October CEO Column: One Year on the Job

By David Chavern

This time last year, I was just starting at the Newspaper Association of America. When I took the job, one prominent news columnist compared it to being “captain the Titanic.” I never saw it that way.

I always maintained the future of news is bright, and now, a year in, I’m more optimistic than ever. The last year at this association has been one of rapid change. We became the News Media Alliance, a change that was long overdue; we’ve reimagined our organizational identity, including expanding our membership to include digital news media organizations; and we have created new products to provide value to our members.

And over the last year I have learned so very much.

1. Many people don’t know where news comes from.

Whether its people who consume news through Facebook and then say they “don’t read a newspaper”, or people who say that the media is biased for a candidate when every bad thing they know about that candidate also came from the news media – it is still surprising to me the extent to which people don’t connect the information they know to the efforts of journalists at news media organizations.

1. News organizations can – and do – move fast.

The historic culture of the newspaper business was to start each day with a whole bunch of blank pieces of paper. You had to recreate the product anew every 24 hours. That means that when a news organization decides to try something new, they have the ability to implement it very quickly. This carries over to the digital space, where newspaper media are leading the way in product and service innovation, content creation, advertising and events, to name just a few.

1. The world of advertising is full of misguided ideas.

We continually hear things like “digital ad inventory is infinite” and “context doesn’t matter.” Since coming on board with the News Media Alliance, I’ve advocated for an improvement in the digital advertising market. Traditional online ads can be jarring, annoying and intrusive, especially on a mobile device. There is no reason advertisements shouldn’t fit the form and function of the platform. Our members are working to make ads more interactive and part of the overall experience. In addition, the News Media Alliance recently joined the Coalition for Better Ads, which is dedicated to improving users’ digital ad experience. In my next year, I look forward to continuing to champion the fight against bad ads and ad blockers.

1. Evidence shows that people value powerful and deep enterprise journalism above all other kind of news.

You want to tell me newspapers are a bad investment? You’re not just investing in paper and ink; you’re investing in the future of society. We need long-form, investigative pieces. The cost of not being an informed public is too high. Just consider the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* political reporting this year, or the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporting on events in Ferguson, or the *Tampa Bay Times* reporting on restaurants that lie about food sourcing. There are just so many examples of news organizations making huge investments so that the public gets the information it needs.

1. People want and consume more news than ever and we will build upon that demand to drive a successful future for the industry.

We hear about people’s attention spans being shorter than a goldfish. But that doesn’t mean people want less news. We are living in the age of information. According to a University of Southern California study, Americans are absorbing five times more information per day now than they were in 1986. And as the demand for quality news grows, storytelling evolves. I think that we have only just begun to explore the incredible opportunities.