

Uniting Idaho: A Small Newspaper Serves Hispanic Populations in Distributed Rural Areas

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Abstract

Print-media needs of Hispanics in non-metropolitan areas of America are often overlooked. One newspaper editor in Idaho found Hispanics to be invisible in her small community and its newspaper, except in crime reports. So she began publishing the bilingual *Idaho Unido*. This study addresses the publisher's business model and motivation for publication. It is based on two research streams: theories of the press from Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm in 1956 through McQuail in 2005 and cultural maintenance perspectives. The *Idaho Unido* story represents a revelatory case, demonstrating the power of a motivated individual to essentially subvert the dominant media paradigm by creating a successful, independent publication specifically intended to serve the information, entertainment and cultural-identity needs of a small, marginalized population living in widely distributed rural areas.

Keywords: communication, entrepreneurship, ethnic media, Hispanic newspapers, journalism, minority press, theories of the press

Introduction

The mass media are agencies for the development of cultural perspectives for ethnic groups in the United States (Rios & Gaines, 1998, p. 746). Among the fastest-growing minority ethnic populations are Hispanics, who account for approximately 13.3 percent of Americans. Minority populations want, need and deserve to be heard, addressed and represented in the mass media's "marketplace of ideas" (Carveth & Alverio, 1996; Rodgers, 1999; Rodgers & Thorson, 1999), and while the media landscape is steadily evolving to better meet the needs of the growing Hispanic population, often overlooked are those Hispanics who do not reside in large metropolitan areas or states along the U.S.-Mexico border. Between 1990 and 2000, Hispanics led non-metro minority population growth. "Three out of every four States posted non-metro Hispanic population gains of 50 percent or more, and almost half posted gains of over 100 percent" (Economic Research Service, 2002). Despite the widespread increase of Hispanic populations in rural areas, local media have been slow to accommodate the needs of this newer demographic segment.

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One state with a surprisingly large Hispanic population is Idaho. This north-western state is eight percent Hispanic overall – seven percent Hispanic in its non-metro population – and expected to be 11.8 percent Hispanic by 2025 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004).

Given declining newspaper circulation and rising production costs in the American newspaper industry, it is notable when a publisher perceives a niche adequate to motivate a new market entry. This study investigates the establishment and operation of *Idaho Unido*, a bilingual biweekly publication serving Idaho's Hispanic population. This case history compares the newspaper with established concepts of media roles and financing, and it examines how a small ethnic newspaper attempts to serve a widely distributed, largely rural Hispanic population. The following research questions are addressed:

RQ1. Does the motivation to create a Spanish-language newspaper adhere to an established theory of the press?

RQ2. Could *Idaho Unido* serve as a successful model for Spanish-language newspapers serving widely distributed, largely rural Hispanic populations?

Literature Review

The use of literature in an interpretive study varies somewhat from that typically found in research adopting positivistic perspectives. As further described in the methodology section, *Idaho Unido* is offered as a revelatory case study and as such does not constitute testing of theory in the traditional sense. Rather, the researcher's acknowledgement of theory serves to inform the reader of prior understandings or biases that may color the interpretation of case data. That said, two primary streams of research provided the conceptual perspective shaping the development of this case: role of the press in cultural maintenance and general theories of the organization of the press function in society.

Cultural maintenance literature provides some understanding of the role mass media play in supporting ethnic identification, creating a sense of community and supporting cultural ties. The literature indicates that readers seek newspapers for local, relevant information and to support cultural identity (Jeffres, 1983; Jeffres, 2000; Maddox, 1984; Marquez, 1993). That there is a link between media and culture is substantiated by research indicating that mass media can be used to promote acculturation or assimilation into the dominant culture or to preserve a subculture, strengthening its identity and protecting it from being absorbed into the mainstream. Marzolf (1979) found media to be vehicles for learning about and accommodating to the host society. Although his study concerned foreign students, a parallel principle may apply to the setting of Hispanic subcultures in America who may desire varying degrees of acculturation. On the other hand, "the existence of ethnic mass media institutions has been seen as evidence of the persistence and distinctiveness of ethnic groups," and the ethnic media may function as shields against pressure to acculturate (Subervi-Velez, 1986; Hsu et al., 1993).

The literature also refers to the importance of language in media. Researchers in international media have commented on "the 'natural' links and solidarities generated by... cultural or linguistic proximity" (Laborde & Perrot, 2000; Wieten, Murdock & Dahlgren, 2000). Gruban, discussing international advertising, points out the common mistake of "underestimating the language barrier and cultural milieu of a country" (Gruban, 1994). Since the barriers in question here are culture and language, it seems reasonable to apply similar logic to cultures within a single nation, such as Hispanic subcultures of North America, and to appreciate the appeal of media offerings in the mother tongue.

Readers want to connect with the familiar and the relevant. Hispanics are known to use mass media (specifically television) for functions such as learning new things, "to learn about myself" and to "keep me aware" (Albarran & Umphrey, 1993). People want to read about themselves and about people they know and issues that hit close to home; they want local information. For example, a reader in New York was exclusively loyal to *El Diario* "because they write about my

culture and problems facing the Hispanic community" (Marquez, 1993). A reader of the *Ithaca Journal* in New York state valued his local paper because it is "our only source of local events: barbecues, book sales and the like" (Galper, 1998). The reader/publisher link may be especially strong for minorities, who less often see themselves represented in the news. Jeffres found a strong correlation between "ethnic media use and ethnic identification" which worked in both directions as ethnic media use led to ethnic identification and activity which in turn led to more use of ethnic communication channels (1983, p. 7; 2000, p. 513). The pattern was "particularly strong for reading ethnic newspapers."

Reader satisfaction with newspapers has been linked to publication traits, notably their expression of community concern, fulfillment of the journalistic surveillance function and credibility. One study concerning newspaper reader judgments identified two dimensions, competence/trust and personalism/surveillance/dynamism, to be predictors of reader satisfaction. Burgoon et al. (1986, p. 775) noted that "caring what the reader thinks actually had strong loadings" on these factors. Some sections of the newspaper are more compelling than others. Hispanics exceed Anglos in their interest in letters to the editor and news about local politics, immigration, discrimination, sports from Latin America, bilingual education and religion (Subervi-Velez, 1986). As *American Demographics* rather insistently proclaimed, local people read local newspapers for local news coverage: "All politics is local. The same can be said of newspapers" (Galper, 1998).

The preceding discussion has laid groundwork for understanding the motivation of Hispanic populations in Idaho for choosing to read particular newspapers. The next section looks at the publisher motivation. There is a logical connection between the two perspectives, as it would seem reasonable that a successful publication to sell would be a satisfying publication to read.

Publishers of ethnic newspapers have expressed motivations other than financial for their journalistic pursuits. Armando Chapeli, who was publisher of *El Tiempo Latino* newspaper in Washington, D.C. in 1993, told *Hispanic* magazine that the main focus of his publication was to provide hundreds of thousands of area Hispanics with "useful, timely information and opinion... with an underlying focus on education and hard work being the only way the community can rise and be successful" (Marquez, 1993). In other instances where ethnic newspapers appear, similar publisher motivations occur. A Denver, Colorado weekly has worked since the 1970s "to bring cohesiveness to Colorado's Latin community, which is a mix of Cubans, Latin Americans, Mexicans, and long-time Chicano residents. *La Voz* has been a major booster of voter registration... In addition to coverage of political issues, international affairs, and business and community news, *La Voz* features success stories about people [whom the publishers] believe should serve as role models for the Hispanic community" (Maddox, 1984).

In short, publishers need not be perceived as strictly mercenary. Their motivations reflect, albeit imperfectly, components of well known theories concerning systems of organizing the functions and control of the press. What follows here is a brief overview of the theories most relevant to the case at hand. The seminal work of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1986) 50 years ago proposed four theories or forms of press organization, and subsequent writers have worked to expand, elaborate and correct it. Siebert et al. proposed the authoritarian, soviet communist, libertarian and social responsibility "theories." The first two have little applicability in the United States, especially today, but the latter two remain somewhat relevant. Libertarian theory contends that the press is an instrument to enable citizens in a democratic population to discover and evaluate truth for themselves (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 3). However, while the name libertarian may evoke an image of promoting a democratic political system, this is not necessarily the case, as Merrill (1990, p. 30) points out: "In libertarian theory there is no *obligation* on the press." A slightly later development, indeed an outgrowth or variation of libertarian theory, social responsibility theory (Merrill & Lowenstein, 1971, p. 175) holds that the press "enjoys a privileged position" accompanied by obligations. Six tasks describe the social responsibility theory includ-

ing: serving the political system by providing information, enlightening the public to make it capable of self-government, protecting individual rights by serving as a watchdog over the government, promoting the economy by bringing together buyer and seller through advertising, providing entertainment, and maintaining financial self-sufficiency of the publication itself (Siebert et al., 1956, pp. 73-74). This is a concept that actually goes back to the Hutchins commission report of 1947 which called for the press to provide “a representative picture of constituent groups in society” (McQuail, 1994, p. 124).

McQuail addresses the two-sided coin of freedom of the media and “freedom and access of citizens to media of their choice” (Hocking, 1947, p. 169; McQuail, 2005, p. 144). He says diversity of ownership is based on the principle that “citizens should have access to media that reflect their ideas and meet their interests and needs” (McQuail, 2005, p. 145). He further notes that in the 1970s some European countries were adequately concerned about press diversity and concentration of ownership that “in a number of countries, subsidies were introduced to maintain a range of competing newspapers and especially to support ailing and minority publications” (McQuail, 2005, p. 150).

McQuail proposed a press theory called the democratic-participant model developed “in recognition of new media developments and of increasing criticism of the dominance of the main mass media” (McQuail, 1994, p. 131). The democratic-participant theory emphasizes public communication “as a means to involve citizens in the political process (McQuail, 1996, p. 71). As interpreted by Berger, McQuail’s democratic-participation theory “calls for ‘deinstitutionalization’ of media and a kind of cultural pluralism wherein ethnic and community groups would have far greater access to media, which should serve ‘the needs, interests, and aspirations of the ‘receiver’ in a political society” (Berger, 1997; McQuail, 1987, p. 97). Milton applied the theory to post-Communist East Central Europe. Mwangi applied the theory to media in developing nations where democracy is emergent. Heuva applied it to alternative press in Namibia (The Atlantic Council of the United States, 2003; Heuva, 2001; Milton, 1997, 2000; Mwangi, 2002). While Idaho does not represent an emergent democracy, the unique and in some cases illegal status of many Spanish-speaking readers represents a disenfranchised minority population that may share some of the needs and concerns of ethnic populations in emergent democracies. However, the theory has broader applicability as well. Mwangi explains that the theory “attempts to establish a level playing field in a democracy” and centers on the idea that “citizens have a right to relevant local information... and the right to use the means of communication for interaction and social action in small-scale settings” (Mwangi, 2002; Pateman, 1979). The democratic-participant model involves “horizontal patterns of interaction” and has been envisioned as using alternative press as well as “micro-media in rural settings and media for... ethnic minorities.” Similarly, Atton (2001) proposes that the theory should be applied to alternative media, although his definition encompasses artistic and literary media and “newer cultural forms.” McQuail (1983) observes that minority groups should have the right of access to media and to be served by media “according to their own determination of need”; that groups, organizations, and local communities should have their own media; and that media should exist primarily for their audiences and not for the media organizations or their clients. The motivations of the Washington, D.C. and Denver publishers identified above appear largely consistent with the social responsibility and democratic-participant theories of the press, even though some theorists argue that market-driven media cannot completely qualify for democratic-participant status.

In summary, the literature indicates that publishers of ethnic newspapers are successful when they provide trustworthy, local, relevant news that enhances ethnic cultural identification and makes readers feel a sense of connection. The literature also reveals that enlightened publishers are motivated to meet their readers’ desires for relevance by providing local political information, entertainment and advertising. An overview of publisher perspectives began with the general theories

of the press as they have developed over the past 50 years, concluding that the social responsibility and democratic-participant models may be particularly relevant to media directed toward ethnic minorities. Research focusing on ethnic newspapers indicates that publishers aim to provide useful information to communities in order to foster ethnic cultural identity and cohesiveness and to present positive role models. Using these literature sources as a general lens, this paper next describes and analyzes the development and operation of a particular bilingual newspaper. Perspectives from the literature review will inform the response to the research questions in a later section.

Methodology: Single-Site Case Study

The researcher selected an exploratory research approach employing a single-site case-study design examining the motivation for and operation of *Idaho Unido*. Extant literature addresses minority cultural maintenance and media consumption. Yet much of that research is situated in larger urban populations where a critical mass of Hispanic population exists. These urban settings generally offer a wide range of culturally relevant activities and institutions and may be expected to be capable of supporting dedicated Hispanic-language media. The current research seeks a better understanding of how the media needs of rural and relatively isolated Hispanic populations can be served. Stake (1994) suggests that obtaining this type of understanding requires knowledge in “the particular” or exploratory research delving into individual “revelatory” case studies in contrast with the broad contexts generalized by quantitative research (Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994). Data analysis consists primarily of the creation of a case narrative that captures the motivation for the creation of *Idaho Unido* newspaper as well as issues surrounding its operations in order to develop an accurate and rich description of the phenomenon. This study seeks scholarly and pragmatic validity (Kvale, 1989) and therefore has adopted an interpretivist research design employing data elicitation and analysis techniques in a manner consistent with recommendations of leading qualitative researchers and methodologists.

The Case of *Idaho Unido*: Creating a Vehicle to Meet Ethnic-Media Needs

Idaho Unido is the only Spanish-language newspaper in the state of Idaho. The bilingual bi-weekly tabloid is published in Pocatello, Idaho and serves the entire state. It began publication in May 1995 and is published by a privately held corporation. It emphasizes local news but also carries state, regional, national and international news for the state’s fastest-growing ethnic-minority population.

The Need

It was 1994 when a budding journalist began to get formally acquainted with the interactions between media and society. And with the role a local newspaper can play in meeting community needs. She saw how a newspaper can serve as a gatekeeper, barring some publics from inclusion. And she learned how a newspaper can bridge a gap and fill cultural and social needs.

Upon graduation from Idaho State University, Farhana Hibbert accepted a job as photographer and reporter at the *Battle Mountain Bugle* in Nevada. Seeking a chance to work closer to home, she became writer and editor for the *Aberdeen Times* in Aberdeen, Idaho. The small, agriculturally based town in the southeast corner of the state exhibited a social, political and economic divide, being about equal parts farm owner (largely non-Hispanic white) and farm laborer (largely Hispanic), the latter living mostly in manufactured housing.

In the community Ms. Hibbert served, about half of all school students were Hispanic. Yet there seemed to be no Hispanic students on the honor roll or in the choir. She saw no Hispanic Americans on the school board, library board or city council. No Hispanic girls participated in the Junior Miss Pageant, even though the annual competition tends to be very popular in Idaho. A dozen Hispanic girls did compete in the Cinco de Mayo Scholarship Pageant, but that event was little publicized in the mass media. “Look at that!” Ms. Hibbert exclaimed. “Twelve beautiful girls, and none of them in the Junior Miss Pageant. None of them in the newspaper either.” Although the Aberdeen community was approximately 40 percent Hispanic, almost none of the newspaper’s social or news-feature coverage concerned this segment of the population. “I thought, how can this be?” Ms. Hibbert recalled. “Don’t Hispanic people have weddings, births or deaths?” Similarly, soccer leagues drew a thousand Hispanic people to the park on a warm evening in nearby Blackfoot. But the *Blackfoot Morning News* carried no coverage of their activities or game results. There seemed to be no Hispanics in the news.

In one newspaper section, however, Spanish surnames did appear: crime reports. Ms. Hibbert perceived a preponderance of negative coverage of Hispanics in the Aberdeen paper’s hard-news coverage. She began to notice that reports of criminal arrests bore either a Hispanic-sounding name or no identity at all. When she asked why a police-beat reporter only recorded the names of the arrested when their names sounded Hispanic, the reporter was unable to explain but insisted it was not a matter of being “prejudiced.” It would be difficult to determine with surety why the particular crime writer behaved as indicated here, but previous studies may offer some potential explanations. McManus found that “news decisions are rarely made by consciously thinking through the components of business and journalism standards, but by reference to the organizational culture that integrates the two into practices that are rewarded, tolerated or punished within a particular newsroom” (Dimmick, 1974; McManus, 1994). Croteau and Hoynes similarly noted that reporters learn in editorial conferences the criteria for writing stories their editor will accept and begin to produce the implicitly desired behavior (Croteau & Hoynes, 2002, pp. 122,127). Thus, it seems plausible that newsroom culture may have affected the crime reporter’s judgments in this case.

Since Ms. Hibbert spoke Spanish, she began soliciting news for the *Aberdeen Times* from Spanish-speaking residents. “Why?” they responded. “No one reads that paper.” Hispanics in south-east Idaho indicated that they watched Univision, Galavision and Telemundo national television but did not read a local newspaper. The problem with newspaper readership was not illiteracy, Ms. Hibbert said. It was irrelevance.

As in media so in society. Hispanics were invisible in the media and in reality. Ms. Hibbert cited instances of Aberdeen, Idaho whites and Hispanics living next door to one another for 30 years and not knowing one another’s names.

The Vision

Driving from work in Aberdeen to their home in Pocatello one day in the spring of 1995, Farhana and her husband, Monte, discussed the situation. Ms. Hibbert marveled at the lack of diversity in the local media. The Hibberts began to do some research. They examined every Idaho newspaper they could find. They uncovered very little news directed *toward* Hispanics or migrants and hardly any “society” news *about* Hispanics.

“What we really need is a Spanish newspaper!” Ms. Hibbert decided.

A mere three weeks later the first edition of the Hibberts’ Spanish-language newspaper was born. Its official mission statement, still printed in every edition, is to advance positive relations among Spanish speakers in the state of Idaho and to provide information that will be “opportune and im-

portant” for all members of the community. Other company documents refer to an aim to advance community relations, provide timely information, promote bilingualism and improve literacy rates.

The newspaper was originally called *Idaho Sudeste* (Idaho Southeast) and served communities in southeast Idaho. It was written entirely in Spanish. Ms. Hibbert had learned Spanish in Puerto Rico in her youth but had to get back up to speed in writing formal Spanish, which she had not done for eight years. She became publisher. Mr. Hibbert grew up a monolingual English speaker and says he did poorly in Spanish in high school, but a subsequent church mission in Mexico inspired him to minor in Spanish in college. He became the newspaper’s editor. In the first edition, May 4, 1995, the publication introduced itself and carried an apology for any linguistic errors that might appear.

The Hibberts faced numerous challenges in launching their new venture. They were initially unprepared for the time and effort needed to publish a biweekly newspaper. He was a University of Idaho employee and she the editor of another Idaho newspaper. Within a few weeks both Hibberts gave up secure, full-time jobs to dedicate their work time to being newspaper publishers.

Evolution of the Publication

Idaho Sudeste was an eight-page tabloid produced in a bedroom converted into an office at the Hibberts’ house. The publishers did their own photography, and Ms. Hibbert developed the film in a closet. The little newspaper was printed at Southern Idaho Press in Burley, Idaho. On the way back from the printer, Monte would drive while Farhana hand-stapled the little newspapers for mailing by 5:30 p.m. The original press run was 6,000 with one paid subscription sold to a customer in Blackfoot, Idaho for \$25 a year. The Hibberts themselves did not draw salaries from the newspaper the first few years; other income sources paid their personal housing and family expenses. When the newspaper was three years old, the Hibberts were still producing it at their home, then shared by their first two children; the family had no health insurance. It was not until November 2000 that HibbCo Inc. found a freestanding home of its own in an old building previously used as a corner store in a residential neighborhood in Pocatello, Idaho.

In its second year (Volume 2, Edition 10, published Oct. 17, 1996), the newspaper began to feature short summaries in English at the beginning of each story. This feature was intended to appeal to bilingual and English-only readers. Headlines and photo captions were in Spanish only. By early 1997 the publication had expanded its coverage and distribution enough to serve the entire state and merit a new name, *Idaho Unido* (Idaho United). The next phase started at the end of that year when the newspaper began to feature complete Spanish and English translations of stories side-by-side. Advertising has consistently run in Spanish.

Idaho Unido began featuring a site on the World Wide Web in the publication’s third year, half-way through 1997. A webmaster working just one hour a week posts stories (front-page news only) to the *Idaho Unido* homepage. The website was set up with award money received in a USWest small-business competition.

Nothing Succeeds Like Relevance

The publishers are now on many mailing lists and receive countless press releases and story tips, but it was not always so. It can be difficult to get input when your publication is not a mainstream newspaper. Local hospitals do not consistently send birth announcements to alternative publications. Ms. Hibbert knows: when her own child was born, she specifically requested that the announcement be sent to *Idaho Unido* as well as to the mainstream local *Idaho State Journal*. But the *Idaho Unido* copy never arrived.

The Hibberts' initial news sources resulted from soliciting information at a Cinco de Mayo celebration in Idaho Falls. Setting up a booth at the event netted content leads such as feature stories, announcements and photo opportunities in addition to generating interest in sales of the forthcoming publication.

One key to getting information has been language. The Hibberts approach news sources and subjects as Cunningham (2002) might recommend: with respect and in their own language. About half of the *Idaho Unido* employees speak Spanish. Half are of Hispanic ethnicity. Much of the effort is still grass-roots. Newspaper employees contact each high school in writing and request they send photographs of all graduating Hispanic students. While this may seem like an imprecise or controversial procedure, cooperation and satisfaction have been high, Ms. Hibbert said.

The paper is an associate member of Associated Press and therefore runs some wire stories. Syndicated material includes horoscopes and comic strips in Spanish. HibbCo Inc. has had an agreement since 1997 with *Diario de Yucatan* in Mexico whereby *Idaho Unido* may run stories from the Mexican newspaper's website. The publisher also belongs to American Business Women's Association, Idaho Business Network, Investigative Reporters and Editors, NAACP, National Image, and Society of Professional Journalists.

The newspaper has run special sections or inserts concerning relevant health risks. They addressed Campesinos Unidos migrant farm workers with a special insert called "Nuestra Vision" and increased their print run by 3,000. They have done editions on Idaho Fair Housing. Readers are especially interested in celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo and Mexican Independence Day (September 16), and *Idaho Unido* accommodates these interests. The publisher is concerned that her audience be informed about civil rights, employment issues and upcoming elections. She is diligent about running U.S. Government citizenship and immigration information.

The front page is always "local and focal," Ms. Hibbert said. Priorities for page-one news include, first, news about Hispanics in Idaho and, second, anything that affects Hispanics, which may be local or national. Virtually every issue has a front-page feature story with Hispanic people or events thoroughly covered and accompanied by prominent photos. A partial list of standard departments indicates the publications' priorities: immigration news and citizenship ceremonies; scholarship opportunities and educational honors; entertainment opportunities such as Hispanic-oriented musical band and dance hall activities; religious events such as baptisms, first communions and Latter Day Saint missionary updates; job opportunities; quinceañeras (celebrations of Hispanic girls' 15th birthdays); and sports including scores and other coverage of Hispanic baseball and soccer leagues.

Relationship Marketing

The publication is living up to the ad-campaign slogan on staff members' promotional bumper stickers, "*Idaho Unido: Mi Periodico*" (*Idaho Unido: My Publication*).

"It's a people thing," Ms. Hibbert said. "We love the community we serve. It's a very personal thing." The personal touch goes back to the early days of building contacts with readers and information sources. "In the early years we knew every birth, every quinceañeras. We went to people's homes to pick up the children's pictures." The publisher likes to say that the newspaper "humanizes the Hispanics of Idaho" by printing news of "people who don't usually make the society pages." She added that one measure of the success of a newspaper is the presence of its clips on readers' refrigerators, which she sees frequently.

"It gets information to some people who might otherwise not get it at all," said reader Antonio Salcido of Idaho Falls, then-president of Idaho Committee on Hispanic Affairs (*Post Register*, 1998). For example, one subscriber wrote to tell the Hibberts, "I've lived in Idaho Falls for five

years, and I never knew about this. I read about the local Cinco de Mayo festival in your paper. I am here because of you.”

Letters to the editor represent such a broad range of interests the publisher herself finds it “incredible.” A recent issue bore four letters including one about local politics, one about politics in Mexico, one from a North Carolina student seeking Hispanic contacts, and an appreciative note from a woman whose nephew’s birth announcement had run in the previous issue. A special file at the publisher’s office is marked “prison letters” and bears the pleas of Hispanics who find themselves in need of legal assistance. Electronic communication, too, is essential to the daily operation of the publication. The editor receives about 300 e-mail messages a day.

The Idaho Unido Business Model

Mainstream newspapers find it difficult to dedicate the resources necessary to publish Spanish-language pages, sections or editions (Cunningham, 2002). Yet a small independent Hispanic newspaper has been surviving, even thriving, for a decade: *Idaho Unido* is not trying to be all things to all people. It aims to serve its targeted market segment well. The publication is now 12 years old. Today it typically runs 16 pages with a grid of five columns by 15 inches. Some routine issues run 24 pages, and the annual high school graduation issue may be as large as 48 pages.

Circulation

Volume 1, Edition 1, published on May 4, 1995 under the name *Idaho Sudeste*, was sold at 12 locations in five southeast Idaho towns. (Those towns were Aberdeen, American Falls, Blackfoot, Fort Hall and Pocatello.) A year later, Volume 2, Edition 1 (May 2, 1996) was distributed at 31 locations in 14 towns. Today the distribution list includes 136 outlets in 40 cities and towns all over the state.

The newspaper began with one paid subscription. When the publication was one year old it had 350 paid subscribers. It averaged eight pages. Just after the three-year mark (by August 1998), the company had 750 paid subscribers. Today the Hibberts claim readership of about 10,000.

Single-copy price always has been 50 cents. The in-state home-subscription price (delivered by mail) is \$25 for 52 issues.

Advertising

The first advertisements in the newspaper came from Ballet Folklorico, Competitive Auto of Blackfoot (on a one-year contract), a hair salon, a flower shop, a clothing store, Les Schwab tires, an insurance company, holiday cruises and a health clinic. Percentage of advertising lineage in the first issue, an eight-page tabloid, was 24 percent. In the first year advertising averaged about 50 percent. Halfway through the fourth year, the newspaper’s Nov. 17, 1998 edition ran 507.75 column inches of advertising in a 16-page tabloid-size paper for a proportion of about 42.3 percent advertising. Nowadays it consistently runs about 50 percent advertising, a bit under the national average (McManus, 1994; Squiers, 1993). Many stories take extra editorial space due to the use of dual languages. However, a calculation of a random sample of recent editions indicated that actual body text in the English language occupied less than eight percent of the paper. Headlines typically run only in Spanish, and the “English percentage” does not allow for the fact that a longer story (longer because it is repeated in another language) may justify a longer headline (e.g., running across four columns instead of two). Some items, such as birth announcements, run only in Spanish since little translation is needed. Photos, of course, run once with bilingual captions.

National advertising rates are \$12.50 per column inch, the same as they were when the newspaper was first published. Several sales arrangements are used including contract, seasonal and classified. The publication does not run different zoned editions; one version serves the whole state. Advertising, subscriptions and newsstand sales fund *Idaho Unido* production. These traditional newspaper income sources pay for printing, postage, computers, facilities and wages for 12 part-time employees. The company is not obliged to pay benefits for the part-timers but does provide on-site daycare. HibbCo Inc. has operated in the black since its first year.

Most mainstream newspapers enjoy, as part of their advertising income, the fees that governments pay to publish public notices and legal announcements. Other typical industry “subsidies” come from quasi-governmental entities such as agricultural organizations. There are no legal notices from local governments in *Idaho Unido* because it is not considered the local newspaper of record. A business such as HibbCo Inc. can, however, benefit from legislation that requires organizations to demonstrate outreach efforts to certain groups, such as Hispanics. Examples include organizations on government contracts addressing housing, health, education or employment issues. There are income opportunities in the form of advertising by not-for-profit organizations including government-grant-supported health clinics which are contractually obligated to conduct “outreach” via advertising. The Hibberts actively and successfully seek such advertising but find that these relationships are the hardest to develop; the ad contracts never seem to become routine. Rather, the challenge presents itself annually as the publishers approach pertinent entities: Hispanics are especially prone to diabetes, for example, and the Hibberts feel it is logical for diabetes-related advertising funds to be used in media vehicles that target relevant audiences.

The company occasionally receives some public or not-for-profit sponsorship of special tab sections. For example, a four-page spread concerning the Armonia (Harmony) Conference received a boost of \$500 from the Idaho Association of Cities. However, the company is self-supporting, relying on newspaper sales and advertising revenue to fund its operation.

Research Questions Answered

This study answers its research questions as follows.

RQ1. Does the motivation to create a Spanish-language newspaper adhere to established theories of the press?

Social responsibility theory applies fairly well to the *Idaho Unido* case. Of the six major tasks associated with this older theory, nearly all are exemplified by the bilingual, biweekly statewide newspaper. It serves the political system by providing information; this is evident because both politicians and constituents read it, an activity promoted by publishing in both English and Spanish. The newspaper enlightens the citizenry and protects people’s rights by covering political news, especially that concerning minority rights and immigration. It promotes the economy by matching advertisers with valuable target consumers. It provides entertainment via announcements of community events as well as its comics and horoscopes. And it has been financially self-sufficient for 12 years. Thus, *Idaho Unido* meets and reinforces Siebert’s criteria for social responsibility theory (Siebert et al., 1956, pp. 73-74).

However, more recent models of the press are more relevant. The democratic-participant model relates better to *Idaho Unido*. Of the major principles McQuail associates with the theory, most are exemplified by the bilingual biweekly. The newspaper demonstrates the principle that communities need their own media, particularly small media vehicles in which readers are active participants. *Idaho Unido* illustrates McQuail’s observation that minority groups should have the right to be served by media they feel meet their needs. *Idaho Unido* was founded on the idea that particular social needs were not being adequately expressed through major institutions and on the

foundation that media should exist for the sake of their audiences and not just for the benefit of media organizations. Thus, democratic-participant theory fits the current case, not as applied to developing nations or emergent democracies but in the broader sense whereby the theory “attempts to establish a level playing field in a democracy” and offers citizens relevant local information media for social interaction (Mwangi, 2002). As the literature review discussed, the still-evolving democratic-participant model is being applied to alternative media as well as newer media vehicles. While *Idaho Unido* is a traditional print vehicle, it does elicit extensive reader participation and interaction. The facetiously worded McQuail observation that “communication is too important to be left to professionals” also fits (1983, pp. 96-97): While the Hibberts are journalism professionals, much of their newspaper content is submitted by laypersons. *Idaho Unido* gives them a voice.

The rural distributed Hispanic populations of Idaho were not being served by mainstream print media. Lack of Hispanic readership of these publications was tied to the publications’ lack of relevance and perhaps lack of mainstream publisher appreciation of the value of the area’s minority readership. While national Spanish-language television was available, Idaho Hispanics, like other readers, yearned for local news. The *Idaho Unido* publishers had empathy for the Hispanic community, were surprised by the media void, recognized a need, saw a business opportunity and were willing to take a risk. Because they have met user needs, they have filled a niche in the marketplace of social and political ideas and have succeeded with their business enterprise.

RQ2. Could *Idaho Unido* serve as a successful model for Spanish-language newspapers serving widely distributed, largely rural Hispanic populations?

Could anyone launch such an enterprise? Probably not within three weeks of conceiving the idea, as HibbCo Inc. did. The Hibberts had the necessary language skills. They did not face significant competition in their niche. They demonstrated traits which promoted their success at developing business and news-source relationships: ambition, gregariousness, relevant talents. Another publisher with a vision, a modest budget, adequate communication skills and respect for its community could conceivably succeed in producing and profitably marketing a Spanish/bilingual publication. *Idaho Unido* is currently self-sustaining, and it appears that it will remain so. The publication has been surviving and growing – in circulation, brand equity and financial soundness – for nearly a decade. Its acceptance shows no signs of abating. The researcher did not attempt to assess *Idaho Unido*’s long-term economic potential. One cannot reasonably predict whether the newspaper will ever make a transition to more frequent publication supporting full-time employees with paid benefits while providing a favorable economic rate of return on the publishers’ financial capital and “sweat equity.” However, *Idaho Unido* has demonstrated that with a minimum of capital investment, high motivation and a strong work ethic, it is possible to produce a viable media product serving the needs of a widely distributed Hispanic population. Thus, *Idaho Unido* does serve as an exemplary model for rural, distributed Hispanic populations and probably for other minority or second-language populations as well. It seems reasonable that a similar publication could be operated by a local association or civic group with similar resources and context.

Discussion: Usage Fulfills Reader Need for Cultural Relevance

Idaho Unido recently observed its 12th anniversary of communicating with Hispanic readers in Idaho. The newspaper has become a welcome publication for its informational content, and it is a viable business venture. It has been successful because it has dealt with its readers and their interests in a sensitive manner. The Hibberts approach news sources and subjects with respect and in their own language. To borrow the terminology of public relations, they have engaged in two-

way communication with their multiple publics. They demonstrate the “community concern” factor discussed by Burgoon et al. (1986).

Hispanic readers use *Idaho Unido* to find out news relevant to them and to read positive stories about members of their community. Some Spanish speakers use *Idaho Unido* to improve their English, reading the side-by-side story versions to develop language skills. Likewise, English speakers use the bilingual publication to improve their Spanish. Businessmen use the vehicle as a means to reach Spanish-speaking consumers. Politicians use the paper for two-way communication with Spanish-speaking constituents: they now actively seek coverage from the publication, and they are regular readers because they need to know what potential voters think. This observation fits with those of Subervi-Velez (1986) regarding the political interests of Hispanic readers. School teachers use *Idaho Unido* as an educational tool in several dozen classrooms across the state. Readers use refrigerator magnets to post *Idaho Unido* clippings so the family can see them daily and children can be reminded of the pride their parents take in their accomplishments. Copies of “people features” are sent to relatives and pasted into scrap books. These soft-news items are high in the news value that Buckalew (1969) terms “human interest,” stories reflecting or generating emotion. This also is in accordance with the Galper (1998) perspective about the value of local news.

The newspaper is relevant to its readers for two major reasons: One, it is about people – people with whom the readers identify. Thus it speaks to the heart of the reader. Two, it is local – it concerns issues and events in proximity to the reader. Thus it speaks to the mind of the reader. It fills a need that no national newspaper, no matter how Hispanic-oriented, can satisfy. *Idaho Unido*, a local ethnic-minority newspaper, exemplifies a model from which publishers in other communities might learn.

Is *Idaho Unido* a paragon of investigative, hard-news reporting? No, it relies heavily on press releases, established sources and feature news. Does it provide coverage of political activities and official entities? Yes, it does. Does it provide relevant information demanded by a substantial reader/customer base? It does. Thus, it appears to gratify significant information, entertainment and cultural needs among readers/customers with a Hispanic cultural and/or linguistic identification. *Idaho Unido* exemplifies the production and consumption of media in support of cultural maintenance.

Future Research

This case study focuses on the publishers’ motivation for creating a media vehicle and on establishing its viability as a model for serving the needs of a Hispanic community. Its heavy reliance on publisher perspective is consistent with case study research and with the literature on press theory, which is based on publisher motivation. The researcher hopes to further investigate reader perspectives regarding mass media, ethnic identity and cultural maintenance.

Conclusion

The *Idaho Unido* case is significant in two respects. First, the publishers’ experience regarding the treatment of a Hispanic community in a small Idaho town graphically demonstrates how a minority group, representing a significant percentage of a local population, can be effectively marginalized. Perhaps more importantly, *Idaho Unido* exemplifies a solution to mass-media aspects of this marginalization. It shows what can be accomplished by motivated individuals with relatively modest financial resources. *Idaho Unido* is economically viable even if not highly remunerative. Grants and donations are not required. Here is a case where will, energy, ingenuity and talent can prevail to meet the needs of an under-served community. The growing economic

clout of Hispanic populations is being increasingly recognized and is drawing the interest of major media concerns. Competition could enter the scenario. However, these larger entities are not likely to celebrate the quinceañeras of Hispanic girls from small northwestern towns or to make sure local minority scholarship opportunities are prominently promoted. *Idaho Unido* provides a business model that could reasonably be pursued by a community public-interest organization or special-interest group. It exemplifies empowerment at a fundamental level.

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Biography



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