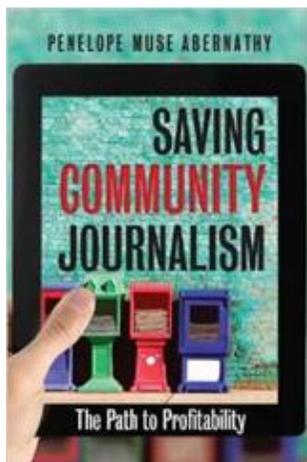


## Lesson Plans for *Saving Community Journalism*



*Saving Community Journalism: The Path to Profitability* is divided into three sections. The first section establishes the imperative for change. The second section focuses on how newspapers must change. The third section considers all the implications of this new paradigm on everything from nonprofits to our educational programs that train future journalists and news executives.

All or select chapters in the book can be used to enrich instruction in these classes: *Introductory News Reporting, Community Journalism, Media Strategy and Business of News, Entrepreneurial Journalism, Foundations of Journalism, Management and Leadership of News Operations, Innovations and Digital Start-Ups.*

Outline of Lesson Plans: The lesson plans for each chapter consist of at least five components that can easily be adapted to slide format for use in the classroom.

- Pullout Quote, summarizing the main theme of the chapter
- Bulleted learning objectives
- Relevant material on this site that can be used to supplement the book
- Suggested supplemental readings, most of which are available free online
- Potential out-of-class assignments
- When applicable, links to other related instructional material, such as the case study of Whiteville, available free through the Case Consortium at Columbia University or a condensed excerpt of Chapter Three, available through *American Journalism Review*

For further information or questions about using material in the book or this website, you can contact Penny Muse Abernathy, the author of *Saving Community Journalism*, at [pennyma@email.unc.edu](mailto:pennyma@email.unc.edu). Your suggestions and questions are welcome.

### Chapter One: Why It Is Critical That Newspapers Survive

#### Pullout Quote

It is hard to overstate the vitally important role that a strong newspaper can play in improving the quality of life for residents of the communities they serve. A good editor can see

the big picture better than just about anyone else in the community – tying together the reality of the present with the possibility of the future.

- *Saving Community Journalism, Why It Is Critical That Newspapers Survive*

#### Objectives/Roadmap:

- Review history of newspapers and the role of accountability journalism
- Establish how newspapers are different from other businesses, based on mission and economics
- Introduce new, more expansive definition of community newspapers
- Understand the three important roles that healthy newspapers play in building strong communities
  - Set the agenda for debate of public policy issues
  - Encourage economic growth and commerce
  - Foster a sense of geographic identity

#### Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Get Started: Lesson 1, *Articulating the Vital Mission of Community Newspapers***  
(focusing on the sections that discuss “accountability journalism” and the three important roles of newspapers)

Downloadable exercises: Exercise 1.1, *Performing a Stakeholder Analysis and Drafting a Mission*

#### Suggested Supplemental Readings:

Chapter 1: “Newspapers,” pp. 34-57. *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in the Broadband Age*. [http://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The\\_Information\\_Needs\\_of\\_Communities.pdf](http://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The_Information_Needs_of_Communities.pdf)

#### Potential Out-of-Class Assignments:

Paper of 500 to 1,000 words: Students can be assigned a community – either geographic (urban neighborhood or county) or ethnic (Latino, for example). Using U.S. Census data, they can identify main trends. For example: Is the community growing? Is it aging? How are most people employed? What is the median household income? How does this compare with the U.S. average? Based on this quick analysis, what does the student consider to be the main challenges the community faces?

Alternative paper: Students can be assigned to read a specific newspaper for a week. What are the major issues that the newspaper covers? How much space in either the print or digital edition is devoted to “accountability journalism” versus covering breaking news and staged events or writing features about people in the community? How well is the paper

performing the historic missions of newspapers: setting the agenda for debate of public policy issues, encouraging regional economic growth and fostering a sense of geographic identity?

## **Chapter Two: Why Newspapers Must Change**

### Pullout Quote

No longer de facto monopolies, community newspapers everywhere have emerged from a 'stodgy' period to find themselves facing new and relentless interlopers. In other words, the industry is not in a cycle from which it will emerge relatively unchanged. Rather, it is in a cyclone. There is a new reality – a 'new normal' – for the newspaper industry.

- *Saving Community Journalism, Why Newspapers Must Change*

### Objectives/Roadmap:

- Introduce the concepts of disruptive innovation and creative destruction
- Understand how the economics of the newspaper industry has changed in recent years
- Establish the new threats to the cost and revenue structure of newspapers
- Understand why newspapers must change
  - The dramatic decline of print advertising
  - The high fixed costs of printing and distributing
  - The shifting habits and expectations of current and future readers
  - The competition is tough and getting tougher

### Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Get Started: Lesson 2, *Developing a Vision and Strategy*** (focusing on the sections that discuss how to conduct an internal and external review of a newspaper's current business model)

Downloadable exercises: Exercise 2.1, *Who Are We? (Understanding Your Current Business Model)*

### Suggested Supplemental Readings:

"Overview." *The Pew Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism: The State of the News Media, an Annual Report on American Journalism*. 2014 Report. <http://stateofthemedias.org>.

Chapter 20: "News Consumption," pp. 226-229. *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in the Broadband Age*. [http://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The Information Needs of Communities.pdf](http://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The%20Information%20Needs%20of%20Communities.pdf)

## Potential Out-of-Class Assignment:

Interview with a newspaper publisher or editor: The goal is for the student to explore how the news business has changed in recent years. How has life in the community that the newspaper serves changed? How does the newspaper deploy its reporting assets to cover the most pressing issues in the community? How much have media habits of readers in the community changed? Has the newspaper kept pace with the change? How have the dramatic changes in the newspaper industry spilled down to the local level (i.e. decline in print advertising revenue)? Has this had any impact on the paper's ability to cover all the news that's fit to print (layoffs, for example)? How does the publisher or editor view the future of both the community the paper serves and the news business? What skills does the editor or publisher look for when hiring aspiring journalists?

## **Chapter Three: How Newspapers Must Change**

### Pullout Quote

From the experience of other industries . . . we know that it is possible to chart a course that leads to rebirth and renewal. But doing so involves more than a mere adjustment to the current strategy; it involves a whole new way of thinking and acting.

- *Saving Community Journalism, How Newspapers Must Change*

### Objectives/Roadmap:

- Understand how the Internet has attacked the traditional business model for newspapers
  - Cost structure
  - Customer base
  - Revenue potential
- Review the strengths and weaknesses of the newspapers across five dimensions, including editorial content, advertising sales and current business model
- Introduce the three-pronged strategy for achieving transformative change
  - Shed legacy costs
  - Build vibrant communities of readers on many platforms
  - Pursue new advertising revenue opportunities
- Establish guidelines for keeping pace with changes in the market, i.e. the 30 percent solution

### Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Get Started: Lesson 2, *Developing a Vision and Strategy*** (focusing on the sections explaining how to conduct a competitive and SWOT – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats – assessment.)

Downloadable exercises: Exercise 2.2, *Who Are Our Customers and Competitors? (Understanding the competitive environment)*, and Exercise 2.4, *What Are Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats?*

Other Online Resources:

*Condensed Excerpt of Chapter Three:* Available on the *American Journalism Review* site, or by clicking here. (<http://ajr.org/2014/05/09/book-excerpt-saving-community-journalism/>)

Suggested Supplemental Readings: *The News Landscape in 2014: Transformed or Diminished? (Formulating a Game Plan for Survival in the Digital Era.* Penelope Muse Abernathy and Richard Foster. Yale University Conference on Information, the Law and Society; November, 2009. [http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/Intellectual\\_Life/Abernathy\\_NewsLandscapewithappendixpdf111009.pdf](http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/Intellectual_Life/Abernathy_NewsLandscapewithappendixpdf111009.pdf)

Chapter 12: “The Ubiquity of Creative Destruction.” *Creative Destruction: How Companies That Are Built to Last Underperform the Market and How to Transform Them.* Richard Foster and Sarah Kaplan

Potential Out-of-Class Assignments:

Customer and Competitive Analysis: Using the competitive framework in *Learn More, Lesson Two (Who Are Our Customers and Competitors?)* on this site, students should identify current and potential competitors for the community newspaper they are studying, focusing especially on traditional rivals, new entrants and substitutes. What are the characteristics of the current customers (readers and advertisers) of the newspaper? (This can be based on information they gleaned from interviews with the publisher or editor, or on observations about the type of news and advertisements in the paper.) Is the paper gaining or losing customers? Where are they most vulnerable, and in danger of losing readers and advertisers? What competitors are most likely to capitalize on this? What sort of strategies or tactics can the newspaper use to deter moves by competitors?

Alternative SWOT Analysis: Students can assess the strengths and weaknesses of the newspaper’s current strategy, and the opportunities and threats the paper faces. Students should attempt to perform the analysis across five dimensions, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the community the paper serves, its editorial content, advertising sales effort, distribution footprint and current business model. This framework is explained in *Learn More, Lesson 2 (What Are Our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats?)*.

**Chapter Four: How to Lead Change**

Pullout Quote:

“I tell my former colleagues (at Harvard University’s Business School) that it’s a lot easier to lay out a strategy on a PowerPoint slide than it is to do it in real life. I vastly underestimated

the amount of cultural work that would be needed to turn around a company. I now believe that a good strategy is, at best, only 49 percent of the solution.”

- *Clark Gilbert, CEO and Publisher, Deseret News Saving Community Journalism, How to Lead Change*

#### Objectives/Roadmap:

- Understand why implementing a new strategy and leading transformational change in a news organization is so difficult
- Introduce the concepts of *adaptive change* and *cultural lock-in*
- Examine the role of defenders, prospectors and analyzers, and the importance of forming a “guiding coalition” to advise, communicate and assist in leading change
- Establish a framework for measuring success
  - If we succeed, how will we look to our customers, employees and shareholders?
  - What processes must we reinvent?
- Case Study: The Whiteville Experience, Getting Started

#### Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Get Started: Lesson 1, *Articulating the Vital Mission of Community Newspapers***  
(focusing on the section on stakeholder analysis)

**Get Started: Lesson 3, *How to Measure Success*** (focusing on the sections dealing with how to keep pace with changes in the marketplace and how to identify processes that must be changed)

Relevant downloadable exercises: Exercise 1.2, *Articulating a Mandate for Change*

Recommended video: Interview with Les High, editor of the *Whiteville News Reporter*  
<http://www.savingcommunityjournalism.com/staying-up-to-date/video-library/>

#### Suggested Supplemental Readings:

Chapter 2: “Successful Change and the Force that Drives It.” *Leading Change*. John Kotter.

#### Potential Out-of-Class Assignments:

Memo to Staff, 500 to 1,000 words: Based on the competitive or SWOT analysis performed previously, students should assume the role of publisher or editor and write a memo to the staff explaining why the newspapers must change and how this will be accomplished. Communicating the imperative for change and laying out the broad outlines of the new vision are the first critical steps in successfully motivating employees to change. Students should explain in the memo how they will measure success going forward and how they will interact with employees, giving them a chance to ask questions and make suggestions.

Alternative Paper, based on case study: The case study on the *Whiteville News Reporter* at the end of Chapter Four revolves around these two issues: making decisions when the information you receive is ambiguous, and acknowledging and dealing with the cultural behavior of an organization. Students should assess the following: How accurately did Editor Les High assess the threat and how quickly did he react? How effectively did he set up a process to create and implement a strategy to deal with the threat? Hindsight is 20/20. What could he have done better? The *Whiteville News Reporter* is independently owned (by the High family). Most community papers now are owned either by a chain or by an investment firm. How might the decision-making process differ?

## **Chapter Five: How to Shed Legacy Costs**

### Pullout Quote:

Calculating exactly when and how much to cut back production of the print edition requires Solomon-like wisdom stripped of emotional attachment since, literally and symbolically, the identity of most community newspapers is tied to the physical entity and not the more ephemeral digital one.

- *Saving Community Journalism, How to Shed Legacy Costs*

### Objectives/Roadmap:

- Understand why shedding the legacy costs of producing and distributing the print edition of the newspaper is so difficult
- Establish the imperative of divesting (shedding legacy costs) so that newspapers can then invest in their future (digital and mobile)
- Review the various ways to shed legacy costs:
  - Outsourcing and consolidation of processes that do not add value
  - Reducing printing and delivering schedules
  - Move content online and begin enhancing digital edition
  - Rethink staffing in all departments
- Case Study: The Whiteville Experience, Tackling the Tough Issues

### Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Dig Deeper: Shed Legacy Costs** (featuring an interview with the longtime publisher of the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*)

### Suggested Supplemental Readings:

Chapter 5: “The Gales of Destruction.” *Creative Destruction: How Companies That Are Built to Last Underperform the Market and How to Transform Them*. Richard Foster and Sarah Kaplan

Chapter 3: “Building Strategy Maps.” *The Strategy-Focused Organization: How Balanced Scorecard Companies Thrive in the New Business Environment*. Robert S. Kaplan and David Norton.

Potential Out-of-Class Assignment:

Paper, 500 to 1,000 words: Shedding legacy costs is very difficult to accomplish. There is fallout and tremendous push-back from customers and employees – especially when there is not a clear path forward for succeeding in the new world order. Students should explain how publishers or editors, such as Les High at the *Whiteville News Reporter* (in case study at end of chapter) can use the four questions posed in *The Strategy-Focused Organization* to create a strategy for shedding legacy costs and measure progress toward those goals. The questions are: If we succeed, how will we look to our customers, employees and shareholders? At what processes must we excel?

**Chapter Six: How to Build Vibrant Community on Many Platforms**

Pullout Quote:

Simply focusing on the number of ‘page hits’ or ‘unique visitors’ to a website does not ensure that a newspaper is actually building a vibrant community of readers online. Nor does it necessarily allow a newspaper to play to its journalistic strengths of providing unique content that can engage readers at first glance and then keep them coming back for more.

- *Saving Community Journalism*, How to Build Vibrant Community

Objectives/Roadmap:

- Understand what readers say they want from a newspaper and what drives the loyalty of current and potential readers
- Introduce a more expansive definition of “community news” based on affiliations and interests, as well as geographic location
- Explore how to use digital tools to enhance accountability reporting on political, economic and social issues that determine a community’s future
- Examine how to use social media and mobile to build vibrant communities of readers in the digital space
- Consider the pros and cons of charging readers for digital content
- Case Study: The Whiteville Experience, Building Community Online and in Print

Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Dig Deeper: Build Vibrant Community** (featuring numerous examples from various papers on how to build both print and digital geographic and special-interest communities; it includes a special section on mobile)

**Get Started: Lesson 3, *How to Measure Success*** (focusing on surveys for gauging reader loyalty)

Relevant downloadable exercises: Exercise 3.1, *Construct a Profile of Your Community and Your Customers*

Suggested Supplemental Readings:

Chapter 25: “How Big Is the Local Reporting Gap and Who Will Fill it?” pp. 262-273. *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in the Broadband Age*. [http://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The Information Needs of Communities.pdf](http://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The_Information_Needs_of_Communities.pdf)

“The One Number You Need to Grow” by Frederick Reichheld. *Harvard Business Review*, December 2003.

Potential Out-of-Class Assignments:

Surveying Readers: Working with the editor, students should create and administer an online survey to determine the following: Who is reading the digital edition? How and where they are accessing it? Are they also reading the print edition? What do they value about the local newspaper? Are they loyal readers, and if so, why? Students can find examples of online surveys in *Learn More, Lesson Three* (How do you track customer loyalty and changing media preferences?)

Alternative Paper, based on case study: Like many community newspapers, the *Whiteville News Reporter* has a small editorial staff – basically five reporters and editors, who have historically operated, for the most part, independently. Until recently, the reporters were assigned specific beats and responsible for producing stories for the twice-weekly print edition. As they attempt to “build community on many platforms” (including print, web and mobile), the editorial staff must learn to cope with a 24/7 news cycle, rapidly changing customers habits and expectations, and overlapping assignments. Students should assume they are the “government reporter,” assigned to cover all town council and county commissioner meetings. How can they use the various digital tools (Twitter, Facebook, mobile, the digital edition) to engage residents in the community in an upcoming election? What other beats might they collaborate with? How can they best use the print edition?

**Chapter Seven: How to Pursue New Revenue Opportunities**

Pullout Quote:

By embracing digital and positioning community newspapers as cross-platform mediums – instead of print-only ones – advertising departments have a unique moment in time to carve out a competitive advantage for their papers in the local market.

- *Saving Community Journalism, How to Pursue New Revenue Opportunities*

### Objectives/Roadmap:

- Understand how local advertisers view the newspaper
- Review the rate and volume issues with most digital editions
- Explore how to move beyond print and reposition the newspaper as a multi-platform advertising vehicle
- Establish why using new digital tools is advantageous to both the local newspaper and advertisers
- Identify three ways to set the sales force up for success
  - Revamped, simplified rate card that encourages purchase of multiple products
  - Mandatory, structured training program to teach digital skills
  - New incentive program that rewards consultative selling
- Case Study: The Whiteville Experience, Pursuing New Revenue

### Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Dig Deeper: Pursue New Revenue** (with examples of how the *Rutland Herald* in Vermont successfully implemented online subscriptions and revamped its rate card. Also examples of how the *Whiteville News Reporter* and *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* rethought their sales processes.)

**Get Started: Lesson 3, How to Measure Success** (focusing on how to survey both readers and advertisers)

Relevant downloadable exercises: Exercise 3.1, *Construct a Profile of Your Community and Your Customers*

Recommended Videos: **Dig Deeper, Pursue New Revenue** Interviews with Catherine Nelson of the *Rutland Herald* on revising the rate card and Bruce Kyse on revamping the sales process)

### Suggested Supplemental Readings:

“The Revenue Picture for American Journalism.” *The Pew Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism: The State of the News Media, an Annual Report on American Journalism*. The Review Picture for American Journalism, 2014 Report. <http://stateofthemedias.org>.

“Newspapers Turning Ideas into Dollars: Four Revenue Success Stories.” *Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism*, February 2013. <http://www.journalism.org/2013/02/11/newspapers-turning-ideas-dollars/>

### Potential Out-of-Class Assignments:

Interviewing Advertisers: Working with the advertising director or publisher of a local newspaper, students can modify the examples of advertiser questions posted in *Get Started, Lesson 3* (How do you track customer loyalty and changing media preferences?). By

interviewing both current and potential advertising customers, students will be able to provide the local newspaper's advertising staff with valuable insights into how they are perceived in the marketplace and how they can improve their service.

Alternative paper, based on case study: Change is about setting off on a new path and learning new behaviors. The last print stronghold in many community newspapers is the advertising department. Students should consider the issues that are confronting Les High in the Whiteville case study at the end of Chapter 7. What are the challenges in managing and motivating the advertising staff that High faces in the Mickey Greer era? How are they different from the ones he faces in the Dean Lewis era? Students should determine how they might have managed differently. What are the risks (and potential opportunities) they would have encountered in pursuing this path versus the one that High chose?

## **Chapter Eight: The Far-Reaching Implications**

### Pullout Quote:

The evolving newspaper ecosystem of the twenty-first century looks to be much more complex and interdependent than it has been in the past.

- *Saving Community Journalism*, The Far-Reaching Implications

### Objectives/Roadmap:

- Explore the implications of reduced profit margins on a newspaper's ability to produce accountability journalism
- Understand some of the unique challenges facing larger metro and regional papers
  - High fixed costs associated with distributing over a vast region
  - Less-cohesive sense of community
- Examine the role of nonprofits in the changed media landscape
- Introduce the concept of the *economics of networks*, and explore how for-profit and nonprofit news organizations can collaborate
- Acknowledge the implications this has on journalism education

### Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Get Started: Lesson 4**, *How Metro Papers are Different* (focusing on the reader and advertiser issues confronting the large metro papers)

**Get Started: Lesson 5**, *How Digital Start-Ups and Nonprofits are Different* (with interviews and an extensive list of resources available to start-ups and nonprofits)

Relevant downloadable exercise: Exercise 4.1, *Can Metros Succeed?*

(Syllabus and lessons plans on innovation used by the University of North Carolina's Reese News Lab are available in **Learn More, Lesson 5** in the section titled, "A Conversation on Innovation")

Recommended Video: *Get Started, Lesson Five* (Interview with Kevin Davis, director of the Investigative News Network)

Suggested Supplemental Readings:

Chapter 22: “Media Food chain and the functions of Journalism,” pp. 242-257. Chapter 31: “Non Profit Media” pp. 314-333. *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in the Broadband Age.* [http://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The\\_Information\\_Needs\\_of\\_Communities.pdf](http://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The_Information_Needs_of_Communities.pdf)

Potential Out-of-Class Assignment:

Research Paper on the Role of Nonprofits: Students can conduct a survey of the various nonprofit news organizations that have been established in their state. The paper should identify the mission of each organization, its funders and the audience it serves. Among the questions for each organization: What is the background of the founder? What “gap” is each organization filling? What stories has it broken? What is the business model?”

**Chapter Nine: Crafting a New Beginning**

Pullout Quote:

Economists use the term ‘creative destruction’ to describe what’s been happening to newspapers. Those two words, placed together, embody the threat and opportunity.

- *Saving Community Journalism, Crafting a New Beginning for Newspapers*

Objectives/Roadmap:

- Review the lessons of recent years:
  - Healthy community news organizations support both our democratic and capitalist way of life at the grassroots level
  - Good journalism alone is not sufficient to save newspapers; a newspaper must also have a forward-looking business plan to acknowledge changing needs of readers and advertisers
  - Newspapers must adopt a new way of thinking about and nurturing community
- Apply the lessons of this book and formulate a business plan for either a newspaper or a digital start-up

Relevant Sections on This Site:

**Get Started: Lesson 2, *Developing a Vision and Mission*** (focusing especially on the sections about how to grow and develop a five-year plan)

**Get Started: Lesson 5, *How Digital Start-Ups and Nonprofits Are Different*** (which includes a syllabus and lesson plans for thinking through the innovation process)

Relevant downloadable exercises: Exercise 3.2, *Create a Five-Year Business Plan*

Recommended video: Dig Deeper: Introduction (the five-minute video interview with business consultant Allegra Jordan focuses the leadership opportunities and challenges newspapers and digital start-ups face.)

Suggested Supplemental Readings:

*Media Ownership and Concentration in America*. Chapter 20: “The Future of Media Industries,” pp. 436-447. Eli Noam

Other Online Resources:

Multimedia Case Study: “Chasing the Community Newspaper Rainbow: the *Whiteville News Reporter* and the Digital Age,” available free through the Columbia University Case Consortium,

<https://casestudies.jrn.columbia.edu/casestudy/www/home.asp>. With teaching note and epilogue.

Potential Out-of-Class Assignments:

Five-Year Business Plan for a Community Newspaper: Students can use the strategy process outlined in **Learn More: Lesson 2, *Developing a Vision and Strategy*** to create a three-pronged strategy that addresses the attacks on costs structure, customer loyalty and revenue potential posed by the Internet. The plan should include specifics of how the paper will shed legacy costs, build vibrant digital community and pursue new revenue.

Alternative Three-Year Business Plan for a Digital Start-Up: Students can use the numerous resources cited in **Learn More: Lesson 5, *How Digital Start-Ups and Nonprofits Are Different***. Students should build a four-pronged business strategy that addresses the issues of content, connectivity, community and capital (i.e. what content will they offer, how will they use technology to connect and engage potential readers, how will they serve the community, and how will they raise the capital to sustain the enterprise.)