in 2019.

PJ BROWNING:

Well, thank you! Hey, I'm just glad ChatGPT didn't say that I was old.

MIKE BLINDER:

No, no. It didn't even mention retirement—though if you look me up, it probably says, "*He should be retiring.*"

Anyway, we're going to unpack this decision about print frequency and chat with PJ about what's going on at the *Post and Courier*—right after this message.

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MIKE BLINDER:

Alright, PJ, you made the announcement to your audience that you're cutting back print on Mondays and Tuesdays. Have you gotten any feedback already? The switch is set for April, right?

PJ BROWNING:

Yeah. You know what, we wanted to make sure we gave plenty of time. I mean, we've been around a long time, and we love our print readers. But we wanted to ensure our announcement allowed enough time for digital discovery meetings.



We've planned multiple digital discovery meetings per week. We have virtual sessions, in-person sessions all over the Tri-County area, inviting our readers to join and ask questions about the ePaper.

Just within the first few days, we already have 160 people signed up for these digital discovery sessions.

MIKE BLINDER:

This reminds me of when Walter Hussman launched his iPad initiative in Arkansas—he held meetings all over the state. You're actually bringing people into a room and showing them how to read the flipbook version?

PJ BROWNING:

We did a printed guide on the day we announced the change, detailing how to use the ePaper. Then, we'll follow that up with the digital discovery sessions.

All in all, I would say it's been fairly quiet for a transition like this. I think it's because we waited long enough to ensure people were already becoming digitally inclined.

That being said, you always have that one hardcore print subscriber who, if you change *anything*, is going to be upset.

MIKE BLINDER:

Let me dive into this on a number of levels. We have the same conundrum here at *E&P*, where my flipbook version is very popular. I have more readers of *E&P Magazine* online, but I feature it heavily all over the website, on the app—technically more than in print. But we still print, and as a publisher, it's very expensive. The margins aren't great. I'm sure you're feeling the same thing nowadays, right?

Correct me if I'm wrong—the auditing counts the flipbook subscriber as a subscriber, right?

PJ BROWNING:

Yeah. I mean, for us, our digital subscription—our ePaper subscriber—is critically important to us.

MIKE BLINDER:

And is that number good?

PJ BROWNING:

We waited until it actually surpassed our home delivery subscriptions. If we had done this a few years ago, we wouldn't have been ready. The technology now tells us every day, every month, exactly how many of our print readers have engaged with the ePaper. We have a clearer line of sight than we did before for this transition.

So I'm actually excited about it, and I've had several readers express excitement as well. We've added additional content on Mondays and Tuesdays to the paper, trying to do everything right.



Of course, you always get feedback that you take to heart. One concern was about the puzzles on Mondays and Tuesdays—some readers said, *What am I going to do if I can't print them?* So, we're going to put those puzzles in the Sunday edition.

We find ways to make sure our readers are happy. I call it the *listening tour*—we've given ourselves ample time to listen.

MIKE BLINDER:

What about the advertising community? I have very long-term print advertisers who still proudly take that back page and want that inside front cover. I know I'm a B2B publication, and you're a newspaper, but how is the advertising community reacting to this?

PJ BROWNING:

We picked Monday and Tuesday for a reason. Those are our lowest advertising days. And gosh, Mike, I remember the days when we'd try to sell quarter-page or full-page ads on Mondays and Tuesdays just to beef up the revenue.

So, these two days were picked strategically, and they really are not strong advertising days.

MIKE BLINDER:

You have a state-of-the-art press facility in North Charleston, don't you? Is it modern? When was it constructed? Is commercial printing a big part of your top line?

PJ BROWNING:

Yeah, and all of our expansion markets also have a print component, so we're not getting out of the print business.

We brought that press in during 2021. It's a 2008 Goss Magnum press that came over from Sweden. It's a great press for us—smaller in scale compared to our old facility, but that was intentional, knowing the future of where we were going with printing.

That being said, we still print all of our community newspapers, and we have commercial printing customers throughout South Carolina.

MIKE BLINDER:

Well, I have to ask—and you have to understand, I'm a board member of the International Newspaper Group, *ING*. Not because I know anything about presses—I don't even know what a litho plate is. I was an ad guy for 20-some years. But we host their awards every year, so that's why I'm on the board.

One of the questions I wanted to ask is—are you downsizing at all? Is the facility still operating at capacity? Is everyone keeping their jobs?

PJ BROWNING:

They are. And, you know, timing is everything. We had a press retirement at the end of the year, so while we won't backfill that position, we won't be laying anyone off either.



We have enough commercial printing to keep us set. No one is losing their job. Even our carriers—actually, some of them were thrilled. A few said, *We finally get two days off in a row!* That was important to them.

We also had conversations with carriers about route optimization. Some will need rate adjustments based on their delivery zones, but we factored all of that into our analysis.

MIKE BLINDER:

Alright, last time you were on the program, we discussed your expansion into Columbia, Myrtle Beach, and Greenville. Those expansions, correct me if I'm wrong, are digital-only, right?

You don't have a print product in those markets, do you?

PJ BROWNING:

Well, we actually do.

We have a *monthly* print product in Greenville and Spartanburg. We'll also have a monthly print product in our Rock Hill expansion. In Myrtle Beach, we also have a monthly print publication.

In Columbia, we purchased the *Free Times* back in 2015, which is a weekly tabloid. So, technically, we are weekly in Columbia with the *Post and Courier Free Times*.

But all of that being said, these are absolutely digitally focused operations.

We just launched a daily *e-edition* on February 6th and 7th in Greenville, Spartanburg, and Columbia.

MIKE BLINDER:

That's what I was going to ask you about. So, you're doing a daily flipbook e-edition, like how we do *E&P Magazine* monthly.

I like doing it that way because it differentiates us—I'm not a blog, I'm a magazine, and I think that's an important distinction.

So now you have that *daily record* for the community in an e-edition. You're a big believer in that, then?

PJ BROWNING:

Absolutely. It's all about content delivery. We've always said *content is king*, but at a recent conference, I heard someone say, *Platforms are King Kong*. And that's true.

If content is king, then the platforms are King Kong—it's about figuring out where people want to read that content.



One of my favorite comments from a print reader who uses our ePaper was, *The only thing I would like to see you add is the sound of turning the page.*

When you're on my e-edition—because he said he just loves the sound of turning the page on a real newspaper. So, you know, it's the same content, but some people prefer a finite reading experience, and that comes with either an ePaper or a physical newspaper.

MIKE BLINDER:

We're running out of time—soon the music's gonna play us off.

You are, I hope you don't mind me saying, a marquee guest. You're a mover and shaker in this legacy industry, which is obviously very digitally focused, and there is no better operation than yours. There's a reason why you're keynoting at Burrell—you're so innovative.

You're down there in Charleston, where you still haven't lost that legacy brand. Where do you see print going in the future? Do you see more publishers adopting this kind of strategy, focusing more on digital?

Put on that crystal ball—or your thinking cap—and give us your prognostication, if you don't mind.

PJ BROWNING:

Yeah, I mean, I think for those that haven't made that switch yet... For us, we decided to stay with carrier delivery and not go with postal, which is probably a whole other segment, a whole other discussion.

MIKE BLINDER:

That's a whole other session.

PJ BROWNING:

Right. But I think it was important for us to stay with carrier delivery, and we had a lot of questions around that.

From a financial modeling standpoint, I think it's a necessity. But I also think that customers are getting more and more digitally inclined—most people have a smartphone today. So, yeah, I feel like the change to five days will have minimal impact.

MIKE BLINDER:

And you're very good at branding yourself as a newspaper, even with such a strong digital focus. As you likely know, some publishers don't even want to discuss that—they push their hundred-year-old masthead to the side and go fully modern.

Do you still feel it's important to maintain that legacy backbone in today's ecosystem?

PJ BROWNING:

Yeah, it is for us.



I'll tell you, in South Carolina, the *Post and Courier* brand is everything, right? It's always been about content for us.

If we were a weak brand with weak content, maybe we'd have a different discussion about rebranding. But we've always been known for our content, and that award-winning content makes a difference in the communities we serve.

That's what has carried us—that's our legacy.

MIKE BLINDER:

PJ Browning, president of the newspaper division at Evening Post Publishing—of course, keynoter at Burrell, *da da da*—but more importantly, the 2019 *E&P* Publisher of the Year.

That was my first year as publisher, and you were my first POY.

Thank you so much for your valuable time. We're gonna check in with you after this shift to see how things are going, and we truly appreciate you being part of the program.

PJ BROWNING:

Thanks for having me. Take care.