

Exercise 3.1: Construct a profile of your community and your customers.

This does not have to be a labor-intensive, time-consuming process. What you want is a baseline – a notion of where you stand today – so you can reliably and inexpensively track trends over time.

First, use data collected by local, state and federal government agencies to construct a profile of your community. How does it compare with other communities in your region? With the state and national averages?

Conduct reader surveys. An annual or semi-annual online survey can give you valuable insights into changing media consumption habits, as well as the loyalty of current readers. In addition, conduct one-on-one interviews with customers who read only the print edition – and compare their interests and loyalty to readers who also read your online editions. You may also want to compare the profile of your readers to the “average” citizen in your community. Are they more or less interested in certain things? Do they share a passion for sports, for instance? Or education? Or public affairs?

Conduct annual one-on-one interviews with advertisers in your paper to gauge their view of your competitiveness and learn how you can serve them more effectively.