

National Journal Communications Council

**Media  
University**

AMU 421: Digital Friendly Media Relations

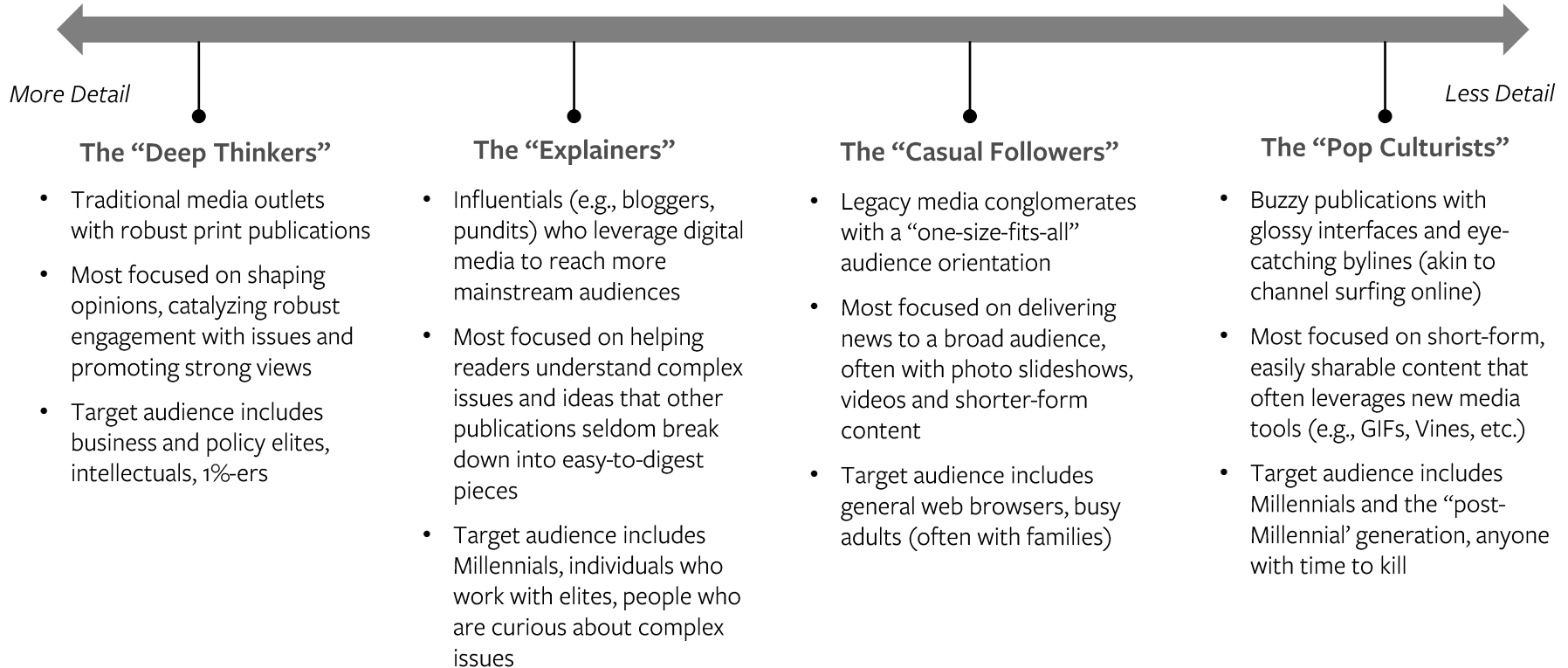
# The Changing Landscape of Newsrooms

March 24, 2015

# Understand the Priorities of Digital Media Providers

Niche-ification of Online Journalism Inspires Tailored Approach to Content Output for Media Companies

Narrative Depth Shaped by Audience Focus and Dictates Final Product



## Relevant Examples



# Age of Publication Does Not Imply Approach to Journalism

Charting Media Outlets According to Narrative Depth and Age Offers Window Into Strategic Ambitions



## “Explainers”

- Grew out of an absence of content from the “Deep Thinkers” that explained issues
- Sprung from more casual fare that didn’t engage with issues rigorously enough

## “Deep Thinkers”

- Defined by the oldest publications of record most interested in shaping opinions
- Comprise the “gold standard” of analytic rigor and top-of-mind issue engagement

## “Casual Followers”

- Formed as the brainchild of larger media or tech conglomerates that want a piece of the news pie
- Geared toward providing “breaking news,” top stories and a summary of issues most people should know about (no depth needed)

## “Pop Culturists”

- Emerged from a “Casual Followers” strategy that instead sought to reach younger readers
- Less concerned with explaining issues and more concerned with bottling the “zeitgeist”

# Shrinking News Cycle Influences Content Delivery Online

Publications Style Content to Combat Decreasing Relevance of Stories Over Time

Know the “Big Four” Popular Forms of Online Content

Long-form Pieces for Immersive Stories

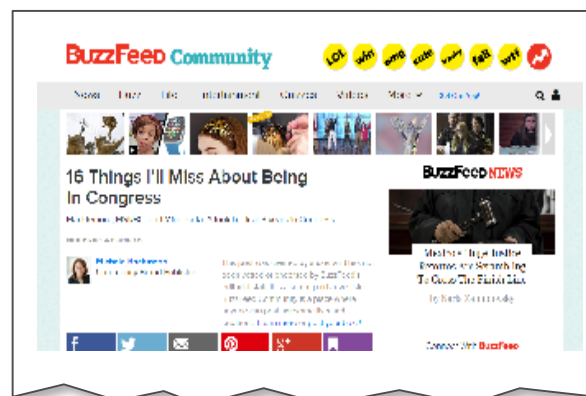
*The Atlantic, “What ISIS Really Wants”*



✓ Used by “Deep Thinkers” and “Explainers”

Listicles for Engaging, Shareable Themes

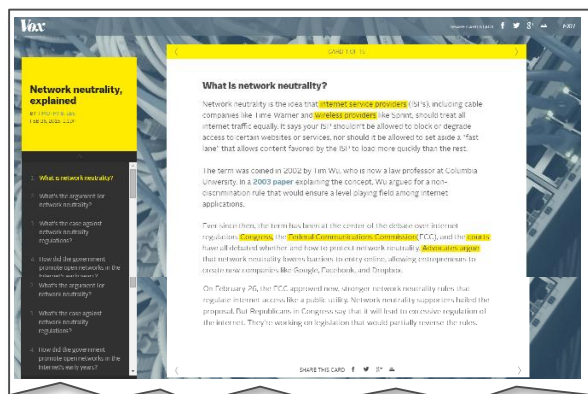
*BuzzFeed, “16 Things I’ll Miss About Being in Congress”*



✓ Used by “Casual Followers” and “Pop Culturists”

Flashcards for Detailed Outlines and Explanations

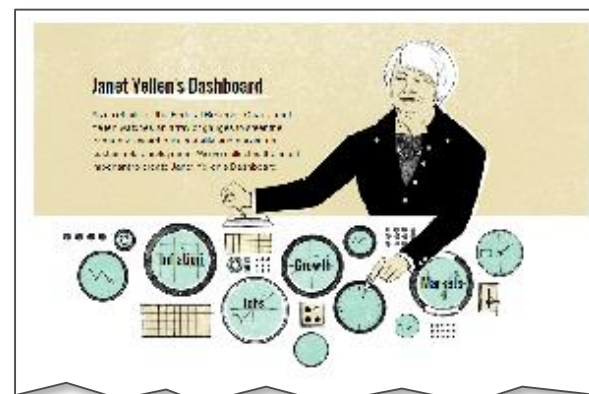
*Vox, “What is Network Neutrality?”*



✓ Used by “Explainers” and “Pop Culturists”

Infographics for Interactive Visual Engagement

*Brookings Institution, “Janet Yellen’s Dashboard”*



✓ Used by “Deep Thinkers” and “Casual Followers”

# Successful Content Delivery Connects Back to Revenue

Metrics and Audience Engagement Techniques Ultimately Aimed Toward Increasing Revenue Streams

Quizzes in Focus: “Start with the End in Mind”

## Straight-Sell Advertising Model

Best for Maximizing Depth, Engagement



National Journal quiz, “The Ultimate Washington Wonk Quiz”

- Ads rely on a straightforward, “no frills” presentation
- Focus is on interactive content but the ads seamlessly fit in alongside primary material (all to the left) for maximum engagement potential
- Most effective for deepening on-site engagement, generating loyalty for publications

## Fully-Sponsored Model

Best for Generating Clicks, Sharing

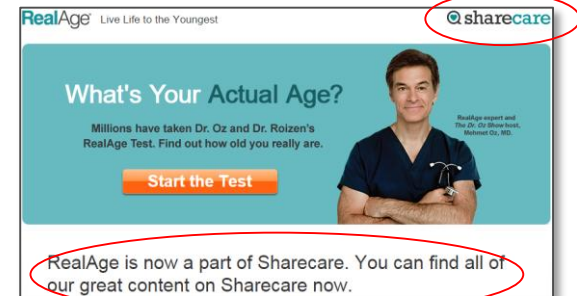


BuzzFeed quiz, “How Would You Die in Game of Thrones?”

- Ad is entirely sponsored by client (ex: HBO), which provides relevant source material and receives help from content creator to mold into ideal format
- Execution puts brand front-and-center, with photos, links to more robust source material
- Most effective for prompting users to share within networks, generating buzz

## Lead Generation Model

Best for Understanding User Behavior, Data Collection



Real Age quiz (sponsored by ShareCare), “What’s Your Actual Age?”

- Ad encourages users to provide important information (e.g., email addresses, health details, business features) in exchange for answers to burning questions
- Execution promotes brand but allows it to recede into the background as the assessment goes on (data is main goal)
- Most effective for learning 1) who target audiences are and 2) what they want/need

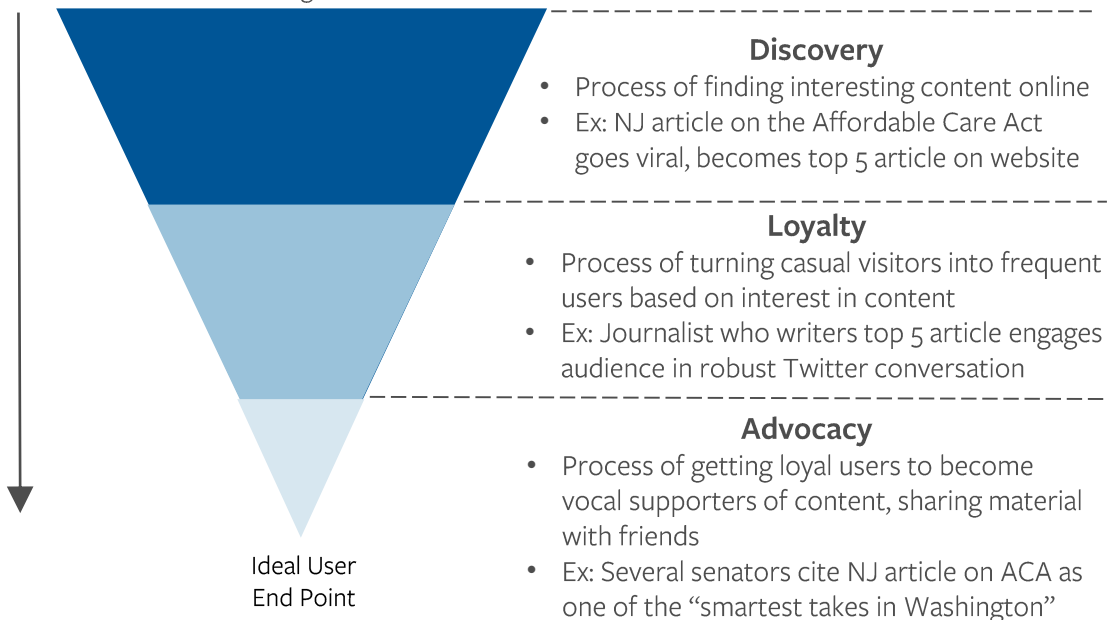


# Newsrooms Adopting Diversified Audience Engagement Strategy

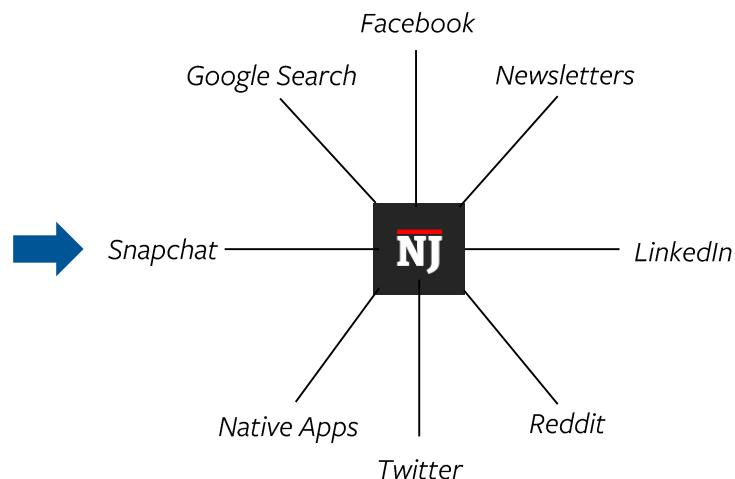
Journalists Must Leverage Multiple Platforms to Maximize Relationships with Online Communities

Recognize the Three Key Elements  
of Cultivating a Sustainable Audience....

Typical User  
Starting Point



...And Give Your Community a Mix of  
Platforms for Consistent Engagement



## No More “Gaming the System”

**How BuzzFeed Evolved:** “When someone asks you, ‘what is your digital strategy’ and you respond, ‘I’m on Facebook,’ **that’s not a strategy.** Take BuzzFeed, which started by winning the Facebook game, then built up direct distribution channels under its control so that it wouldn’t be so dependent on a constantly-shifting Facebook interface, pushed media through new channels (email, apps, etc.) and now has a multifaceted and sustainable audience.” – Senior Leader, *National Journal*

# Rise of the “Aggregators” Requires Flexible Take on Journalism

Native Online Platforms More Willing to Repackage Pre-Existing Content than Traditional Outlets

## New Media Molds Material Found Online Into Preferred Package

*Pull Content from Social Media or Lesser-Known Websites...*



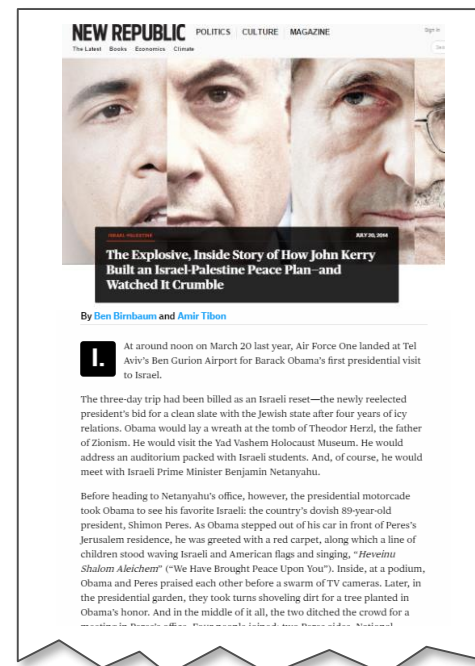
*...And Transpose Resulting Content into Acceptable Format (“Cut Out the Middleman”)*



- Journalists devote portion of beat to scanning known aggregators for content (e.g., Reddit, Nedhardy)
- Once desirable content is found, only best aspects of original material carry over to main website
- In most cases, photos and videos are the crux of the article (focal point of piece)

## Traditional Media Primarily Relies on Interviews and Established Relationships

*Mine Contacts for Insights and Perspectives on Key Issues*



- Once access achieved, pull-quotes and anecdotes support analysis
- Photos and videos add to text but do not supplant text (not focal point of piece)

# Quizzes Present Interactive Approach to Working with New Media

Focus on Virality Should Inspire Associations to Think Creatively About Engagement Opportunities

Attract Users with Engaging Title and Theme...

...Build Suspense with Random Yet Related Questions...

...And End with a Satisfying, Share-worthy Payoff



## Potential Quiz Ideas for Associations



- ✓ "From Plisners to Pale Ales: Which Beer Personifies You?"
- ✓ "How Well Do You Know That Beer?"
- ✓ "Who Owns These Famous Beer Brands?"



- ✓ "Is One of These Experimental Planes Your Spirit Animal?"
- ✓ "Which Pilot from Top Gun Are You?"
- ✓ "Would One of These Famous Pioneers in Flight Be Your BFFL?"



- ✓ "Are You More ER or Grey's Anatomy?"
- ✓ "Do You Know What These Obscure Doctors Specialize In?"
- ✓ "Which Fictional Super Surgeon Would You Trust to Save Your Life?"

### Case in Brief

**Profiled Piece:** BuzzFeed quiz, "Can We Guess If You're Liberal or Conservative?"  
**Organization Type:** Media Company  
**Format:** Interactive quiz

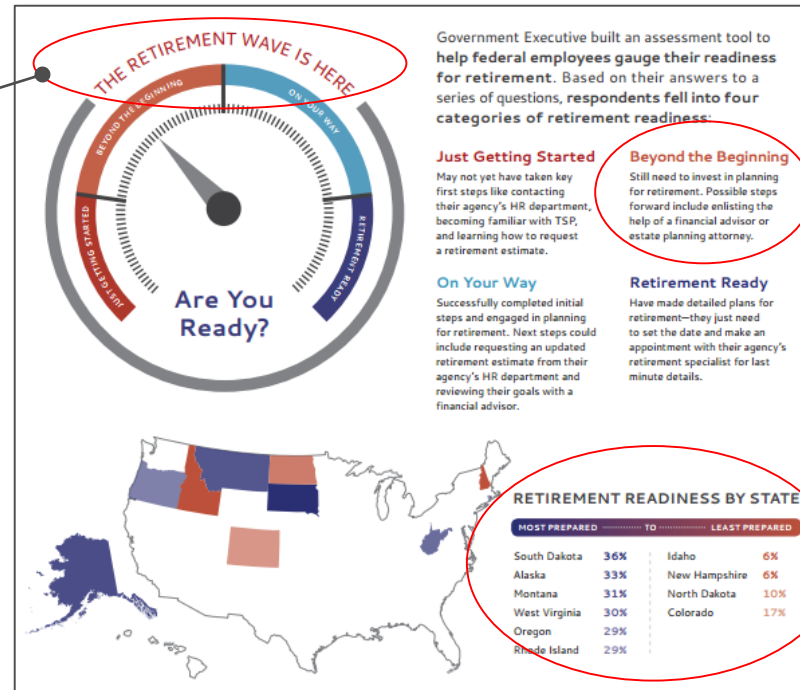


# Assessments Create Helpful Data Archive

Moving Beyond the Quiz, Assessments Provide Window Into Consumer Behavior

Engaging Assessments Tell Users Something About Themselves and Collect Useful Information

Helpful infographics draw attention to key takeaways and metrics



Four categories provide insight into retirement readiness (a result which can be converted into useful data)

Retirement readiness described on a state-by-state level to see how respondents compare to others (results also rich in data that can be leveraged by multiple parties)

- Assessments pull sensitive information from users and allow content creators to create a robust data set that can be leveraged in several ways (sold to member companies, used to target particular members within an association, etc.)
- Successful assessments generate broad interest, have an appealing interface and connect with readers on an emotional level, raising ads that material will be shared across audiences

## Case in Brief

Government  
Executive

**Profiled Story:** Government Executive assessment, "Are You Ready to Retire?"

**Organization Type:** Media Company

**Format:** Self-Assessment

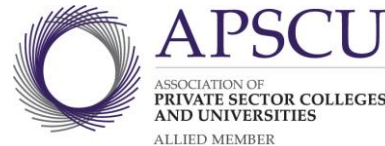
# Apply Assessments to Associations

Associations Should Consider Creative Partnerships with Media Companies to Produce Value-Added Assessments

## Potential Assessment Ideas for Selected Associations



- ✓ “How Much Do You Need to Retire?”
- ✓ “Are You Eating the Right Foods After 65?”



- ✓ “How Can You Reduce Your Student Debt Burden?”
- ✓ “What Degree Do You Need for Success in Your Field?”



- ✓ “All Clear? How Did Your EMT Perform, And What Everyone Should Know About the Modern Ambulance”



- ✓ “Is Your Small Business Prepared for the Affordable Care Act?”
- ✓ “Creative Disruption: How is Globalization Impacting Your Company?”

### Tying the Strategic Pieces Together

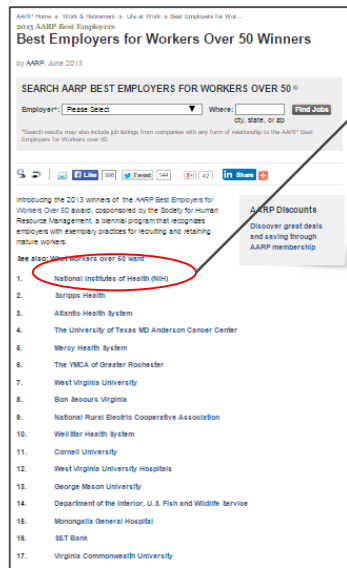
- ✓ **Bringing Members Into the Fold:** Think of ways to galvanize membership on topics of shared interest
- ✓ **Reconciling Potential Questions with Desired End Results:** Understand how each question of an assessment contributes to building the data set (e.g., what data points will each question collect, what data points are we most interested in knowing, etc.)
- ✓ **Reinforcing the Bottom Line:** Remember the value for content creators (e.g., data can be leveraged for advertising revenue, information can be sold to third parties, etc.)
- ✓ **Pinpointing the Right Partners at the Right Time:** Recognize that media partnerships can be a helpful way to amplify quiz reach insofar as selected media partners share similar ambitions, target audiences, etc. and the time has been invested to establish the appropriate relationship



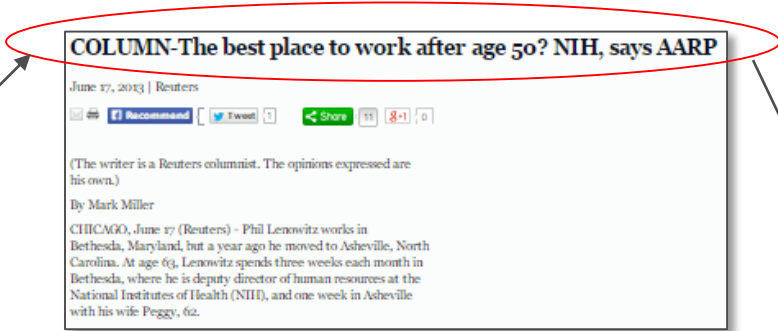
# Helping the Writers Help You

## Willingness to Provide Raw Data Can Result in Best Opportunities for Journalist Engagement

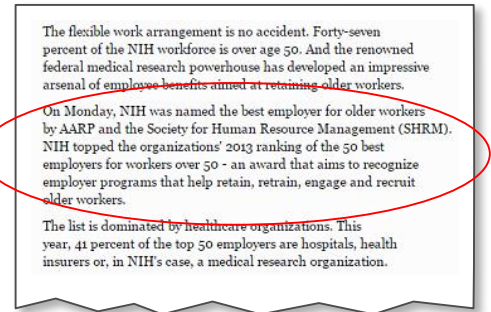
### 1. Providing Easy-to-Digest Material Inspires Journalists



### 2. Inspiration Leads to Articles Rooted in Association’s Perspective



### 3. Selected Pull-Quotes Cite Association’s Ideas Directly



### Key Takeaways in Focus: AARP

- ✓ **Create the Data Set:** AARP releases list of “Best Employers for Workers Over 50”
- ✓ **Grab the Attention of Media Outlets:** Chicago Tribune takes notice (detailed, easy-to-digest survey produced by recognized thought leader), and journalist decides to write piece focused on the prevalence of healthcare companies on the list
- ✓ **Leverage Influentials:** AARP makes itself available for more detailed discussion and offers a sufficiently senior member of its leadership to comment on elements of the list (in this case, a vice president in charge of financial security)

### Unlocking the Archive

“...A certain kind of journalist would prefer to get access to a database or spreadsheet of information rather than call an expert and get an interpretation of the numbers without having access to them. Let’s say the Census comes out with a new report on Millennial data – where we live, how much we earn, etc. The Census will often send me an email saying, ‘would you like to talk to an expert right now about what she considers interesting,’ and my first reaction is often: ‘Not really! I would like you to send me the data so that I can go through it myself, and then when I find a story in there that merits commentary, I will reach out.’” – Senior Editor, *The Atlantic*



# Arm Time-Strapped Journalists with Vital Information

Younger Reporters Staffed on Numerous Beats Require Increased Emphasis on Accessible, Relevant Material

Refer to the Journalist Engagement Checklist to Better Assess What Writers Need  
Based on Changing Newsroom Dynamics

Key Process Consideration	Yes	No
1. Does the prospective journalist understand our industry and the needs of our member organizations?		
2. Has the prospective journalist ever written an article on our industry? (Additional detail: If so, how did that article paint our work?)		
3. Does the prospective journalist have substantial writing experience?		
4. Do we know how the prospective journalist prefers to learn more about a particular subject (e.g., phone calls with relevant experts, bulleted lists, etc.)?		
5. Do our standard briefing materials (e.g., press releases) do a good job of highlighting key information in a straightforward, easily digestible fashion?		
6. Do we feel confident enough about our public-facing presence (e.g., website, contact information availability, etc.) that prospective journalists see few barriers to engaging with relevant thought leaders within our organization?		

## In Their Own Words

“Journalists are looking for a story....When associations consider journalists as potential partners in thinking about an issue that faces their industry, they have to remember that it’s about what [the journalists] want, not about what [the association] wants. You can’t try to sell them on your issue.” – Senior Leader, *National Journal*

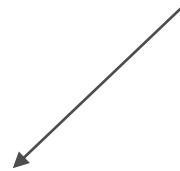
# Amplify the Efforts of Social Media Focused-Writers

Forced to Promote Their Own Work, Help Journalists Build Online Communities by Leveraging Association Channels

## 1. Pinpoint Journalists of Interest



- Journalists must now devote time to self-promotion (“piece doesn’t end when you hit publish”)
- Associations must, in turn, take advantage of the ability to see a journalist’s entire work product online (reflecting their views and interests) and establish relationships on the basis of common ground and mutual understanding



## 2. Deploy Association Social Media Account to Amplify Journalists’ Messaging



- Organizations with broad membership can help journalists promote content using social media accounts
- Ex: AFGE retweets journalist’s article analyzing the pros and cons of higher pensions for government employees



## 3. Use Personal Social Media Account to Initiate Direct Contact and Demonstrate Subject-Matter Expertise



- Catalyze genuine personal relationship by responding to journalists using private accounts
- Ex: AFGE comms professional tweets thoughtful opinion to journalist regarding her article, and journalist in turn uses ideas as source material for future work, establishing credibility





# Going Local is a Growing Success

Associations Should Harness Member Stories at the Local Level for National Amplification

## Potential Partnership in Focus



### 1. Launch Campaign

- American Gas Association partners with Georgetown University to sponsor contest
- Award goes to community which creates most effective energy reduction plan

### 2. Transfer to Web

- Award and stakes are posted online on AGA website
- Association provides page to follow developments with campaign over time

### 3. Engage with Publication

- NPR takes interest in local implications of story in relevant communities
- Publication devotes a series of articles to how selected participating communities tackle challenge

### 4. Spread the Word

- Ongoing reports allow for consistent engagement with narrative (binge on content)
- NPR narratives link back to AGA website and enhance attention to project while catalyzing sharing opportunities

## What Makes the Local Such Fertile Ground for NPR?

**Opportunity to Fill Gaps in National Coverage:** “To me, local is the big play, because local commercial radio has abandoned the local market. Local newspapers are withering or sometimes dying. The big national media companies, including excellent ones like *The New York Times*, cannot afford to be covering every single community. So that leaves a big, gaping hole to serve Americans’ local coverage.” – Vivian Schiller, NPR CEO

**Local is the Future of Media (and Advertising):** “Despite globalization, hyperlocal information is very valuable both to people and advertisers. In the coming years, we will be seeing the rise of a new way to look at information - geography. Inspired by utility and the promise of hyperlocal advertising, startups are racing to build businesses that deliver highly relevant, local information to users.” – Alex Iskold, AdaptiveBlue CEO

# Don't Underestimate the Power of the Native Ad

When Executed Properly, Native Ads Offer Direct and Authentic Links to Target Audiences

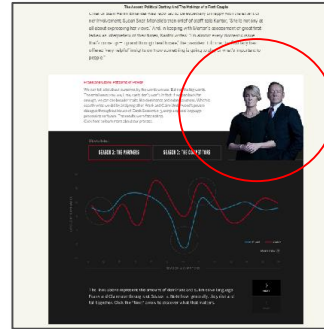
## Dissecting the Anatomy of a Successful Native Ad

Step #1: Hook the Reader



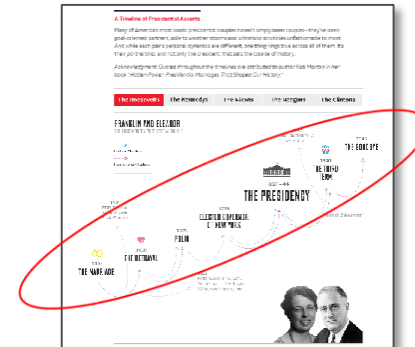
- Topic aligns with themes that would be interesting to a publication's readers (politics, interpersonal relationships, historical trends)
- Bold presentation (spotlighting the strong title) captures audience attention, signaling this is no standard piece of content

Step #2: Keep the Brand Front and Center



- Content creators find ideal spots for placing references to sponsored content in other parts of website and/or interspersed within native ad
- References to show and main characters (e.g., Frank and Claire's photo with corresponding exposition) don't seem contrived but remind readers of initial inspiration for content

Step #3: Leverage Multimedia Tools



- Writers take advantage of the best part of the online experience, which lies in maximizing graphical content
- Photos, videos and infographics (i.e., "A Timeline of Presidential Ascents") enhance engagement and offer elements that readers may be willing to share with others, expanding the available audience beyond readership

### Step #4: Keep Narrative Voice Consistent with Audience Expectations

**Why Native Ads Work:** "We know that banners and boxes don't work and that native ads do work, **but they won't work if they feel like ads.** We can talk to our audience better than others can, and we can create content that will be clearly marked as advertising but with the voice, sensibility and feel of *Atlantic* content."— Senior Leader, *The Atlantic*

### Case in Brief

The Atlantic +



**Profiled Story:** The Atlantic and Netflix, "The Ascent: Political Destiny and the Makings of a First Couple" article  
**Organization Types:** Media Companies  
**Format:** Immersive story with photos, videos and infographics

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