

The Daily Newspaper Routine Experiences an Evolution

by [Bob Cohen](#), Media Post, November 13, 2009

Everyone has a daily routine. From tasks as mundane as walking the dog to a morning workout regimen. There are certain things that we, as Americans, simply do. **For almost three-quarters of American adults in our country, this routine includes reading a newspaper** - in print, in your email, on your Blackberry or across any other of the many channels available to society today.

Therefore, it is interesting to me, as a researcher, sociologist and media industry veteran, that there has been so much considerable coverage questioning the current health and future viability of newspapers.

As a researcher, I can share with you what the numbers show about the newspaper business. Scarborough Research has tracked the audiences of newspapers for more than 35 years. Our 2009 measurements indicate that, in contrast to stereotypes or misconceptions, readership of newspapers, while declining, is still relatively strong and part of our routine and culture. According to our latest newspaper ratings:

-74% of adults read a paper in print or online during the past week. Newspaper readership in some markets reach upwards of 90%.

-19% visited a newspaper website during the past week.

-70% of American adults (18+) read a printed newspaper during an average week.

While the numbers speak for themselves, I understand why readership may be in question. Media has spent more than a decade incorporating online platforms into our strategies. Hear the word "newspaper" and we think exclusively of paper and ink editions. But the reality is that newspapers have become more than the traditional printed copy. Scarborough data demonstrates that newspapers are successfully extending their audiences online, providing a 4% "lift" in readership to their print companions.

Indeed, newspapers face major challenges in "monetizing" these online audiences, to attempt to compensate for the decrease in advertising in their printed editions. But this critical business issue should not conceal **the continuing and sustained interest that large percentages of Americans have in the content of newspapers, as reflected in the size of newspaper audiences, both print and online.**

Further, newspapers are increasingly providing their content on a variety of digital platforms, including mobile, e-editions and e-reader devices. These ever-evolving technologies are now assuming their own roles in our daily routine, and newspapers

have a challenge to further monetize their content across them.

The sociologist part of my background provides a different perspective.

Naturally, the business and financial challenges that stem from the decline of advertising revenue are bigger headlines. Since many consumers tend to gravitate toward controversy and out-of-the-ordinary developments, this has dwarfed the story about newspapers' ability to maintain audience. The emphasis on this angle, however, prompts a natural question: Are newspapers successfully telling their own business story to advertisers or investors?

The newspaper culture is one steadfastly rooted in in-depth journalism, which means presenting facts with balance and fairness. Aggressive self-promotion, while not a natural inclination of this culture, could go a long way in these unusual times.

My varied background as researcher, media professional and sociologist all converge on one final principle: localism. Simply stated, your daily routine, and the inclusion of reading a newspaper in that routine, is strongly rooted in the context of where you live, because media choices, business conditions, employment opportunities, lifestyles, shopping options, and daily work and commuting patterns vary by local market.

Even in the age of the Internet and access to virtual communities, local, physical geography is a more significant determining factor in our lives than we sometimes appreciate. Where you live on Planet Earth is significant.

Scarborough's data tells us that newspapers -- both print and online -- still reach a critical mass of U.S. adults. But it also shows that print audiences are slowly and steadily declining. How can the newspaper industry reconcile consumers' desire for the in-depth reporting and content newspapers provide with the changing routines of Americans?

The challenge for publishers, as is true for all media executives, is to evolve delivery of that content to better incorporate into the new daily routines of Americans. **And, once again, demonstrate to advertisers that Americans do, in fact, read newspapers. It is simply part of our daily routine; the medium is just evolving.**