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Who Reads Newspapers Anymore?

By: David L. Thompson

What's the point of writing an opinion article if nobody reads newspapers anymore? That's a partially valid point raised by a few PR professionals and people who tend to get their news via social media or updates read on their phones. The thinking goes that maybe back in the days of old that everyone scoured the daily printed newspaper for articles they could clip, photocopy, and hand out or mail to contacts. But that day has long gone. Why spend the time when no one's going to read it?

In the word of a character of fiction oft-cited in December: "Humbug" to that. And we're not just saying that because National Council of Nonprofits' President and CEO just published an article in *The Hill* ([Natural disasters keep coming. So should disaster tax relief.](#)) Getting random readers to see and take action based on the persuasion of an opinion article is a great result, but it's not the only reason for drafting, polishing, and submitting an op-ed to a print or electronic publication. Here are other reasons for writing op-eds:



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- **Putting thoughts into a cohesive argument or effective flow of reasoning.** The exercise of drafting an article for publication can be an excellent discipline, forcing the writer to approach the subject from the readers' perspective and empowering others to have a vetted base from which to expand, focus, or pivot.
- **Taking readers beyond headlines, talking points, and sound bites** to share more of the whole story in a straightforward and reader-friendly format. Typically, opinion articles come in at around 750 words – neither simplistically short nor oppressively long.
- **Connecting the dots.** The whole point of advocacy is putting ideas, data, and stories in context so the person you are seeking to convince can see the whole picture. Short of putting on a PhD level course on the topic, the modern opinion article serves the purpose nicely.
- **Getting exposure for the issue.** Maybe random readers won't care what you have to say; but maybe some will whom you didn't anticipate will expand the reach and enhance the impact of the written words.
- **Returning Back to the Future.** Although the technology (pixels, not ink) and format (electronic, not hard copy) have largely changed, a principal purpose of the act of writing an opinion piece remains intact – being able to send a copy to an intended audience. Yesteryear's technique of mimeographing nine copies to hand-deliver to the mayor and eight other city council members, or photocopying 30 copies to mail to each member of the state senate, may have largely gone the way of the dinosaur. Yet the original underlying rationale remains equally strong today: the ability to put the piece in front of the intended audience. Only now we can simply forward a link to the piece via email to lawmakers, their staffs, other media to gin up additional coverage, as well as to organizational members, coalition partners, and others to build the pressure on lawmakers to act in the desired way.

These are just a few of the reasons for preparing opinion articles for public consumption. The bottom line is that op-eds are an important tool in the advocacy toolbox. Not something that must always be employed. But an approach that – at the right moment – can build on past efforts, broaden an understanding for your point of view, and shift momentum in your favor.