

81%

of adults read community papers in 2009

New research from the National Newspaper Association (NNA) again demonstrates that Main Street America relies upon community newspapers to inform and empower citizens from coast to coast. In a follow-up to its landmark research over the past five years, NNA finds that 81 percent of adults read a local community newspaper each week, remaining steady comparable to the rate recorded in 2005. The survey was conducted in August and September of 2009.

"This is in stark contrast to news reports trumpeting the decline, if not demise, of newspapers," said Cheryl Kaechele, president of NNA and publisher of the Allegan County News in Allegan, MI. "We learned five years ago that we had a different story to tell, and with this third update we again prove that our initial findings hold up."

According to the 2009 NNA survey, conducted by the Reynolds Journalism Institute's (RJI) Center for Advanced Social Research at the Missouri School of Journalism at the University of Missouri:

- **81 percent of adults over the age of 18 read a newspaper every week.**
- **73 percent of those readers read most or all of their paper.**
- **On average, readers spend 39 minutes reading an issue of their local paper.**
- **Nearly 40 percent of readers keep their paper for more than six days, enabling them to revisit a story of advertisement at their leisure.**

"Readers and advertisers have not abandoned community newspapers that serve their communities well, that are involved in

their communities," Kaechele said. "In towns and cities across the country, vibrant local newspapers continue to help strengthen their communities, and those communities in turn strengthen and support their local news source. They grow, together."

"Just about all of the research and news reports on the 'struggling' newspaper industry have been based on what's happening at the top 100 major metropolitan newspapers, maybe the top 250," said Brian Steffens, NNA executive director. "That doesn't tell the story of the remaining 1,200 daily newspapers or 8,000 community weekly papers in America. Many of those troubled papers started as community papers and then enjoyed decades of growth as they expanded into adjacent communities and surrounding suburbs, becoming regional newspapers and losing that tight community focus. That worked for awhile, but that model may not be as successful going forward. But it doesn't seem right to paint the rest of our industry with that brush."

To capture a snapshot of readership along Main Street America, NNA surveyed adults in markets served by newspapers of less than 15,000 circulation to examine the relationship between Main Street America and newspapers. The 2007 and 2008 surveys included population centers less than 50,000; the 2005 survey targeted population centers less than 100,000.

According to the 2009 NNA survey, local community newspapers are the primary source of information for both news and advertising in local communities by a 5-1 margin over the next most popular media.



39 minutes

"On average, readers of the 2009 study spent 38.9 minutes on reading local newspapers."

Discover what's in it for you!

Insert your newspaper's contact information here

Insert your newspaper's logo here

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER READERSHIP SURVEY



81%

Of Adults Read Community Papers

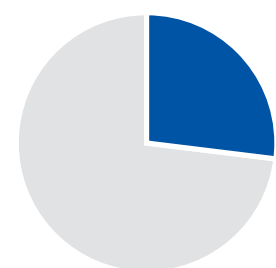
"More than one-third of readers keep their paper for more than six days, enabling them to revisit a story or advertisement at their leisure."

Insert image of your newspaper here

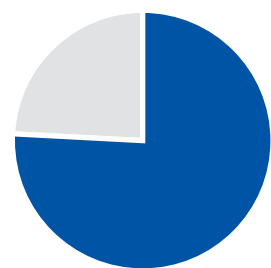
The Source for All Your Local
NEWS | SPORTS | ENTERTAINMENT | ADVERTISING
And More!

Readers with Internet access

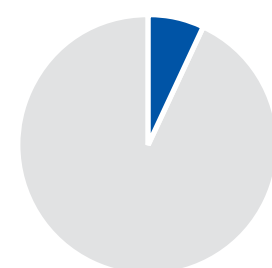
Of those who visited a local newspaper website in the past month



32% visited the local newspaper's web site per month



79% visited within the last week



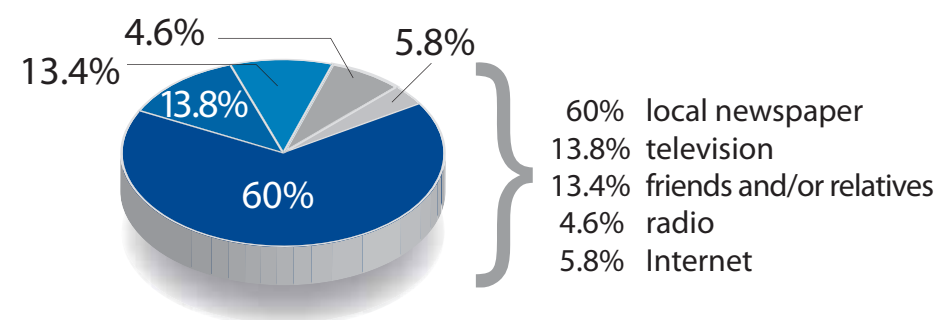
10% report visiting daily



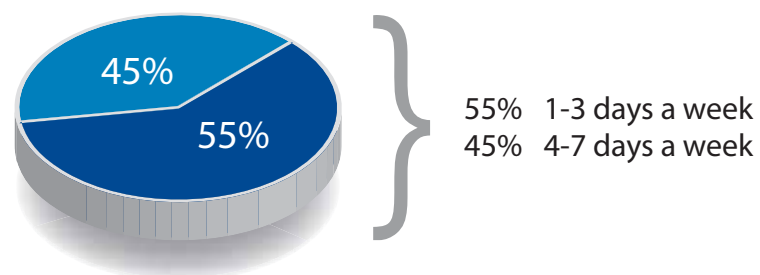
What readers say about their community newspapers

75% say—
“My newspaper is a newspaper that I trust more than other sources of news”

Where do they get local community news?



How often do they read a local newspaper?



PRIMARY SOURCE OF NEWS AND INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- 60 percent: local newspaper (Compared to 59 percent in 2008)
- 13.8 percent: television
- 13.4 percent: friends and/or relatives
- 4.6 percent: radio (Compared to 6.6 percent in 2008)
- 5.8 percent: Internet

(The rest say they get their local information from co-workers, “others,” or they “don’t know.”)

READERS TOLD NNA THEIR PREFERRED SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- 61.4 percent: local newspaper
- 11.2 percent: television
- 4.8 percent: radio (Compared to 5.4 percent in 2008)
- 9.2 percent: friends and-or relatives
- 5 percent: Internet (Compared to 5.2 percent in 2008)

THE FINDINGS ALSO NOTE

- 99 percent of readers read local news
- 63 percent read local news “very often”
- 86 percent read education (school) news
- 91 percent read editorials and/or letters to the editor (Same as 2008)
- 74 percent read local sports (Nearly the same as in previous surveys)
- 76 percent read public notices

These are the bread and butter topics of community newspapers. But how well do community newspapers perform these functions?

- 73 percent of readers believe their local news coverage is good to excellent.
- 69 percent believe the accuracy of their community newspaper is good to excellent.
- 64 percent believe the quality of writing in their community newspaper is good to excellent.
- 59 percent believe the fairness of reporting is good to excellent.

“While there is room for improvement, it should be noted that these were rated on a five-point scale, with the middle being fair or acceptable,” Steffens says. “Adding fair or acceptable to these numbers push them up dramatically — to between 94 percent and 98 percent.”

The 2009, 2008 and 2007 surveys asked a new set of questions asking readers to rate the following statements on a seven-point scale, from “doesn’t describe at all” (1) to “describes extremely well” (7).

- 80% say —** My newspaper makes it very easy to find the information I want.
- 78% say —** My newspaper is well-organized and easy to get through.
- 74% say —** My newspaper understands the things that are of special interest and importance to people who live in the area.
- 58% say —** My newspaper is a newspaper I really trust.
- 67% say —** My newspaper has stories for people with my particular interests.
- 61% say —** My newspaper is extremely useful to me personally.
- 62% say —** My newspaper does an excellent job of investigating claims and statements made by government, civic and business leaders.
- 59% say —** My newspaper really cares about people like me.
- 56% say —** My newspaper gives me the information I need to hold government, civic and business leaders to a high level of accountability.
- 51% say —** My newspaper does a better job than any other news source of helping me understand the news.
- 42% say —** My newspaper provides more background and depth than any other news source.

To reinforce the concept that the public, or newspapers on the public’s behalf, should hold government accountable, 68 percent of readers said that government should be required to publish public notices in newspapers.

“This is an excellent report card on the value of community newspapers,” said Kaechle. “But we cannot ignore a changing media landscape. We urge our members to view the Internet as an opportunity, not a threat; to consider it as one more tool to deliver value to our communities.”

Internet access at home dropped to 70 percent, compared to 75 percent in 2008, 67 percent in 2007 and 61 percent in 2005, according to the latest research. Broadband (high speed) Internet access has jumped to 76 percent from 74 percent in 2008, 66 percent in 2007 and 39 percent in 2005.

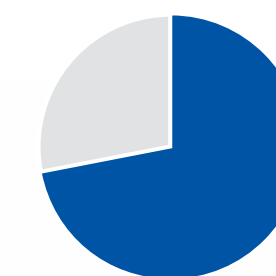
Some 32 percent of community newspaper readers report they have visited their local paper’s web site in the last month, about the same as a year ago and compared to 20 percent in 2005.

“Despite a sizable growth in Internet and broadband access in smaller communities, these results indicate tremendous community support for their community newspapers,” Kaechle said. “The value proposition to readers and advertisers remains strong.”

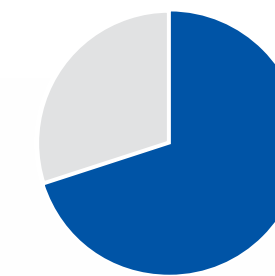
“There are plenty of community newspapers that are maintaining or growing profit margins, many of them in double digits,” said Steffens. “I get more calls about newspapers starting up than I get from publishers who are considering shutting down. Just in the past few weeks, I’ve learned of nearly a dozen new community newspapers starting up. Community newspapers remain the dominant source of local news, products and services — typically by a wide margin — over any other media.”

When comparing 2009 results to 2008, 2007 and 2005, do not assume that they indicate a true increase or decline year over year. A direct comparison is impossible because the same people were not surveyed each year and the survey sample was changed each year. Each year the “top end” was reduced to focus more on adults in smaller towns and cities that were more likely to read a community newspaper instead of a major metropolitan daily.

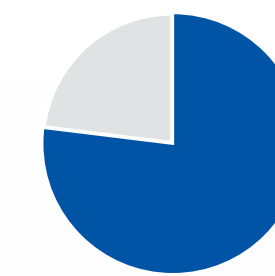
What we can say is that the results were extremely consistent across all three years. These results demonstrate that the findings were not a fluke of a particular year or sample. These results might suggest that adults in smaller towns and cities have a stronger relationship with the newspapers than adults in larger towns and cities.



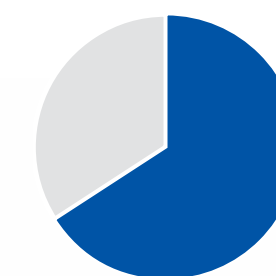
69% say accuracy is good to excellent



64% say the writing is good to excellent



73% say news coverage is good to excellent



59% say the fairness of reporting is good to excellent



Source: National Newspaper Association, April 2010

Surveys developed and conducted by
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 DONALD W. REYNOLDS JOURNALISM INSTITUTE
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