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Daily News layoffs par for the course

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Aug 14, 2018

Ever since I began on my path to a career in journalism, I've heard a near constant refrain about the death of print media and that there's no future to be found in the field. It was discouraging to hear, particularly in light of opting for a profession that already had a reputation of low pay and a lot of competition for jobs.

In the 11 years since I was a freshman in Bloomington, I've heard a number of stories about layoffs and the general struggle of print to survive. The most recent addition to that genre is easily the most dispiriting.

On July 23, the staff of the *New York Daily News* received an email informing them that Tronc, the paper's owner, planned to restructure the newsroom — an appropriately cool and emotionally detached euphemism for firing reporters. Those who got the axe were let go immediately, though per the email, they will continue to be paid for the next 90 days and be eligible for transitional benefits after that.

The reduction in staff comes less than a year after Tronc purchased the *Daily News* for \$1 from billionaire Mort Zuckerman.

At a meeting the day after the layoffs were announced, there appeared to be no strategy behind the move, per a July 24 *Daily Beast* article that gave some details of an editorial staff meeting a day earlier.

"When a top executive from frugal newspaper giant Tronc was asked Tuesday about the specific strategy behind Draconian cuts to the *New York Daily News* on Monday, he didn't have an answer."

Tronc executive vice president Grant Whitmore and *Daily News* EIC Robert York struggled at times to explain the strategy behind the cuts.

In an article for *Deadspin*, writer Albert Burneko speculated that the move might have had something to do with the resignation earlier this year of Michael Ferro, who served as chairman of Tronc and left just before allegations of sexual harassment were published.

“As a parting gift, Tronc paid him \$15 million, voluntarily bundling up the total value of a three-year consulting contract into one lump payment expensed against the company’s earnings and putting itself \$14.8 million in the red for the first quarter.”

That’s money that could have gone to pay the wages and healthcare of reporters who focused on local coverage and investigative journalism. When newsrooms are reduced in size, there are only so many issues and subjects that can be covered as resources are stretched thin. Some area is bound to suffer and that can impact public perception of a news organ and potentially impact the bottom line.

Unfortunately, that’s a story that’s all too common these days for newspapers. *The Denver Post* released an editorial in April criticizing Alden Global Capital for the handling of the paper. The Post has seen layoffs and other changes designed for short-term profitability without concern for long-term sustainability.

This doesn’t happen in a vacuum, of course. Newspapers are impacted by changes happening in other industries. Classifieds are less necessary with websites providing the same function at a cheaper price and the related rise of Amazon and downturn of physical retailers means the advertising dollars aren’t there like they were in the golden age of papers. Not to mention the decline in unions makes it difficult for workers to bargain and push back against changes that could negatively impact them.

There is still a need for newspapers, still a need to keep tabs on local government, still a need to tell the stories of locals and still a need to chronicle the feats of sports teams and still a need to cover schools.

The News Measures Research Project analyzed 16,000 news stories in 100 communities with populations ranging from 20,000 to 300,000. The paper found that only 17 percent of the stories were “truly local — that is actually about or having taken place within — the municipality.” Less than half of the stories were produced by local media outlets and only 56 percent of the stories addressed critical information for communities such as education, civic information and emergencies and risks.

Many of the stories dealt with celebrities, YouTube videos and responses to tweets, that’s the type of content that can be found at a myriad of sites. For some news organizations, that’s just the nature of the beast, the need for clicks and engagement and page views to feed the ad revenue.

Thankfully, those aren’t traits that ring true about *The Reporter-Times*. We take pride in filling our front page with local content.

That can be a challenge at times during slow news cycles, but any reporter worth their salt can uncover a story by just walking around for a little bit. People are eminently fascinating once you start talking to them and everyone has a story in them. When it comes to our interior pages, we strive for

stories that, if not local, will still resonate with the lives of our readers. Compared to other papers, we are a small staff — small, but mighty. Sometimes there are challenges when one of our colleagues is out ill or vacation, but it's always *The Reporter-Times*.

It's like what the late Mark E. Smith said about his band, The Fall, which was notorious for a revolving-door cast.

"If it's me and yer granny on bongos, it's The Fall."

No matter the challenge, we'll always be the *Reporter-Times*. It's been that way since 1889, and we plan to keep on keeping on.

Andrew Crowley is a reporter for the Reporter-Times, who covers education and features.