



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Like “Paper or Plastic?”, it’s Now “Print or Digital?”

December 20, 2011

In this month’s 60-Second Email™, we speak with Michael Romaner, Executive Vice President for Digital at Morris Communications. Morris Communications is a privately held media company headquartered in Augusta, Georgia with diversified holdings including newspaper and magazine publishing, outdoor advertising, radio broadcasting, book publishing and distribution, visitor publications and online services. Morris Publishing Group (the newspaper publishing arm of the company and one of the oldest newspaper companies in the United States) owns and operates 13 daily newspapers as well as nondaily newspapers, city magazines, and free community publications in the Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, and Alaska.

David Harper: As Executive Vice President for Digital for the entire company, what are your main responsibilities?

Michael Romaner: Ultimately, I am responsible for the strategic direction our company takes in the digital publishing arena. In this new position, I work with all of Morris’ diverse divisions in helping them form strategy, partnerships and digital marketing. Over time, I expect other responsibilities will emerge. For example, it is likely my team and I will help our division heads find and provision resources to achieve their digital goals, whether they be in development or sales or marketing.

What are some of the greatest challenges today facing the print version of newspapers and other printed publishing?

This is always an interesting question. The best answer I can give is “time.” Or maybe, “proliferation of choice.” People still love printed products. But since the advent of the web, the amount of information – and entertainment – that has become readily available



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has exploded beyond anyone's imaginings. The vastness of it all absorbs people's attention in a way that traditional products like newspapers and magazines can't do anymore. Who has time to read a daily newspaper in the morning when the first thing you do is check your email, your Facebook page, Twitter, etc?

Well, some people do, in fact, have the time and make the time, because the daily newspaper is still a very powerful thing. And important! But some people don't make the time. For young people, newspapers never became relevant. For some others, newspapers (and magazines) lost their relevance, simply given the proliferation of information choices. This is certainly not universal. Millions of people continue to subscribe to these traditional products. And they drive a powerful business – one that is not nearly as powerful as it once was, however.

Advertising dollars also have become scattered across the giant new marketplace of information and entertainment solutions. Think classifieds: Does a local auto dealer want his listings on a local classifieds website or Autotrader.com, where he will find the same audience as is on the local site, plus an expanded audience beyond anything the local site can provide?

What are the greatest opportunities in the digital area?

The smart money says it's in mobile – hardware, apps, advertising, HTML5 web development. Forecasts say that 60 percent of all digital advertising will be on mobile devices in 2016. Right now, the amount spent on mobile-related advertising is miniscule. Imagine the shift we are going to see over the next 48 months.

How will newspapers and publishing be different 2 – 3 years from now?

Increasingly, our efforts are turning to digital, and especially mobile. We are launching apps for everything. And we're learning to sell mobile. Increasingly, publishing on print will be a niche practice, and printed products will be niche products. But those products



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will be more expensive than ever, as niche products tend to be. People who want them in that format will be happy to pay the price.

How do you define “leadership”?

I just finished reading Walter Isaacson’s biography on Steve Jobs, and now I have some new views about leadership (I highly recommend the book). Job’s success came from several factors, particularly he loved the products Apple built. He loved them in a way that he had to be involved in their development every step of the way. Whether it was how the software worked, or the hardware, or the design aesthetic, he insisted on being close, involved. He breathed life into Apple’s products in a way no one else at the company ever did – and there were (are) many great people working at Apple.

Too many executives in too many companies are too removed from the product or service the company provides. They are too happy to delegate to experts, because either they think they should, or because they have no real passion for the product. CEOs typically manage the money, not the thing the company is known for outputting. Leadership, then, is about passion. It’s about teaching your employees in a hands-on way to love the product and care for the customers it serves.

Looking over your career, what’s one of your most meaningful accomplishments?

I have always tried to inspire greatness in my employees. I have sometimes been successful. Over the years, there have been times when my division was a great place to be. That’s what I wanted most of all.

What’s one of your most notable regrets?

I didn’t stay close enough to the product. Had I done so, we would have had better products. I delegated too much.

What would you recommend to new employees who aspire to be managers and leaders?



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Don't lose touch with the skill you developed that got you into management in the first place. If you were an engineer, be sure to continue to engineer. Keep your skills honed. If you were a designer, design stuff for the rest of your life – even if you become the CEO. Yes, you will have to learn all sorts of new skills. But you must make time to keep the old ones alive. Most managers never learn to do that. And then, they increasingly become removed from the product. They wind up delegating themselves to far less important roles, like “running the company,” rather than building the product.

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What changes do you expect to see in publishing? How have your reading habits changed? Are you print or digital? Share your thoughts with other readers on our [blog](#). We also welcome your comments on this month's issue.

You can access all of our 60-Second Emails™, including the most recent issue, *Did Steve Jobs Leave You Frustrated?*, via this [link](#).

Thanks for reading, and the very best of wishes to you and your family for the holidays and the New Year.

Best regards,

**David**

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