

**Connecting with Readers:
How Newspapers in Kansas Are Using Web 2.0**

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Community newspapers embracing social networking

Years ago, when the late Sam Shade was publisher of the Sedan Times-Star in southeast Kansas, he required members of his staff to take a 15-minute coffee break each morning and afternoon.

He had them leave the office, walk down the street and interact with folks. Staff members always returned with story ideas after visiting with residents and business owners. They also came back with ad copy and orders for job printing.

Rudy Taylor, co-publisher with his wife Kathy of the Taylor Newspapers of Southeast Kansas, was in business with Shade back then. Today, Taylor says his challenge to his staff is similar to what Shade had his staffers do each weekday. Now, however, Taylor and his staff use social networking.

“We use social networking mostly as a way to stay connected with our readers,” Taylor says. “We encourage our staff members to get personal accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Plurk and other forums because we know those interactions will boost their awareness of community issues, events, personalities and flashpoints in today's society.”

Taylor says he feels exactly the same way about telling staffers to get involved with social media as Shade did years ago with the required, twice-daily coffee breaks. He knows the importance of community building and engaging with members of that community. And that doesn't include just readers of his weekly newspapers.

“The more connected we stay, the more aware we will be of what's making our community, county, state and nation function,” Taylor says. “In addition, we use Facebook to tease late-breaking news, podcasts and videos that we place on our Web site. That has led to many new readers of our pulp product. A new subscriber told me recently that she didn't even know the newspaper existed until she saw those teasers on Facebook. That led her to our Web site, and eventually to our printed newspaper.”

Taylor also keeps a company account for Facebook, and has plans to beef it up. So far, he says, it's mostly gathering dust — and a few friends. But at least there's a Taylor Newspapers account, he adds.

The Taylor family, which publishes three newspapers, plans to help each community in their readership area develop a community forum, similar to a successful one that's hosted by a private party in Elk County.

“Many of our news items from Elk County emanate from this forum, and again, we use it as a way to tease back to our own Web site and newspaper,” he says. “Fact is, as we make updates on our own Web site, the forum administrator places a crawler on the screen touting that news item and our taylornews.org Web site.”

Taylor says he know that many in the newspaper business think he and his wife, both 63, son Andy and daughter Jenny Taylor Diveley are doing something incredibly creative with the Internet and with social networking. Kathy Taylor grew up the daughter of a letterpress editor, so Rudy Taylor says her transition to technology has “come the whole nine yards.” He adds that their son and daughter keep them in the “modern mode of thinking.”

“But truly, we are just being good citizens of social media and the communities we serve, always looking for reliable information to report and opportunities to sell our newspaper products,” he says. “Newspaper owners and staff members need to be wherever there is activity, information and life.”

Taylor likens his work in southeast Kansas to the early summer happenings in Iran after the contested presidential election, when he says that same thinking proved successful after news reporters were banned from filing stories and cameras were banned from the streets.

“Thanks to social networking and cell phone cameras, there remains a semblance of reliable information, even though a corrupt government is playing havoc with human rights and democracy,” he explains. “While I'm not daring to compare our situation with the one found in

Iran, there lingers a thought in my mind that social networking may prove to be a solid link to many Americans who seldom pick up a newspaper, watch legitimate news programs on television or even check news Web sites that are offered by newspapers and broadcast entities.”

Rethinking ways to reach readers

Michael Jackson

Posted by Backroadsnews on June 26, 2009

Yes, he had some unusual habits later in his career, to say the least, but if you didn't think Michael Jackson was cool when he did the moonwalk or threw the hat when he performed Billie Jean at the Apollo anniversary TV show, then you weren't cool!

It's too bad that someone with his talent ended up going in a strange direction like he did, but nobody can argue that he was probably the biggest performer the world has ever known, and he absolutely changed the music industry.

“Thriller” is still pretty awesome, no matter what.

So what are your thoughts and memories of Michael?

Becky - Jun 29, 2009 at 1:04 pm

Oh how I loved Michael Jackson when I was in junior high. I was in his fan club and even wrote him a letter when he burned his hand filming the Pepsi commercial. He was an awesome performer and singer.

Andy - Jun 29, 2009 at 11:57 am

Listening to Thriller right now... still don't really like it. _Just as I remembered from the day, I guess.

Outsidelookingin - Jun 28, 2009 at 9:12 pm

His music makes me want to dance! He was a great performer, and I think he lost touch with reality. His whole life was on stage and as a famous person. He would have disappeared into the background in the days before tabloid journalism was so common. I feel bad for his kids to grow up without their father, but hopefully his death finally brought him peace.

When Dan Thalmann, publisher of the *Washington County News* in north-central Kansas, heard that 12 local high school seniors were going to attend President Barack Obama's

inauguration last January, he sprang into action. He worked with them to set up Twitter accounts to feed into his blog. Thalmann also arranged to have their cell phone photos sent to a Flickr feed on the blog. And he loaned them a couple of Flip mini video camcorders to send video back home.

His idea was to keep his community up to date on the students' minute-by-minute experiences in DC. Not only did Thalmann think that this would serve as a form of personal journal/record for the students and their trip, it also would enable folks back home to follow their experiences as they happened. And he used all of the information they gathered as a base for a feature story he wrote about the trip for the newspaper.

"I figured these kids can text message in their sleep anyway," says the 36-year-old Thalmann. "This just made it a bit more useful."

Thalmann started his blog, Backroads Newsroom, in January 2008. But he didn't get serious about it until late that summer. Since then, his blog has been referenced during meetings of the city council, school board and county commission. His blog posts also have been a constant topic of discussion around Washington County, population 6,200, where he publishes his weekly newspaper.

Thalmann promotes his Backroads Newsroom as "online news, commentary and discussion for Washington County and beyond." Posts in late June ranged from the death of Michael Jackson and comparing Fourth of July fireworks displays in nearby small towns to a greased pig contest and the overnight break-in at a café and convenience store that may have been connected to the escape of two prisoners from a nearby county's jail. He allows readers to post comments anonymously.

"I've often said that I feel like I am a babysitter of a lot of unruly children, because four out of five times, people tend to go negative," Thalmann says. "I think, however, this blog-style discussion will allow newspapers to stay relevant."

Thalmann says he has had people call and yell at him for comments others make on the blog. He says 95 percent of those posting comments choose to remain anonymous, but he's deleted fewer than a dozen posts because they were what he called "pure personal attacks against non-elected individuals."

"I've found, however, that over time, a few consistent commenters have started helping me police the blog," he says. "These days, when someone takes me to task, it is pretty common for a few commenters to come to my defense, which is cool since that so rarely happens in the newspaper."

Thalmann wonders whether he as the blog administrator should participate on the blog.

"I participate openly and vehemently at times, but I'm curious to see how others approach this," he says. "I feel a blog is a totally different monster than a Web site, and I'm being very specific when I say 'monster' because it has to be fed constantly. There are times when I've regretted the decision to start this thing, but now that I've had more than 340,000 hits since I started, I figure it is here to stay."

Thalmann has experimented with his blog. Last winter, he did a little weather report while driving home in the snow and posted it onto his blog via YouTube.

"I suck as a weatherman, but people enjoyed watching it," he says. "I truly believe the newspaper is changing as we know it. Soon we'll all be journalists/press/media, but not necessarily broadcasters or newspaper publishers, etc."

Thalmann recently started a Facebook page and had 317 fans as of July 1. Mostly, he says, his assistant editor, who operates the page, posts photo galleries so people can access color photos for their own use. He has noticed a lot of young people formerly from the Washington County area becoming fans of the Facebook page.

He also uses Twitter, which he believes is still evolving. He says he got some traction from a tweet about the local nursing home having troubles. Out of nowhere, an employee there

who had been following me told me about all sorts of issues. Later, Thalmann received a call from the nursing home manager because he had blogged about it, too, and the manager didn't like that. He added that he planned to follow up with a story on the nursing home for both his blog and his newspaper.

Among Thalmann's planned to start an e-edition in summer 2009.

"The intention for this product is to better serve the faraway subscribers who don't get the paper on a timely basis, if they get it at all," he says. "We'll use ArcaSearch, I believe, which also allows key-word searching of the digital archive, which should be nice."

At some point, Thalmann adds, he'll get a Web site. But he wants something different than the traditional newspaper Web site, so that is why he says he is dragging his feet.

Newspapers, he says, are purveyors of information. He believes journalists will always be around, but need to rethink ways in which they can reach readers.

"I believe we need to question the way in which we distribute our product," Thalmann says. "I think the lines between print, radio and TV will be blurred with the help of the Internet. I believe a standard format for modern news distribution will be developed in the next decade. Hopefully, we can evolve and stay alive while the changes occur. I, for one, would like to be active in the development of this new format, rather than trying to keep up after the change has already occurred. I think it will be easier to assure my survival that way. We'll see . . ."

Reaching people that newspapers don't

On March 8, 2009, a helicopter crashed in a field outside Moundridge, Kan. Todd Vogts of *The Ledger* was typical of most small-town newspaper editors. He was on scene before the ambulance arrived.

Vogts utilized Twitter to post updates about what was going on, and then he used the photo-sharing site Flickr to post photos that were incorporated into his blog post about the

accident. He beat the media personnel who arrived by utilizing these social media tools, including Facebook, because his “status” was updated with a tweet every time he posted to Twitter.

The real value in the social media was shown, however, Vogt says, when people began commenting on the blog post.

The pilot of the helicopter — 66-year-old Roger Hershner, who died in the crash — was from Sequim, Wash., and people from his home state found the post as they were looking for information about their friend and family member. Vogts says 34 people commented on his blog post. They shared stories about the pilot and the amazing life he led. This translated into additional coverage of the crash, and such insight into the pilot’s life made him more human instead of being just another victim of a tragic accident, Vogts says.

A Washington newspaper serving the pilot’s hometown contacted Vogts and used his story and photos in its publication and provided him with stories he used in *The Ledger*. Not only did the blog become a place where people could share stories about the pilot, but it also translated into a partnership with a newspaper halfway across the country, he says.

“Could this have been accomplished without social media tools?” Vogts asks. “Maybe, but it probably wouldn’t have been so successful. People come to the blog and shared their memories because they felt comfortable with the format the information was presented in.”

Vogts says large media companies — The New York Times, CNNs and Washington Posts of the world — are different than the local, weekly newspapers that reports on wheat crops and Friday night’s pinochle game at the senior center.

“The big media companies can just jump into the social media world and wait for followers and friends to come because their digital presence is already large enough that people are actively seeking new ways to connect with the media outlets,” he says. “For a small-town news organization, that is far from the case.”

Oftentimes, Vogts explains, the weekly newspaper is in an area largely unaffected by the Internet. Subscribers are older and want to get their news from newsprint that leaves ink on their hands. In some areas, such as Moundridge, he adds, religious sects such as the Holderman Mennonites don't use televisions or computers, so having an online news presence is of little help to the news organization, especially when looking at the bottom line from a publisher's standpoint. However, Vogts says, younger generations and an ever-increasing number of older generations are active on social networking sites.

"They don't automatically consider where they get their news," he says. "They just spend time on the social network and glean information from what their digital friends are talking about and sharing via links."

Vogt says Twitter is valuable because it can give a small paper the ability to instantly update readers about what is taking place, especially in a breaking-news situation, such as the helicopter crash.

"Anyone with a cell phone can use it," Vogts says. "Each Twitter account can have one cell phone number associated with it, and an update can be posted by simply texting the update to the service. If the reporter in the field has a smart phone, such as a Blackberry or iPhone, he or she can even install applications that allows them to update the Twitter feed without using a text message, which is good if the person only has a limited number of text messages they can send each month."

As a way to share all such content under one, single-branded umbrella, though, Vogts says smaller newspapers can utilize blogging, which provides two important functions — conversation and immediacy.

"No matter how the blog is being used, readers can post comments at the end of the post, and then reporters or columnists can join that conversation in the comments," Vogts says. "Much like Twitter and Facebook, it allows people to easily communicate with the news organization

and get to know the reporters so any wall between the readers and the writers is nearly eliminated.”

He says people are quickly becoming used to reading blogs, even in smaller communities, and they are less fearful about posting comments to voice opinions. Also, he adds, it is fast. It only takes a few minutes to fill in the comment field of a blog post compared to the time it takes to read a print piece, develop an opinion, write a letter to the editor, send it in and see it in print, he says.

“The fast ability for readers to join the conversation also means reporters can post quickly and beat other media trying to swoop into town covering big news events,” Vogts says. “Also, it allows local news events of varying degrees of importance to the outside world to be reported on quickly. If someone wants to know how Friday night’s football game turned out, and they don’t want to wait until next week’s paper, they can look at the paper’s blog, or sports blog if specialization is incorporated, to find out that night, especially if it was an away game that fans couldn’t attend.”

Of course, he says, to buy into any of this, small-town publishers will need to understand that putting information online will not necessarily detract from paying subscribers.

Generally speaking, Vogt says, online users and print subscribers are two different types of people in small communities. Social media tools are a way to reach people in small communities not being reached by the print product, he says.

“One of the most compelling reasons to utilize social media, though, is its price — free,” he adds. “In time when money is tight everywhere, the value of using free services to increase readership and the relationship with the community can’t be ignored.”

What's working at larger newspapers?

Reporters at *The Wichita Eagle* have been utilizing Twitter since early 2008. From live tweeting news events to finding story ideas and sources, social networking has dramatically changed the way some reporters there are connecting with sources and readers. And their tactics are ones smaller papers can emulate.

Using Twitter to expand court coverage

- . _Judge Jeff Goering is breaking for lunch. Court is scheduled to resume at 1:45 p.m.
13 minutes ago from txt _
- . Jackson: When Lloyd hugged her after saying she was lost, he said, "I'm sorry. I just wanted to spend some time with her."
14 minutes ago from txt _
- . Still on cross examination: Jackson was a block away from Lloyd's house when she received the voice mail saying her daughter was missing.
18 minutes ago from txt _
- . Jackson: Chavira was being potty trained at the time she was dropped off at Lloyd's. But she didn't tell him that.
20 minutes ago from txt _
- . Jackson: Lloyd first learned about the girl, and that he could be the father, until she was 3 months old. She told him about it at Sonic.
24 minutes ago from txt _
- . On cross-examination, Jackson said she would leave Chavira with both men who were the possible fathers.
26 minutes ago from txt _
- . In the house, Jackson said she saw the child's pink diaper bag, her clothes and shoes on the floor of the living room.
29 minutes ago from txt

In less than a year, covering trials via Twitter has gone from an experiment to one of *Wichita Eagle* reporter Ron Sylvester's regular reporting tools. With each new trial, Sylvester says he's gained about 100 followers — both locally and even from other countries — and that doesn't count the people who watch it from *The Wichita Eagle's* news Web site or on his work

blog, "What the Judge Ate for Breakfast: News from Inside Wichita's Courts."

The reaction has been stunning at times, Sylvester says. Other news sites, notably the *Orange County Register*, also have picked up on this kind of coverage for the courts.

But February 2009 brought a giant step forward when a federal judge in Wichita gave Sylvester the go-ahead to use Twitter there.

"I don't know if it's a first, as some of the legal bloggers think," he says, "but it is a big step in expanding live coverage of the courts."

Federal courts don't allow cameras or video or audio recorders. The federal courthouse in Wichita doesn't allow cell phones, Sylvester says, so he had to get the judge's permission to bring his Smartphone and Bluetooth keyboard into the courtroom.

The trial in February surrounded federal charges of racketeering aimed at accused members of the Crips street gang. Federal prosecutors around the country have used racketeering laws for years to try and curb the problem of street gangs, he says.

"But to see these trials, you had to go to the courthouse," Sylvester says. "Twitter will allow people to follow the trial in real time and learn more about federal courts and how they work."

Lynne Devenny, a state bar certified paralegal at Elliot Pishko Morgan P.A. in Winston-Salem, N.C., wrote in her blog "Practical Paralegalism" that she wanted to be "Ron Sylvester, Courtroom Twitterer." Actually, Devenny wrote in her blog in late February that "Mr. Sylvester is not a 'courtroom Twitterer,' although he is a multimedia reporter for *The Wichita Eagle* and *kansas.com* who covers trials and tweets continuously from the courtroom. Not only is he very good at providing live commentary in Twitter's 140-character micro-blogging format, but he's got my dream job."

Devenny went on to say that Sylvester has ruined her for other courtroom journalists because now she wants all of them to Twitter from public hearings. She says he has changed the

face of courtroom print reporting, especially for impatient trial enthusiasts who no longer want to wait for the morning paper or the evening news.

Sylvester started tweeting from the courtroom in early 2008, initially as a media experiment.

“By the end of the trial,” Sylvester says, “we were getting a lot of reaction from readers. People said they were sitting at work, refreshing the page over and over again to keep up with the trial.”

“Not that any of us would admit to doing the same thing,” Devenny blogged, “but think of all the time he saves us from having to watch hours of Court TV.”

She ended her post by asking, “Anyone need a courtroom tweeter in North Carolina? I’ve got some vacation time”

Sylvester started providing live updates of a capital murder trial in the killing of a small-town Kansas sheriff in the fall of 2008. It was a way of live blogging from the courtroom. He would e-mail updates from his Smartphone and Bluetooth keyboard and send them back to the online team in the newsroom, where time stamps would be added to his posts.

“Readers enjoyed it, but the workflow lagged at times,” Sylvester wrote in his blog ‘technolog-j.’ “The copy desk during the day is sparse, usually one person posting all the updates throughout the day. Metro editors were in meetings all day. I was filing faster than the posts were appearing. That was a snag we were going to have to work out.”

That spring, as another big trial loomed, copy desk staffers told Sylvester and editors they couldn’t handle another round of live blogging because people were going on vacation and they were short-staffed.

The trial was for a man accused of killing a 14-year-old girl who was nine months pregnant during a murder-for-hire. When jury selection began, Sylvester decided to start posting updates on Twitter. He says jury selection is usually the most boring part of any trial.

“Most times, we don’t even cover it,” Sylvester wrote. “But capital murder trials are different. The juries not only decide whether a defendant is guilty, if they return a conviction on capital murder, the jury also decides whether or not the defendant will receive the death penalty. With life and death at stake, I like to know who is sitting on the jury.”

Sylvester says jury selection also seemed to be ideal to conduct experiments.

“Who would notice? So I began tweeting portions of the part of the trial no one seems to care about. Most were tidbits that probably wouldn’t make it in any stories I wrote for the print edition.”

Some of Sylvester’s Twitter highlights:

Prosecutor told the judge one prospective juror "appears to be stoned."

"I don't know if this is a legal reason," said prosecutor Kevin O'Connor, "but the state's position is he should be dismissed because he's a punk." _

Prosecutor: "Do you have any concerns about the criminal justice system?" Juror: "Some people in the system are criminals themselves." _

Lawyer: "Do you understand some of the things you've heard about the case may not be accurate?" Juror: "Sure, especially from the media."

Sylvester says he didn't expect the reaction his tweets received.

“I received an e-mail from a Wichita police officer following the trial on Twitter, saying ‘Keep it up,’” he says. “A woman tweeted her friends, ‘Court TV is gone, but Twitter has [@rsylvester](#).’”

Sylvester says the feedback is important to him because they are local people, looking for local news. “They’re not readers or viewers or audience anymore — in this world of social networking, they’re my friends,” he wrote in his blog. “I like that. I keep getting notices that more people are following me each day.”

At a limit of 140 characters, Sylvester says, Twitter forces him to write tight.

“It’s hard work,” he says. “I leave court feeling exhausted.”

Finding sources & story ideas

Wichita Eagle reporter Suzanne Tobias writes a weekly column about families and parenting. She joined Twitter in April 2008 and says it has turned into an indispensable resource — especially for getting story ideas and sources for stories she’s already working on.

One way she uses the micro-blogging site is to periodically do a search for Wichita to see what people are talking about, which frequently leads to story ideas. With more than 1,100 followers now, Tobias says she feels like she has a huge focus group literally at her fingertips. Finding sources for stories is sometimes as easy as 140 characters.

“I was writing about more people participating in medical research,” she says. “I put out a call on Twitter, and in less than 10 minutes, I was talking to a Wichita man I ended up quoting in the story.”

Wichita tweeps: I'm looking for folks participating in clinical trials. Med research participation is up. e-mail stobias@wichitaeagle.com
10:06 AM Apr 8th from web

Sometimes followers simply send Tobias story tips. A Twitter tip in February 2009 turned into a story about a Wichita East High School student who caught a content error on a state writing assessment. That story wound up being linked to from Yahoo and Fark and broke page view records for Kansas.com.

Twitter frequently helps drives traffic on the Eagle’s Web site.

“I regularly post a link to my column, as well as to other stories on kansas.com,” Tobias says.

Today's column, on unruly kids in restaurants.
Let the angry calls and e-mails begin. <http://bit.ly/EFBeZ>
9:51 AM Jun 18th from TweetDeck

She only started posting links to her weekly columns because people asked her to — especially people who do not live in Wichita or do not regularly visit Kansas.com.

“I follow a lot of mommy bloggers all over the world,” Tobias says. “They’re more likely to read my column by following a link from Twitter than by going to kansas.com directly.”

The Eagle’s kansas.com does have an official Twitter account (@kansasdotcom). The 1,445 followers of that account get mostly autofeeds —morning headlines and breaking news. But it’s the paper’s real people on Twitter who make connections, find stories and interest readers.

“I think the most important thing about using Twitter, Facebook or any other type of social media is to be a person first, not a reporter,” Tobias says. “You garner more followers — and eventually tips and sources — by really listening, replying, direct-messaging and participating in conversations, not just being a robot Twitter account posting links. No one likes that.”

At 6,393 tweets and counting, Tobias calls herself a “total Twitter evangelist” in the newsroom, and she encourages other reporters to embrace it, too. The first step, she says, is simple. Just get signed up. Then do a search by geographic location, and start following everyone in your area.

“After that, it almost feeds on itself,” she says. “The only way to tap into that audience is to follow as many people as you can and start participating in the conversation.”

A few more examples of tweets from @suzannetobias:

Looking for Wichita-area teens/parents to comment on this new Nielsen report. <http://bit.ly/b0zE9> (Email stobias@wichitaeagle.com.)
11:11 AM Jun 26th from TweetDeck

Wichita-area tweeps: Have you or someone you know included a pet in a wedding ceremony?
E-mail dmccartney@wichitaeagle.com.
1:00 PM Jun 23rd from TweetDeck

Wichita-area tweeps: Do you have chickens in your backyard? E-mail btanner@wichitaeagle.com (story on urban chicken farming).

2:54 PM May 18th from web

Wichita parents: Are you ditching kid activities (pricey sports leagues, lessons, etc.) in these economic times?

stobias@wichitaeagle.com

3:02 PM May 12th from web

So anyway, here's today's column. It might, just might, be more enjoyable than a root canal... <http://bit.ly/s0tne>

12:13 PM Apr 30th from web _ _ _

_Reader called to say my column was "the highlight of my day so far." And now she's off to get a root canal. (I wish I were kidding.)

12:11 PM Apr 30th from web

A reporter's first tweet:

[deniseneil](#): Do I really want to do this? [2008-05-07 20:34:30](#)

While some reporters worry that they cannot fit any more tasks into their already busy days, Eagle entertainment writer and columnist Denise Neil says Twitter has actually made her job easier because it's so immediate and interactive.

"It's like being able to eavesdrop on what people are talking about," she says.

For a person whose job it is to know who serves what on which days and what local bands are performing where, Twitter is the ultimate resource.

"For me, it's been great for restaurant reporting," Neil says. "So many local coffee shops and restaurants — 30 to 40, I'd say — are on Twitter. They post what's going on, what their specials are and other quirky items about their businesses."

She says she can usually fill up her weekly dining columns just from Twitter tips. While it's a great resource, she says they always call to confirm any item or tip they get from Twitter.

Neil also says she feels like she's more connected to many of her readers and sources now. "I have conversations with readers who never would have felt comfortable calling me on the phone, or even sending me an e-mail."

When Tobias and Neil started using Twitter, they were hooked. But they also became concerned that *The Eagle*, like many businesses, might not see the value of having employees using Twitter and Facebook at work. So they started an electronic file of all the tips, story ideas and sources that came straight from Twitter. They've never needed that file, though.

"*The Eagle* has actually encouraged us to use Twitter because we find out about stuff that we just wouldn't otherwise," Neil says.

Do Twitter tactics work?

Eagle reporters are using Twitter to report, to get story ideas and sources, to post links to stories and to engage readers in conversation. But is it driving Web traffic or gaining newspaper readers?

Nick Jungman, *The Eagle's* senior editor for interactive, says Twitter is now consistently one of the top referrers to kansas.com.

"It's not at a Google or Yahoo level, but probably in the very next tier," he says.

Jungman also thinks it's important in building newspaper/reader relationships. "We were early to Twitter, and we gained a huge amount of credibility with local early adopters," he says. "I'll call them 'opinion leaders.' These are young, tech-savvy professionals who have influence with their peers. They think what we do with Twitter is cool, and I think that's our reputation now."

He admits it's still a pretty small community, but he says it's a very influential community — and one he doesn't think the newspaper was making much of an impact on before.

“We make it a point to follow the people who follow us, and I'll watch the stream of our followers' Tweets,” Jungman says. “It's really something to see what people ‘retweet’ and how quickly they do it. It's instant feedback that is really valuable.”

†††

When newspapers began publishing to the Web, the stories were static. They rarely changed until the next issue of the paper was on the press. Eventually, newspapers started allowing readers to post comments. Now, readers are not only commenting, but also conversing with reporters and with each other. They are offering news tips and providing photos and video — all through the Web.

With the read-and-write capabilities of Web 2.0, connecting with readers is faster and easier than ever. Readers can join the conversation. Readers can start the conversation.

Publishers and editors of some community newspapers — like Rudy Taylor, 63, and Dan Thalman, 36, and Todd Vogts, 23 — are embracing the community-building opportunities. They are blogging and tweeting. They have Facebook accounts, and they let their readers become citizen journalists. Newspapers not already using or experimenting with social media should borrow ideas from them. They also should look at how larger papers, like *The Wichita Eagle*, are using social media and adapt those ideas for their own newspapers and communities.

Related sites:

- <http://www.taylornews.org/>
- <http://www.backroadsnewsroom.com/> and <http://twitter.com/BackRoadsNews>
- <http://ledgernewspaper.net/pressroom/> and <http://voiceofthevogts.wordpress.com/>
- <http://www.kansas.com/>
- <http://twitter.com/RSylvester> and <http://blogs.kansas.com/courts/>
- http://twitter.com/denise_neil
- <http://twitter.com/@suzannetobias>