

# Why We Should Save Print Newspapers

Updated May 25, 2020, Version 2

(Originally written in August 2011  
and revised in December 2012)

To the Editors of the *East Bay Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

I am a subscriber to your print newspapers for which I am grateful because they make it feasible for me to stay generally informed on local, state, national, and international news in a time-efficient manner. I am dedicating this update of my previous essay “Why We Should Save Newspapers” to the *East Bay Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I am sending a copy of my updated essay to Libby Schaaf, Mayor of Oakland because we have communicated in the past about our first job, delivering newspapers: I delivered the *Oakland Tribune*, and she delivered *The Montclairion*.

My updated essay does not include some substantial material in the previous essay (attached), so it is worthwhile to take a look at the latter also.

## **1. The Most Time-Efficient Way to Be Generally Informed**

Almost a decade ago, I wrote an essay entitled “Why We Should Save Newspapers” (attached). I was motivated to write that essay because I am a longtime reader of print newspapers and had read numerous reports which cast doubt on their continued existence. Over the decades, I have found print newspapers to be the most time-efficient way to be generally informed on local, state, national, and international news. In about a half hour, I can comprehensively read/skim the print edition of the outstanding *East Bay Times* which we receive daily. On weekends, we also receive the print edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*; and I can read/skim both newspapers in about 45 minutes. “Read/skim” means that I have at least viewed each article, decided how thoroughly I wanted to read it, and finished it.

We also receive the electronic version of both newspapers; I have given them a try, but dropped reading them because they are not a time-efficient way for me to stay generally informed (more on this later). I have been a statistician/programmer for over 25 years, spending 8 hours per day working on a computer. Regardless of my computer skills, I can stay informed with print newspapers more efficiently and faster than with their electronic counterparts.

## **2. Motivated to Update My 2011-2012 Essay**

Since I wrote my 2011-2012 essay on why we should save newspapers, I have continued to see reports which cast doubt on the survival of print newspapers. On April 12, 2020, *The Guardian*, a British daily newspaper founded in 1821, ran an article dealing with the imminent death of print newspapers which included, "Why our newspapers might not survive the contagion of coronavirus. Print papers have been defying predictions of doom for two decades. But this pandemic is likely to finish off many titles." This article has motivated me to update my 2011-2012 essay. I would like to see print newspapers continue to exist because I depend on them to stay generally informed in a time-efficient manner.

### **3. Newspapers Foster an Informed Electorate**

"Newspapers Foster an Informed Electorate" was also a section heading in my 2011-2012 essay. Our country was founded on the then radical concept that the right to govern comes from the consent of those governed, not from heredity -- as it had in most countries for thousands of years. Accordingly, citizens of democratic governments should be informed since decisions taken by government are done with their consent.

#### **Does the Internet Foster an Informed Electorate?**

From my 2011-2012 essay:

"There is concern that the Internet is not equally conducive to fostering an informed electorate. The following is from a June 27, 2011 article in the San Francisco Chronicle by Erin Allday entitled,

"FIELD POLL. Politics on fewer voters' radar. Experts say Internet lets users tune out information." (p. C1):

"A growing proportion of California voters is not paying much attention to politics and what's happening in government as they are increasingly drawn to the Internet as their primary source of news, according to Field Poll results released today."

"...political scientists said Sunday that they blame the Internet in large part for waning interest in government affairs, especially among younger persons."

#### **Is There a Personal Payoff for Being Generally Informed?**

Most Americans would agree with the ideal that citizens of a democracy should be generally informed on local, state, national, and international news since the right to govern in a democracy comes from the consent of those governed. However, personal considerations usually trump lofty ideals. Reasons Americans give for **NOT** being generally informed on local, state, national, and international news include:

- Americans don't have time to stay informed on local, state, national, and international news.
- Americans don't need to be informed on local, state, national, and international news to do their jobs nor for their day-to-day life. I understand this point-of-view well: I do programming and statistics and don't need to know one iota about local, state, national, and international news to do my job well.
- Americans certainly don't need ongoing (real-time) updates on local, state, national, and international developments because they don't provide inputs to ongoing (real-time) decisions made in these areas. For the vast majority of Americans, their only input to government decisions is voting every two years. This position was discussed in the following excerpt from my 2011-2012 essay:

Newspapers work for readers for whom immediacy is not critical.

"I do technical work which does not require that I keep abreast of local, state, national, and international news. However, I do keep abreast of these topics because I am interested in them and because it is my duty as a citizen. However, I do not need real-time (immediate) news updates about virtually any of these subjects because I do not provide input to real-time decision making about them. Essentially my input to these items is voting every two years.

"Secretary-of-State Hilliary Clinton, in contrast, does need immediate updates about conditions in Afghanistan, the killing of Bin Laden, etc., because she is involved in current decision-making about these developments. I do not provide input to these decisions. My role is that of an informed citizen, and for this role newspapers are very appropriate; it does not matter that I do not read my two morning newspapers -- Oakland Tribune and San Francisco Chronicle -- until that evening and often do not finish them until the next day.

"Newspapers are ideally suited for citizens who want to stay generally informed and whose basic input to issues is voting every two years. Newspapers will wait for you until you have time to read them, and much of their information is pertinent even if you read them a week or more later, such as a summary of a new economic or medical report. **For most of us, the immediacy of news reporting as touted by TV and the Internet is largely irrelevant.**"

In light of this, it is remarkable that Facebook touts their News Feed which is a "constantly updating list of stories in the middle of your home page." The vast majority of us don't needed to be updated in real-time throughout the day.

#### **4. Print Newspapers Make Being Informed Doable and Efficiently So.**

As discussed above, in a democracy the right to govern comes from the consent of those governed, not from heredity. Accordingly, citizens have the responsibility to be generally informed on local, state, national, and international issues. However, many Americans do not stay generally informed because they are very busy and because they don't need this information for their jobs nor day-to-day life.

Given this situation, it is critical that the work required to be a generally informed citizen in a democracy be done in the most time-efficient way possible. If this task can be made time-efficient, more Americans may be willing to invest the time and energy to stay generally informed on local, state, national, and international issues. How can this task be done as efficiently as possible?

#### **With Print Newspapers, the Task of Being Generally Informed Can Be Accomplished in 30 Minutes Daily.**

Each day there is plethora of news at every level. For example, California has 58 counties and 482 municipalities, the United States has 50 states, and our world has 195 countries. There is daily news in each of these entities. With so much news, how can one stay generally informed in 30 minutes daily?

Newspapers enable us to accomplish this. They report to us on a small subset of all the daily news developments which are pertinent to Americans in our city/state. Newspapers are organized by section, and within sections items are roughly ordered by importance/significance; this facilitates staying informed and keeping news items in perspective.

The main section of a newspaper usually contains national and international news. As noted above, the United States has 50 states, and our world has 195 countries, but newspapers report only a small subset of all the daily national and international developments that informed Americans should know about. For example, I recently read reports of the typhoons in the Philippines (to where I call for problems with my AT&T U-verse Internet) and about the explosion of COVID-19 cases in Peru (my wife, who is from Mexico, has a hair salon and has several customers from Peru).

#### **The Organization of Newspapers by Sections Facilitates Reading the News in the Order You Choose and Keeping Track of What You've Already Covered.**

Newspapers are laid out by sections, and within sections items are roughly ordered according to importance/significance. **This gives you lots of flexibility in how you read them.** For example, I do not watch sports on TV, but I like to be generally informed about what is going on in sports since it is a significant part of our culture. So often I first skim the sports sections of the *East Bay Times*. Then I read the entire business section which is at the back of the sports section. The business section includes excellent reports by *East Bay Times* business writers George Avalos and Rex Crum. Then I might read the lifestyle, entertainment and other special sections such as food or gardening. Then I finally get to the main sections of both newspapers which are often the last sections I read. Moving through the newspapers by sections speeds up the reading process and helps you keep track of what you've already covered (more on this later). This reading strategy is hard to employ with Internet news.

#### Don't Look at Any Article More Than Once.

As written above, print newspapers help us prioritize what daily news we read by reporting to us a small subset of all the daily news developments which are pertinent to Americans in our city/state. Even with this filtering, however, the content of daily print newspapers is substantial and appears daunting. Some of the articles are quite long, beginning on the main page and spreading over one, two or more inside pages. I talk to college-educated people in their thirties and forties who tell me they just don't have time to plow through all the local, state, national, and international news in a daily newspaper.

A requirement for staying generally informed in 30 minutes per day via print newspapers is to not look at any article more than once. Make a decision quickly about how you want to read an article – skim, speed read, or thoroughly read – and then finish it. Don't look at it again. If you repeatedly glance at articles without decisively finishing them, you won't get through the newspaper. This reading strategy is hard to employ with Internet news. Getting through a print newspaper in 30 minutes and retaining the essence of the information it contains is a skill you develop.

**Print newspapers are organized by sections**, and this layout helps you to keep moving quickly through the newspaper and to keep track of what you've already covered. When I finish a section, I set it aside. In this way, I know I have completed it. It then goes to another member of our family or is recycled. This reading strategy is hard to employ with Internet news.

**Checking Off What You've Already Covered.** As just written, print newspapers are organized by sections and this layout helps you to keep track of what you've already read and to not look at any article more than once. There are, however, times when

you get pulled away from reading the newspaper (e.g., my wife needs my help with something). When you return to reading the newspaper, it can be hard to remember where you were in the newspaper and which articles you have already finished. So, you end up glancing at the same articles again to figure what you've already covered.

To avoid this redundant activity and loss of time, I use a **green** pen to check off articles I have finished. Whether I read them thoroughly, speed read them, or just skimmed them, a green check tells me I have finished the article and not to look at it again. The articles in the business section of the East Bay Times all start on the first page and continue to subsequent pages. Sometimes I will also use my **green** pen to check off the continuation of an article on subsequent pages of which I already read a few paragraphs on the first page and decided not to read further. Another member of our family uses a **red** pen for this purpose. This reading strategy is hard to employ with Internet news.

#### Print Newspapers Facilitate Speed Reading.

As noted above, some articles in our daily print newspaper are quite long, beginning on the main page and spreading over one, two or more inside pages. To read the entire newspaper in 30 minutes, you have to speed read many of these longer articles. The layout of print newspapers facilitates speed reading. You start, for example, on the main page, then move to p. 7. You continue to read most of the article on this page before moving to p. 8 where you read the final third of the article. You can speed read such an article much faster in a print newspaper than you can on the Internet with all the scrolling and clicking while you dodge the incessant pop-up ads.

#### The Feeling That You Have "Finished" the Newspaper in 30 Minutes

Employing the newspaper reading strategies presented above, I get a distinct feeling after a 30-minute systematic read of the daily print newspaper that I have "finished" my news reading for the day. When I am clicking and scrolling on Internet news as I try to dodge the pop-up ads, I never get a distinct feeling that I have "finished" reading the news for the day.

#### Newspapers Greatly Facilitate Clipping Articles

I am including here at the end of this section an added benefit of print newspapers: they greatly facilitate clipping articles. One might think that in the age of the Internet there is no benefit from clipping articles. We find this not to be true at home.

#### Clipping for my wife

Literally every night I clip articles for my wife who is not the avid print newspaper reader I am. Before I clip, I underline with red ink the parts relevant to her. If I did not clip the article, I would not remember to tell her about it the next day. Each morning I find

articles on the bench in my den which I cut out the night before. When I see them, only then do I remember why I cut them out or even that I saw them. I then pass them on to my wife. She is very busy, so usually reads only the parts I underlined with red ink. This saves her time.

#### Clipping for my writing

I also used clipped articles for my essays. Many articles I clip from print newspapers are very hard to find later on the Internet -- if you can find them at all. Also, the clipped articles often inform me about additional information on the Internet which I would not have thought to look for. I underline the relevant parts of my clipped articles with red ink, so I don't have to re-read the entire articles when I use it later, a significant time-saver

#### The Focus of Part 4

The focus of Part 4 is on physical differences between print newspapers and Internet news that make print newspapers a more time-efficient way to stay generally informed than Internet news (or television news.) There are also fundamental differences between these news media that favor print newspapers over Internet news or television news. These fundamental differences are discussed in my 2011-2012 essay (attached)

From my 2011-2012 essay, pp. 7-8:

#### II. The Problem with Television News

##### Television News' Sequencing Problem

From my 2011-2012 essay, pp. 9-11:

#### III. The Problem with Internet News

##### Where Are They Going to Click First?

##### Internet News' Prioritization Problem

### **5. Are print newspapers compatible with sustainable existence on our planet?**

**Definitely yes.** This subject was covered extensively in my 2022-2012 essay (attached). I included the major point from this essay below.

### **The Major Points:**

- Newsprint is the base paper on which news is printed to become newspapers. **Newsprint is made from recycled papers.** But 100 % recycled pulp cannot be used for newsprint because it will not give sufficient strength to newsprint to run on high-speed printing presses nor to be folded prior to delivery.
- Newsprint can be recycled five to seven times after which the fibers have become too short to bond into new paper. At this point, newsprint can be recycled into cellulose insulation, animal bedding, compost, or other uses.
- New pulp, which is combined with recycled pulp, almost always comes from trees specifically grown for papermaking. A tree harvested for papermaking is soon replaced by another, so the cycle continues. Most of the trees cut for paper come from fifth or sixth generation pulp-wood forests.
- Trees, the source of the wood pulp for paper, are a renewable natural resource in contrast to non-renewable (or exhaustible) resources such as petroleum and natural gas. Trees are renewable, recyclable and sustainable.
- Trees to produce paper are harvested in a sustainable way. Sustainable harvesting of timber was already in practice in German forests by the mid-1800s, and these methods have been improved and refined since then. Today, net annual forest growth in the United States exceeds harvests by more than 70 percent. Forest growth in the U.S. has continually exceeded harvest since the 1940s. The United States Forest Service estimates an average of 1.74 billion trees are planted in America every year. Their most recent data shows that United States forestland is roughly as abundant today as it was 100 years ago.
- **Young trees are the most effective at capturing greenhouse gases (carbon sequestration).** When trees are harvested in a program of sustainable harvesting to make wood and paper products, young trees replace older trees. Young, growing, vibrant forests are the largest carbon sink on earth: CO2 absorption by U.S. forests has increased by 25 percent since 1990. (Reducing U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions: How Much at What Cost? McKinsey & Company, 2007.)

When a young forest is growing, it produces 1.07 tons of oxygen and absorbs



1.47 tons of carbon dioxide for every ton of wood. But as the forest matures, growth slows, and the absorption rate drops off. Harvesting a mature forest sequesters the carbon in the wood, meaning it will not be released into the atmosphere. A 2,400-square-foot wood-frame house, for example, has 28.5 tons of carbon dioxide sequestered, roughly equivalent to seven years' worth of emissions from a small, light-duty car. Harvesting mature forests also allows new, young forests with a rapid rate of carbon absorption to take their places, continuing the cycle.

John A. Helms, Ph.D., professor emeritus of forestry at the University of California, Berkeley writes,

"...it's the young trees and forests that are most efficient in taking up carbon. Not that old forests don't contribute - they do. But when their capacity to remove carbon is measured against young forests, old forests come up short. In young forests, the uptake of carbon dioxide greatly exceeds the loss. The reverse can be true for very old forests."

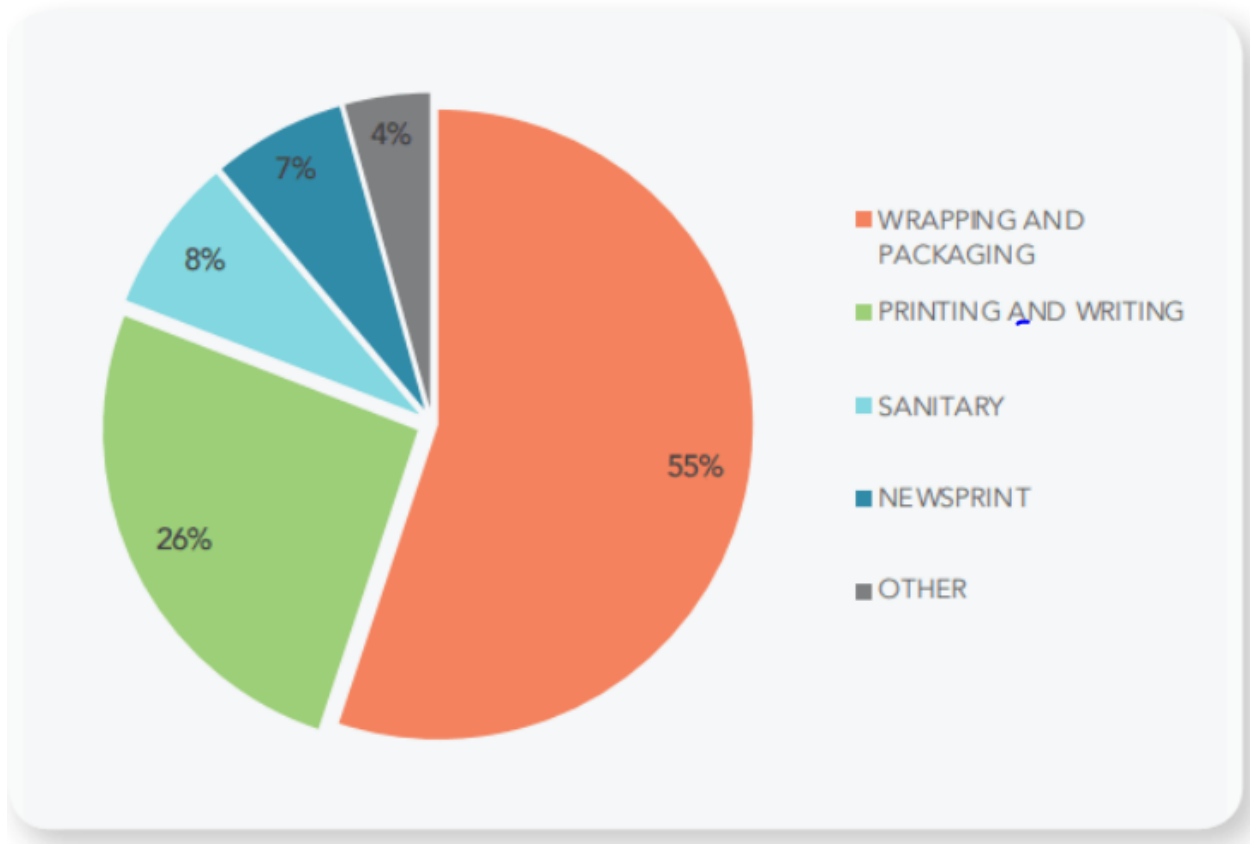
"To maximize carbon sequestration and storage, we need forest management that results in healthy forests of all ages on the landscape."

"What's good for forest health is good for carbon sequestration. Active forest management can certainly increase carbon sequestration."

- Sustainable harvesting supports the preservation of forests. Fifty six percent of America's forests are privately owned, and private land owners plant about 3-4 times more trees than they harvest. The harvest gives them the income they need to maintain, renew and manage this valuable forest resource sustainably. Without this income, landowners face economic pressures to convert forestland to other uses, including growing other crops that are more profitable or selling the land for development. In both cases, the forest is removed forever.
- Newspapers are recycled. About one-third are made into newsprint. About a third are exported (think about all the cardboard boxes needed to box all the consumer goods America imports). The remaining third is used to make cereal boxes, egg cartons, paper plates, grocery bags, tissue paper, napkins, cellulose insulation, animal bedding, and compost.
- Packaging, not print, is the single largest category of paper use (Source: Statista, 2017 data). The 55% share for packing in 2017 is surely higher today with the

great increase of products and food delivered at home – in cardboard boxes – as we shelter in place.

### Global paper consumption (by paper category, in tonnes).



### Conclusion

We should save print newspapers. They are the most time-efficient way to stay generally informed. A goal of a democracy to have an informed electorate since the right to govern in a democracy comes from the consent of those governed. Print newspapers facilitate this goal.

Print newspapers are compatible with sustainable existence on our planet.

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