

Local media always has your back!

MARK PAVILONS

Arthur Miller once said that a good newspaper is like a "nation talking to itself." And Robert Peel believed that public opinion is a compound including "newspaper paragraphs." And P.T. Barnum espoused "he who is without a newspaper is cut off from his species." A recent Edelman's trust barometer poll revealed some less than positive results. Some 56% of Americans agree with the statement that "Journalists and reporters are purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or gross exaggerations." And 58% think that "most news organizations are more concerned with supporting an ideology or political position than with informing the public." The 2021 Trust Barometer reveals an epidemic of misinformation and widespread mistrust of societal institutions and leaders around the world. There's a failing trust in four major institutions - business, government, NGOs and media. The pandemic, and uncertainty it has created, is somewhat to blame. Toss in fear, apprehension, racism and financial pressure to the mix, and you have a recipe for mistrust. A large part of this apprehension comes from a certain former head of state and his repeated bashing of the media and use of the term "fake news." There's an old saying about glass houses and stones. Unfortunately, he's left a bad taste in the mouths of Americans. The 2019 Digital News Report outlines the effect the loss of hundreds of newspapers across the country has had on its media ecosystem. Canadian news sources seem to be held in a higher regard, with trust levels at 52%. In addition to those who rely on digital for news, 66% rely on TV while only 28% source their news from a print publication. Sure, I'm biased, but I firmly believe that our trust is high. We ultimately serve you, the public, our readers. You are the boss, not the person named on our masthead. The community newspaper is the one true source of local information. It's likely the last bastion of local news. It's one of the few remaining places where you can learn about your neighbours, local policies, where your taxes go, when your road is getting paved and how your son or daughter performed on their sports team. Few other venues exist to tout local business accomplishments, discoveries, milestones and acts of kindness. Our mandate is to report reliable facts as they are presented to us. We are not psychics or have some invisible pipeline to the truth. We rely on other individuals and organizations - entrepreneurs, politicians, municipal staff and residents - to share their stories and facts on various issues. Yes, some of it is opinion and some is inherently biased. But that should be clearly stated in every instance and it's up to the reader to decide and decipher. We can present the facts, and the opinions, what you do with them is up to you. Some argue that the media itself isn't strong enough to turn this tide of trust around. They need support and yes, endorsement, from those very same sources. This is the basis of credibility. While credibility, honesty and passion can be established, it only takes one big mistake, or one misstep, to set it all back to the beginning. I've been with this paper for nine years now. I worked hard in the beginning, getting to know all the community leaders, local politicians, local volunteers, organizations and just what makes King tick. It took about two years before I could confidently say I had a handle on it. It also took me two to three years to build a reputation, both for myself and this newspaper. It took vigilance, a listening ear, fact-based reporting, and providing publicity for every worthwhile cause. It involved highlighting local accomplishments and always being in King's corner. In a way, I had to become one of the community's biggest cheerleaders. You would think that once I established credibility and had a good, solid track record, that would be it. Not so. The work continues week after week. Every issue I have to reaffirm our commitment to the community; provide timely and pertinent information. I have to continually be the best I can be, so the community is not only informed, but engaged and enlightened. I want everyone to feel they can turn to me, contact me, about anything on their minds. Often, these grass-roots stories appear in print. Sometimes, they don't. There are issues, mainly legal ones - disputes, court cases, employment issues - that we shy away from and that demand caution. I'd like to think I do an excellent job in putting this package together for you week in, and week out. The pandemic has been challenging, resulting in much fewer public events and in-person interviews. But we have persevered and still provide oodles of decent articles for you to digest. Just as I ask people to reach out to me about their stories, I also ask that they put me in my place when necessary. I'm not perfect. I do make mistakes. Hopefully they are minor, and few and far between. Again, the ultimate judge is you. Tell us how and where to improve. Tell us what you love and what you hate. Just as our system of government relies on engagement and involvement, so too, does your local community newspaper. I'm with Sally Quinn, who once said "I can't imagine life without a newspaper." I'm here for you!

