



tiny news  
collective

# Homegrown Advertising: Tips for Small News Publishers Building Advertising Programs

Tuesday, Feb. 25 at 12 p.m. PST / 3 p.m. EST

# Welcome!



**Madison Karas**  
Project Manager for R&D  
*Tiny News Collective*



**Erica Perel**  
Operations Director  
*Tiny News Collective*



**Amy Bushatz**  
Founder and Editor  
*The Mat-Su Sentinel*



**Ken Schneck**  
Editor  
*The Buckeye Flame*

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I AM A....

Publisher

Technologist

Academic

Journalism support professional

Introduce yourself in  
the chat! 

# House rules

Community Code of Conduct



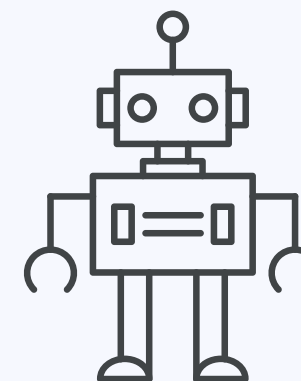
Use the chat to drop questions, comments or responses. Be respectful of presenters and attendees.

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Use Chatham House rules for participant input. Please share and attribute information from us!

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We will be recording this webinar; AI recording bots are OK. We'll share slides afterwards.

# Today's agenda

- 01 Welcome & Introductions
- 02 Research Overview
- 03 Checklist for starting ads sales
- 04 Tips and Ideas for Starting
- 05 Q&A w/ Publishers



# Full report

## Part 1

Findings from research with early-stage and mature small, independent local news publishers across the United States.

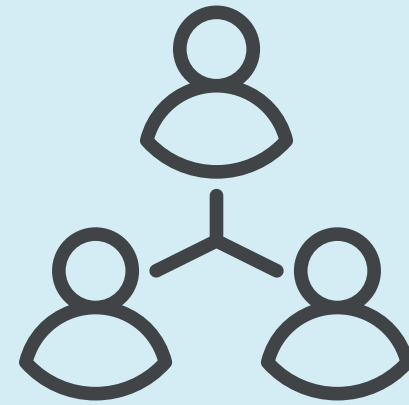
## Part 2

Actionable advice, resources and information for news publishers, including a checklist for starting an advertising program.

<https://bit.ly/homegrownads>

# Major themes

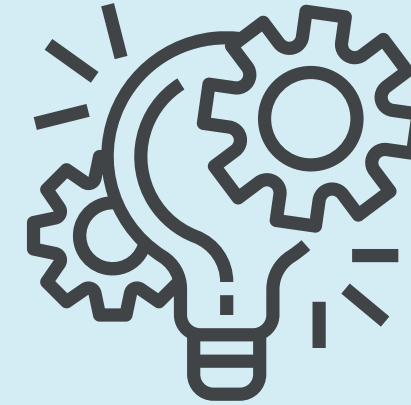
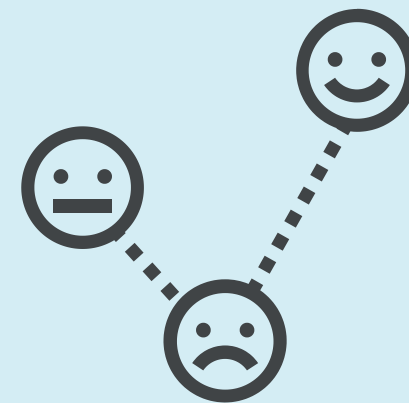
**Organizational readiness is a hurdle**  
89% of news entrepreneurs cited a lack of staff and capacity that precludes them from being ready to accept even in-bound leads.



**Articulating a unique value proposition is key**  
Publishers don't try to compete with Google or Meta. They lean into a trusted relationship with a desirable audience.



**Indie pubs seek right-sized solutions**  
They want ad/sponsorship programs that reflect the style and values of their news organizations, but have concerns about intrusive advertising, poor UX or editorial independence.



**Technology can be a stumbling block**  
Adtech remains a confusing landscape. Publishers lack time to learn platforms and default to low-tech, manual systems.



**Founder-led sales are both a challenge and an opportunity**  
Founders have capacity issues but experts say they are the best candidates for telling their story to marketers.



**Public policy ad efforts need support**  
Lobbying efforts would direct government ad spending toward local news, but without targeted support, small publishers won't be able to capture those dollars.

# Checklist for starting ad sales

## Checklist for launching an advertising program

Do you already have potential advertisers reaching out, but are unsure what you need to get started with ad sales? Are you wondering what minimum requirements your publication needs in place to make your first ad sale? Here's what publishers, ad sales and journalism technology professionals feel you need.

### Organizational

- A policy of what types of advertisers your publication will and won't sell to, and what types of advertising or sponsorships you will and won't accept (*See our section on Organizational Readiness in Part One for more about creating a policy and examples*)
- Knowledge of how you will report advertising income for tax purposes
- An understanding of any requirements, local regulations or prohibitions on special cases like native advertising, endorsements or advertisements for gambling, cannabis, alcohol or firearms
- A plan for who on your team will manage the ad sales process and production and how often
- A willingness to start experimenting with ad sales and lead generation techniques and methods within your physical and digital communities
- Knowledge about the size of potential audiences that an advertiser could reach by doing business with you (your email newsletter list size, your social media audiences or print circulation) (*See an example of that on [QCity Metro](#)*)

### Technology and workflow

- A plan of action for how you will offer ad spots in your product, whether it's an image and text spot in your newsletter, a spot on your website or in a print product
- A process (could be a spreadsheet, Airtable or Excel file) or a CRM (customer relationship management) system to keep track of advertising opportunities and sales
- An ad schedule to manage inventory and placements, creatives (that could be combined with your ad sales tracker when starting out — basically a system for seeing what ad spaces you have available and when)
- A media kit to showcase advertising opportunities to potential clients, if you have multiple ad spots (*See examples of that on [Taos News](#), [Chicago Reader](#), and [Illinois Eagle](#).*)
- An advertising inquiry contact method or page to make it easy for advertisers to reach out
- An understanding of what analytics, performance or impact metrics you may be able to offer your advertiser on their campaign (click-through metrics, pickup rates, etc.)

### Financial

- A contract template/insertion order for advertising agreements
- A billing system to process advertisers' payments
- Benchmarking knowledge of competitive ad pricing for advertising units in your local jurisdiction (whether from other media, commerce chambers, etc.)



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# Tips for getting started



# Getting the ball rolling

## **You can start with a small audience**

Don't get caught up in a numbers game waiting to have a large newsletter audience or large number of members before trying to monetize it for ads. Experts say you can start with an audience of just 500-1000 newsletter registrants.

## **Don't overcomplicate it**

You don't need multiple dynamic advertising spots on your website or newsletter to launch your advertising program — you could start with a single advertising spot — such as a leaderboard ad or just an image, link and text somewhere in your digital products — and experiment with selling it to influence how you build.

## **Make it part of your routine**

Whether it's just you or a small team of you, carve out regular time in your publication's schedule to dedicate to ad sales — even if it's once a week or month.

# Strategies to find advertisers

## Create an interest form

Set up an interest form for advertisers to fill out with information about their potential advertisement, instead of just having an advertising contact email or page on your website. This can kick-start the sales process by reducing back-and-forth.

## Find a local multiplatform partner

Smaller publications with only one or two channels through which to offer advertising could look to local radio stations or magazines to find a partner to offer multiplatform packaging. This can lead to larger and more lucrative deals for all outlets involved.

## Find your local version of national chains

Reaching out to local branches of national brands can be a good start for publishers to develop recurring or longer-term advertising or sponsorship campaigns, or for those who encounter tight ad spend budgets with other local businesses. Examples: hospitals, YMCAs, cannabis businesses

SERVING 40,000 READERS IN RED BANK, MIDDLETOWN, LITTLE SILVER AND FAIR HAVEN

**redbankgreen**  
For 100 years.

**Get a week of free advertising on redbankgreen**

First Name

Last Name

Email Address (Required)

Phone Number

Message

Sweet, Let's Do It

There's no fine print

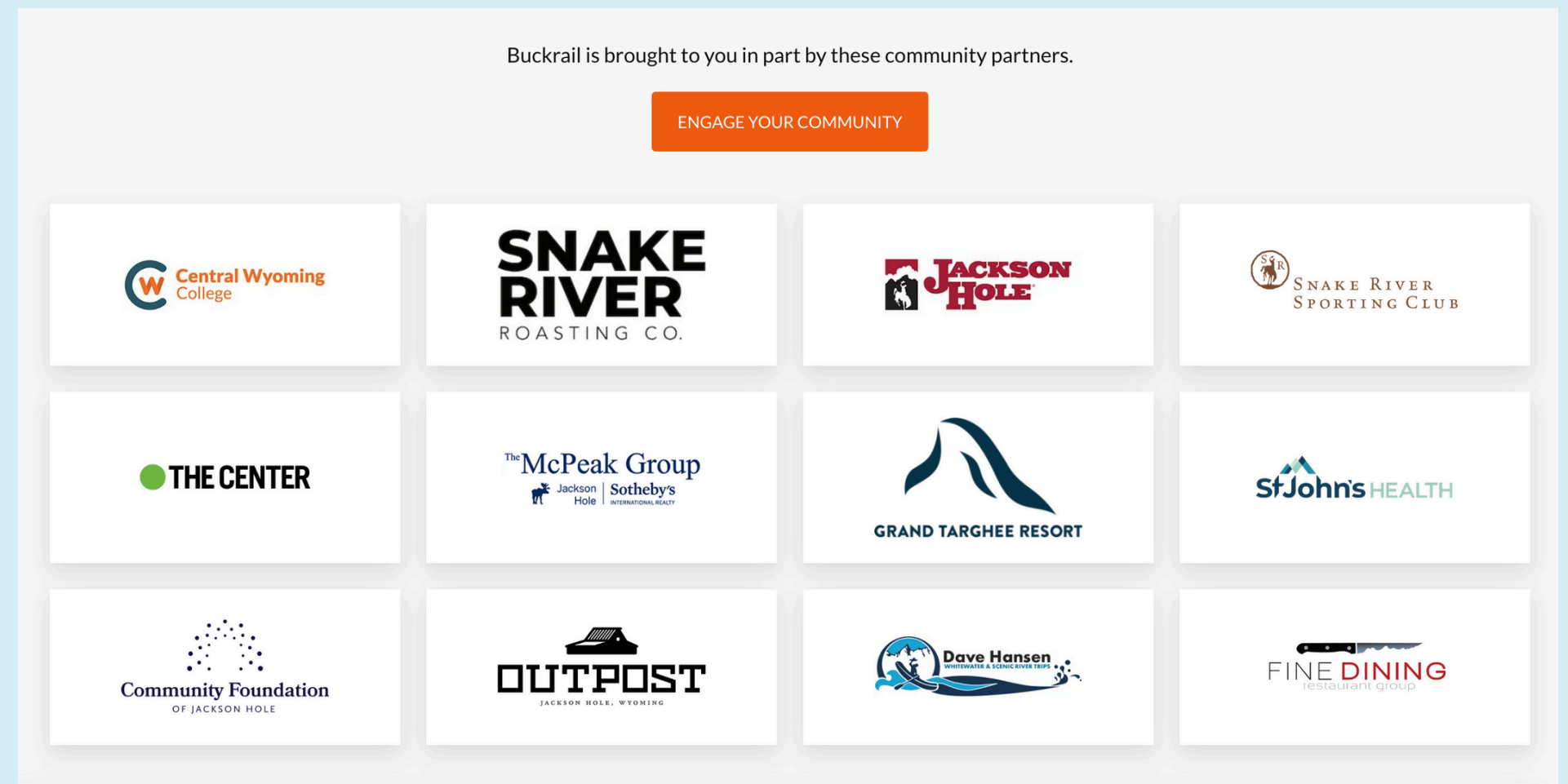
*The lead-generation interest form for prospective advertisers on redbankgreen's website*

*Credit: [redbankgreen](#)*

# Strategies with ad products

## Offer multiformat, packaged ad slots

Offer advertisers multiple ways to show up on your site. One example of this is on Buckrail.com, which has packages that include traditional display banner advertising in tandem with sponsored branded content, and news topic-specific targeting. A high-value, low-effort component of this is their ‘Community Partners’ program at the bottom of articles.



*An example of the “Community Partners” program on the bottom of a sponsored post section front on Buckrail.  
Credit: Buckrail*

# Strategies with ad products

## Experiment with industry exclusivity

Using and guaranteeing advertisers industry exclusivity over your publication's digital products or specific ad spaces can be a technique to upsell ad packages. This guarantees an advertiser that they will not sell ad space to other clients in their same industry, which allows the advertisers' share of voice on their digital products to stand out.

*Redbankgreen makes use of a "local authority" slot on its website to highlight expertise from local industries.*

*Credit: redbankgreen*

LOCAL AUTHORITY 



**Caryn Cohen**

Partner at Canopy Crossroad  
Dispensary

### ON CANNABIS

- How is Canopy Crossroad's education-focused approach different from that of the typical dispensary?
- I have trouble sleeping. Could cannabis potentially help?
- I'm curious about edibles and gummies. What would I need to know as a first timer?

### Read More →

Caryn is a longtime local and co-owner of Canopy Crossroad, a cannabis dispensary at 9 West Street in Red Bank. She's joined forces with her husband, local friends to bring an authentic, local, values-driven and curated cannabis experience to her community.



CANOPY  
CROSSROAD

9 West Street Red Bank, NJ 07701

# Strategies with ad products

## Create a Best of or Readers' Choice awards

Best of or Readers' Choice contests or competitions recognize local community members or businesses and are popular for generating large sponsorships or advertising packages. These are commonly paired with events to offer awards and can also be an opportunity to grow audience and newsletter sign-ups.



*An award and program from Planeta Venus' 2024 Latino Award Dinner. Credit: Claudia Amaro*

*Performer Daysi Sosa "La Wapa" and Planeta Venus Editor-in-Chief Claudia Amaro at the publication's 2024 Latino Award Dinner.*

*Credit: Claudia Amaro*



**Q&A**

# Q&A



**Amy Bushatz**

Founder and Editor

*The Mat-Su Sentinel*

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**Ken Schneck**

Editor

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# Full report

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## Part 2

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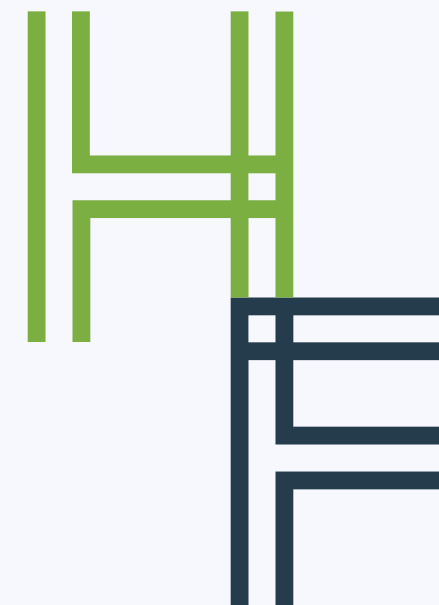
<https://bit.ly/homegrownads>



Andrew Snook of Pattison Media, Chris Baker and Chris Wood of The Taos News, Adam Meyer of Teton Media Works, Vania André of The Haitian Times, Shawn Houck and Matthew Farnsworth of Upslope Media, Joe Amditis of the Center for Cooperative Media, Nick Mathews of the University of Missouri, Ted Williams of Tiny Money, Alice Myerhoff of Alice Myerhoff Consulting, Matthew Snyder of ResponsiveAds, Katie Rethman of Newspack, Mike Shapiro of Hyperlocal News Network, Ron Fields of EmpowerLocal, Tony Varghese and Jake Schonberger of beehiiv, Kenny Katzgrau of redbankgreen and Broadstreet Ads, Alex Kisielewski of Ghost, S. Mitra Kalita of URL Media, Joe Lanane and Allison McIlmoyl of Indiegraf, Abe Brewster of Patch Labs, and Kay Murray and Alexander Papachristou of Lawyers for Reporters.

As well as Tiny News Collective members Nancy Flores of Austin Vida, Amy Bushatz of Mat-Su Sentinel, Delonte Harrod of The Intersection Magazine, Thomas Yocum of Tucker County Observer, Nora Hertel of Project Optimist, Eric Falquero of The 51st, Emmanuel Paul of CaribbeanTelevisionNetwork, Claudia Amaro of Planeta Venus, Emily Christensen of The SHOUT, Cara Kuhlman of Future Tides, Mariela Santos-Muñiz of BoriMás, Luella Brien of Four Points Press, Mark Tyler of Atlantic City Focus, Makeda Easter of the art rebellion, Brit Harley of Five Wards Media, Bunni Elian of The Leveler News, Jeannette Andruss of Spotlight Schools, and Arjuna Soriano of ang diaryo, as well as the many other independent publishers who completed our national survey.

# Thank you!



WILLIAM + FLORA

Hewlett  
Foundation

**Thank you!**