



# YEAR 2 IMPACT REPORT

TRACKING TRANSFORMATION:  
26 LOCAL BLACK PUBLISHERS





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## OVERALL

LMA launched the Knight x LMA BloomLab in 2022, with \$3.2 million in funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, to empower Black-owned local media outlets by equipping them with the tools and resources needed to achieve long-term financial stability and thrive within the industry.

- Each participating news organization receives technology stipends up to \$50,000.
- The BloomLab team has worked with 26 publishers in three cohorts across 18 states and the District of Columbia.
- The lab's goals include increasing non-print revenue by at least 50% to diversify income streams, expanding audience reach by at least 20% to strengthen community engagement, and implementing workflow improvements to drive overall effectiveness and efficiency.

## REVENUE

Revenue performance from all three cohorts outpaced the newspaper industry overall. Several industry sources reported revenue declining at an average annual rate of 4%-7% over the past five years. Industry expectations for 2023 estimated an overall revenue decline of 3%-5%.

Key results include:

- **Digital revenue YOY growth of 30%** — from accelerating and/or improving digital solutions.
- **Philanthropy revenue growth of 15%** — led by national and local organizations supporting journalism, as well as organizational improvements.
- **Print revenue held flat** — beating industry results that continue to experience high-single-digit declines.

## AUDIENCE

The BloomLab team completed detailed social media, web and analytics audits for 25 publishers across all three cohorts, ensuring a data-driven strategy for audience reach and retention. The BloomLab team conducts weekly calls with all cohorts to disseminate best practices in audience engagement, which span paid social media strategies, newsletter optimization, product management and the effective use of AI.

Key results include:

- The creation of a 2024 Publisher Growth Playbook that outlines best practices to navigate associated risk with the volatile nature of social media platforms, and address challenges and opportunities presented by AI.
- Over 15 publishers have implemented user surveys with plans for listening sessions and focus groups, to forge stronger connections with audience and inform product decisions.

## TECHNOLOGY

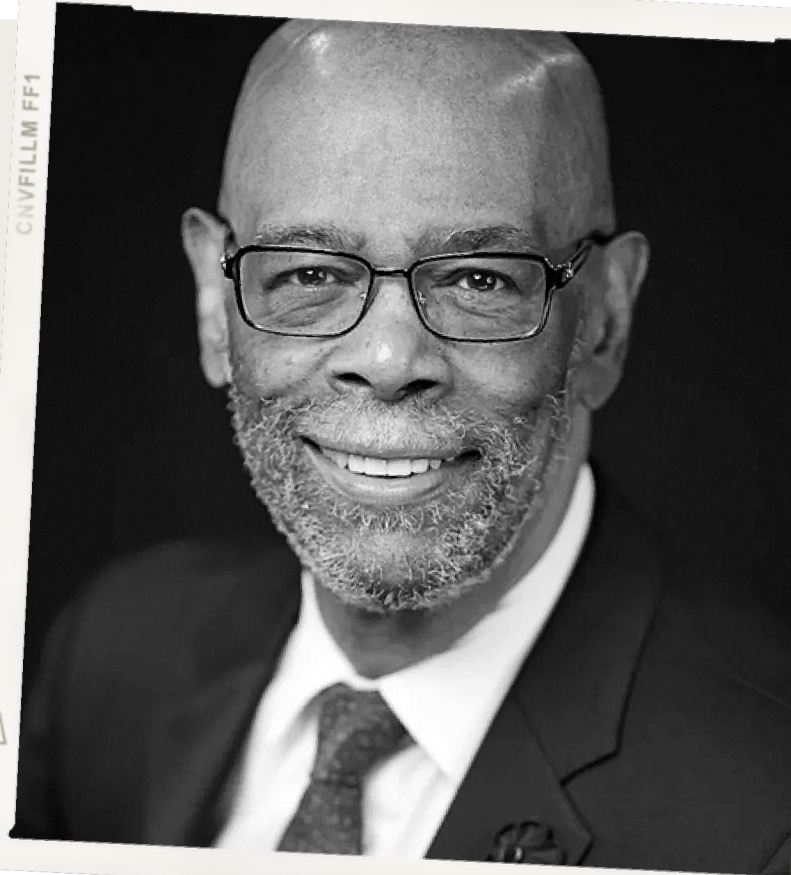
BloomLab participants' tech adoption stems from more than just providing the latest gadgets. Our success hinges on a three-pronged approach: training, implementation support, and shared services. We don't stop at stipends for new tech; we equip the teams to use it effectively, making it an integrated part of their workflows. This effort ensures everyone's on board and maximizes the technology's impact.

The proof is in the pudding: through collaboration and shared resources, the lab has saved over \$2.5 million, implemented over 200 technologies, and applied AI strategically to streamline workflows across sales and content creation. It's clear that technology, coupled with the right support system, is a recipe for success.

# IN MEMORY OF JAMES A. WASHINGTON

April 26, 1950 – April 2, 2024

President and General Manager  
of The Atlanta Voice, part of  
BloomLab's Cohort 1



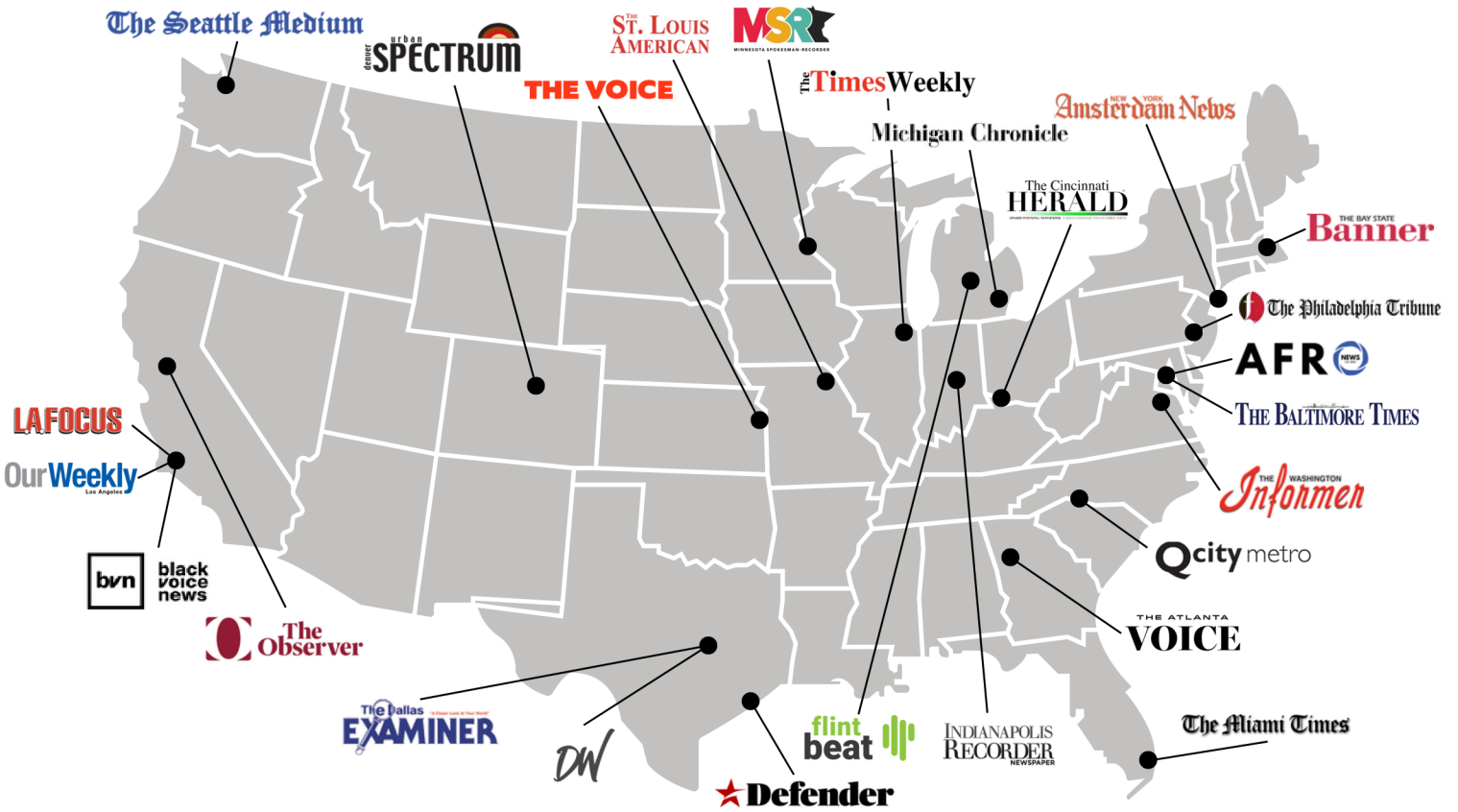
”

James Washington was **a legendary leader** of the Black press for many decades. This is a huge loss for the industry. We'll honor his legacy through Word In Black and other efforts that will make the Black press in our country even stronger.

”

**Nancy Lane,**  
co-CEO,  
Local Media Association/ Local Media Foundation

# BLOOMLAB PUBLISHERS



## COHORT 1

- AFRO AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS
- THE ATLANTA VOICE
- DALLAS WEEKLY
- HOUSTON DEFENDER
- MICHIGAN CHRONICLE
- NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS
- SACRAMENTO OBSERVER
- SEATTLE MEDIUM
- ST. LOUIS AMERICAN
- WASHINGTON INFORMER

## COHORT 2

- THE BALTIMORE TIMES
- BLACK VOICE NEWS
- THE CINCINNATI HERALD
- DALLAS EXAMINER
- QCITY METRO
- MIAMI TIMES
- THE PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE
- THE VOICE (KANSAS CITY & WICHITA)

## COHORT 3

- BAY STATE BANNER
- DENVER URBAN SPECTRUM
- FLINT BEAT
- INDIANAPOLIS RECORDER
- LA FOCUS
- MINNESOTA SPOKESMAN-RECORDER
- THE TIMES WEEKLY
- OUR WEEKLY



# KEY TOUCHPOINTS

**2K+**

CONSULTATIONS

The BloomLab team presses on in its work to engage local Black-owned news organizations participating in this groundbreaking initiative. The three directors continue to conduct one-on-one consultations, periodic cohort meetings and frequent training sessions on technology, revenue and audience development. The directors develop innovative strategies and consistently communicate with publishers and their teams to understand best ways to improve the dissemination of information, tools and resources.

**70+**

WEBINARS

Since the BloomLab began, the directors have conducted more than 108 training sessions with publishers and their staff on topics such as leveraging paid social media, qualifying prospects for sales, AI for journalism and getting started on reader revenue. We facilitated over 2,000 one-on-one consultations and more than 70 webinars to date.

**108**

TRAININGS

With additional funding from Walton Family Foundation, we brought on Adriana Lacy, CEO of Adriana Lacy Consulting, to help publishers develop strategies to increase audience engagement and better assess audience needs and trends. Lacy has advised publishers on the best ways to create readership surveys, and in 2024 will finalize an industry toolkit covering effective strategies for increasing digital audience.

**19**

SITE VISITS

# REVENUE IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

## 2023 VERSUS 2022 REVENUE DATA FOR ALL COHORTS

### DIGITAL REVENUE

- All three cohorts saw **30%** YOY growth.
- Cohort 1 was up **31%** in lab Year 2, and cumulatively up **205%** over two years.
- Cohort 3 was up **57%** in first lab year.



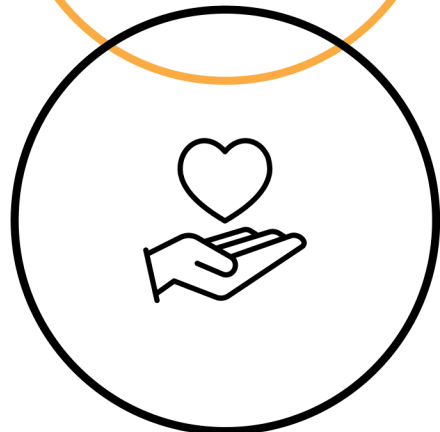
### PRINT REVENUE

- All three cohorts combined, held essentially **flat** on print revenue in an environment of high-single-digit declines.
- Cohort 2 was up **8%** in print.



### PHILANTHROPIC REVENUE

- All three cohorts combined were up **15%**.
- Cohort 1 was up **27%** cumulatively over two years.
- Cohort 2 was up **96%** YOY
- Cohort 3 was up **88%** YOY



**Note:** Revenue performance data includes 24 of the 26 publishers originally selected for the Knight x LMA BloomLab. One publisher withdrew from the lab; a second publisher is still active in the lab but had not yet started implementing technology or revenue strategies during the period covered by this Year 2 Impact Report.



# 2 YEARS OF INCREDIBLE GROWTH FOR COHORT 1

## DIGITAL REVENUE

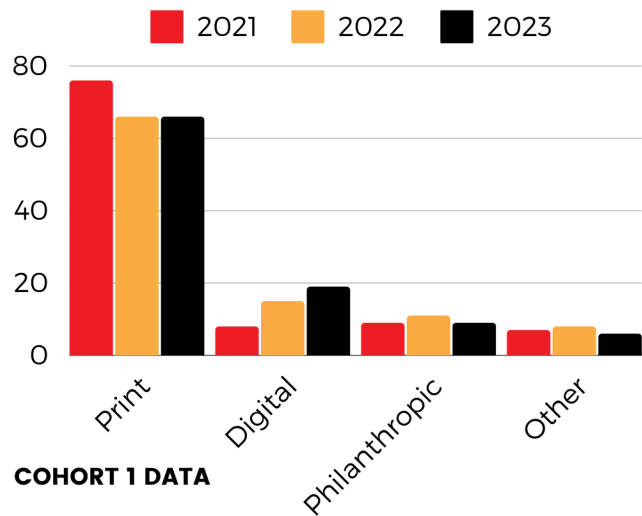
In 2022, the Knight x LMA BloomLab reported significant digital growth of 133% for Cohort 1 participants comprised of Word In Black publishers. This growth rate represented **\$1.5 million in incremental digital revenue**.

In 2023, digital revenue continues to grow, reaching a **cumulative rate of 205%** over two years. Again in Year 2, Cohort 1 publishers experienced incremental digital revenue growth and cumulatively have **grown by \$2.3 million**.

## PRINT REVENUE

Print revenue for Cohort 1 publishers remained strong against newspaper industry benchmarks. While national forecasts for newspaper revenues were projected to decline year-over-year, publishers in the lab **outpaced the industry** for print newspaper revenue. On a dollar basis, direct print revenue increased cumulatively by \$531K for all publishers.

## REVENUE DIVERSIFICATION



## PHILANTHROPIC REVENUE

Collectively, Cohort 1 publishers saw direct philanthropy grow by 27% during their time in the BloomLab. Cumulative philanthropic funding collected by all publishers exceeded **\$3.8 million** over the last two years.

# DIVERSIFYING REVENUE STREAMS

## DIGITAL REVENUE

Digital revenue grew 30% overall for all cohorts. On a dollar basis, **digital revenue grew by \$1.3 million in 2023.**

Digital revenue from the Word In Black initiative helped expand this revenue stream for Cohort 1 publishers, contributing to overall results. Some publishers experienced digital revenue gains as high as 678%, with **several publishers already exceeding our 50% digital revenue growth goal.**

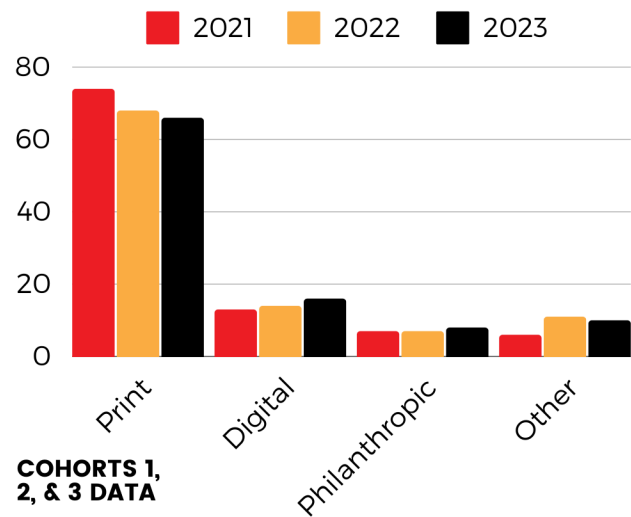
Two publishers reported digital revenue for the first time — and in those cases, many of the BloomLab recommendations remain in early stages of implementation, leaving upside for future growth.

## PRINT REVENUE

Print revenue for all publishers outpaced newspaper industry benchmarks. While national forecasts for newspaper revenues were projected to decline year-over-year, Black publishers in the Knight x LMA BloomLab **outpaced the industry** for print newspaper revenue.

As print dollar amounts softened slightly, digital grew more than enough to compensate. Print's share of all publishers' total revenue declined — a testament to the continued growth of digital. Print revenue accounted for 66% of overall revenues in 2023, compared to 68% in 2022.

## REVENUE DIVERSIFICATION



## PHILANTHROPIC REVENUE

Collectively, publishers saw **direct philanthropy grow by 15%**. On a dollar basis, philanthropic revenue grew by \$428K. Total philanthropic funding collected by all publishers exceeded **\$3.3 million in 2023.**

Ready to dive deeper into journalism philanthropy? Download our report from the LMA Advanced Fundraising Lab to unlock expert tips for securing funding for civic journalism.

[www.localmedia.org/philanthropy](http://www.localmedia.org/philanthropy)

# CASE STUDIES FROM THE COHORTS



## LAUNCHING A PAID NEWSLETTER

**Cohort 2 Member:** QCity Metro in Charlotte, North Carolina. | Page 10



## CELEBRATING BLACK BUSINESS

**Cohort 2 Member:** The Baltimore Times in Baltimore, Maryland. | Page 11



## RELAUNCHING A COMMUNITY EVENT

**Cohort 2 Member:** The Cincinnati Herald in Cincinnati, Ohio. | Page 12



## OPERATIONS MANUALS LEAVING A LEGACY

**Cohort 3 Member:** Denver Urban Spectrum in Denver, Colorado. | Page 13



## NEW TECH BRINGS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

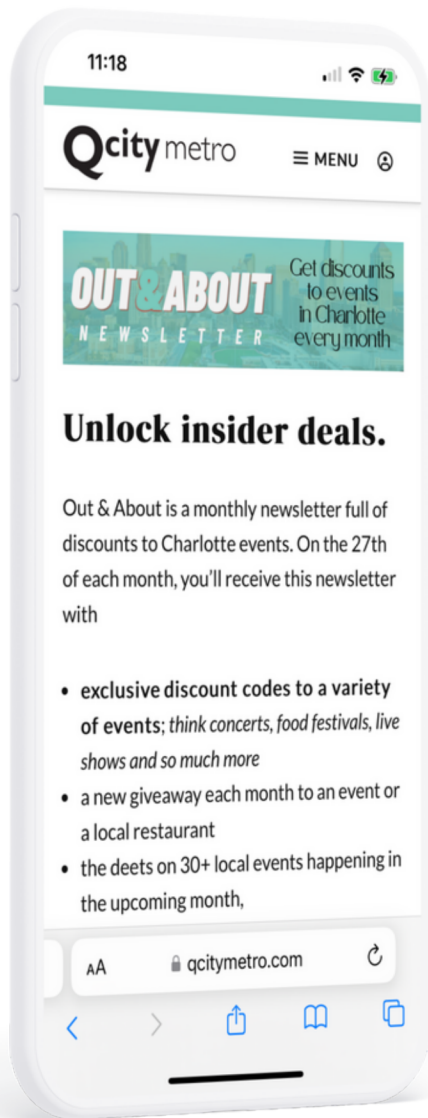
**Cohort 2 Member:** The Dallas Examiner in Dallas, Texas. | Page 14



## SMART MARKETING SEMINAR

**Cohort 1 Member:** The Washington Informer in Washington, D.C. | Page 15

# LAUNCHING A PAID NEWSLETTER



VISIT  
[WWW.QCITYMETRO.COM/  
OUT-AND-ABOUT](http://WWW.QCITYMETRO.COM/OUT-AND-ABOUT)

**Cohort 2 member:** QCity Metro in Charlotte, North Carolina

**Publisher:** Glenn Burkins

**Revenue Strategist:** Bethany Lane

**Goal:** “Our goal was to launch QCity Metro’s first subscription-based newsletter, part of our ongoing effort to grow new revenue streams. Subscribers would pay \$5 per month or make a one-time payment of \$50 per year.”

**Technology:** Newspaper, WooCommerce and Active Campaign

**How BloomLab helped:** “What we thought would be a simple task actually required extensive automations and workflows in Active Campaign, WooCommerce and Newspaper. Our team did not have the skills to pull this off.

“Apyrl Pilolli, BloomLab’s director of technology and innovation, went above and beyond to help us complete this project. In addition to helping us with essential development, she worked with Newspaper to identify and correct bugs that threatened to derail our efforts.

“Her knowledge of newsletter automations and skills in troubleshooting were invaluable. She even helped us craft marketing messages to our readers. We could not have done this work without her guidance.

“Although completion took longer than we anticipated, the automations and workflows function seamlessly.”

**Results:** “The new product was launched in March so it is still very early but we are seeing signs of success with numerous purchases to date. Our goal is to gain 1,000 subscriptions in the first year.”

**If we did this again:** “In hindsight, we would give the project more time and push back the launch date so that we didn’t feel so rushed. We also have created a written project plan.”

# CELEBRATING BLACK BUSINESS

**Cohort 2 member:** The Baltimore Times  
in Baltimore, Maryland

**Associate Publisher:** Paris Brown

**Goals:** “Our main goal was to celebrate Black businesses and recognize their contribution and economic impact in their local neighborhoods. We wanted to shed light and increase their exposure, which we believe would lead to increased sales. So we created the Best of Black Baltimore campaign to allow the community to vote for their favorite local Black businesses.

“The goals we established were:

- Gather at least 5,000 votes from the community. We had more than 12,000.
- Increase our email list. We grew our list from 1,357 to more than 4,000.
- Create a digital revenue model and campaign that we could grow and promote annually that aligns with the mission of The Baltimore Times (to improve the quality of life of our readers).

**Technology:** Newspack and Audience.io

**How has BloomLab helped:** “The team at BloomLab gave us boldness and a greater appreciation of our brand value. Learning about the importance of local media brands through training and conference participation encouraged BT to take risks.

“We knew we had the BloomLab that could give feedback and advice, discuss strategies and ideas, and support us in ways we did not have before our participation. Our publisher and I agree that the BloomLab was a lifeline for our organization.

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## THE BALTIMORE TIMES

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“Tangible benefits of the lab include:

- Grants to acquire the tech stack have helped us to compete in the digital space. We can offer the same menu of services as some large media companies in our market.
- The Best of Black Baltimore was in our digital plan, but we did not know how to do it and did not have the support to walk through how to do it appropriately. However, the lab support led us to pick a tech company that was cost-effective, easy to operate, user-friendly and had a supportive technology staff.
- Digital revenue and growth are now part of our overall growth strategy. Before our participation, we were only print-focused.”

**What worked?:** “The Best of Black Baltimore aligned with our organization’s mission and supported our community’s Black-owned and operated businesses.

“The increased positive engagement on our social media platforms by the nominated Black business was great *and* it was a surprise to us.

“We met and exceeded our digital revenue goals, and we now have an annual digital campaign and event that businesses look forward to participating in each year.

“This cohort was what we needed, but we did not know we needed it! Our publisher, Joy Bramble, often says we would have gone out of business without participating in this lab.”

# RELAUNCHING A COMMUNITY EVENT



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**Results:** The response from the community was amazing. We needed to keep adding additional seating. **We sold 1,450 tickets** and had four sponsors sign on — Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Easley Blessed Photography, First Financial Bank and Idea Public Schools of Greater Cincinnati.

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**Cohort 2 member:** The Cincinnati Herald in Cincinnati, Ohio

**Publisher:** Walter White

**Goal:** We aimed to relaunch our Daddy-Daughter Dinner Dance on our new website and ticketing platform. We wanted to sell out the event and attract attendees not just from Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, but to expand our reach and influence further afield. We wanted to create a welcoming, exciting, loving, adventurous setting and a night to remember for all participants.

**Tech Used:** Newspack, Google Ad Manager, CitySpark calendar and ticketing platforms, and Nota.

**How has BloomLab helped:** The BloomLab's digital, software, and training resources provided us with:

- A Newspack website that enables the Herald to maximize our reach across the region and the country.
- Google Ad Manager setup and trafficking so we could promote multiple ad sizes easily across the website.
- The CitySpark ticketing platform allowed us to create a ticketing brand and control the money paid by participants within days of purchasing tickets. We did not need to wait eight to 10 days before the payout.
- Nota's AI tools allowed us to help create all of our social media messaging.
- Apryl Pilolli, the lab's director of technology and innovation, provided constant guidance, training, and invaluable recommendations from a tech stack standpoint.
- Robert Walker-Smith, the lab's director of digital revenue, gave excellent sales training regarding sourcing and obtaining sponsors for the event.
- John Celestand, the lab's program director, and Adriana Lacy, the audience development consultant, provided leadership and audience training that were totally on target. It enabled us to focus on the target market we need to ensure success.

**If we did this again:** We would begin the planning process for the 2025 event in July 2024. We will use all the leadership, sales, marketing, audience, and tech stack training we acquired during the past 18 months in the lab to create a Daddy-Daughter week of events running up to the actual main event.

# OPERATIONS MANUALS LEAVING A LEGACY



**Brittany Winkfield,**  
associate publisher  
Denver Urban Spectrum

*“We have come to a point ... where we are thinking about succession, and I wanted to lay it all out in terms of what I haven’t seen. What does Bee, our owner, know how to do, that nobody else knows how to do?”*

The BloomLab team has advised publishers to create operations manuals to outline how their business runs daily. Effective operations manuals provide clear directions to employees on how to do their jobs while also helping to boost morale, create a clear hierarchy and encourage the team to perform better.

Well-constructed operation manuals can serve as the go-to document that assists with training, summarizes responsibilities, and outlines procedures and processes. Brittany Winkfield is the associate publisher of the Denver Urban Spectrum who will be taking over as owner in 2025. She describes the process of creating manuals:

## **What was the key factor in your decision to work on the operations manual?**

**Brittany:** “I think often with the legacy publications or any organization that has been operating for a number of years, there is not always a streamlining of communication. There are tasks that are being performed just out of historic knowledge. I’ve been with the organization for the last year and there were a lot of questions that I had. I’ve learned a lot of answers from just observing, shadowing our owner, and seeing how things operate, but nothing was written down.”

## **How do you foresee the operations manual helping you when you take over the organization?**

**Brittany:** “The document acts as a roadmap, showing our team dynamics. Before my arrival, our owner was the sole full-time employee. Editors, reporters, photographers, bookkeepers, and others are freelancers. My vision includes transitioning to having employees, allowing them to onboard smoothly using the operations manual as a guide. Hopefully, this tool will help to ensure everyone comprehends our collaborative efforts beyond deadlines, and to build a cohesive work environment.”

## **What advice would you give to other publishers thinking about creating an operations manual?**

**Brittany:** “Think about the future. How do you want to leave things? Some folks want to work until the day they die, but then again, thinking in a more positive light, what does the next iteration after you look like? What are you leaving for that next wave of publishers and/or leaders in the organization and how are you setting them up for success? It just starts as you start to plan because I think it naturally ties into the succession planning ... hopefully everyone will have that luxury of retiring and enjoying their time off. Planning for the future is critical but is also in your best favor.”

# NEW TECH BRINGS NEW OPPORTUNITIES



**Mollie Belt,**  
publisher  
The Dallas Examiner

**Cohort 2 member:** The Dallas Examiner in Dallas, Texas

**Publisher:** Mollie Belt

**Webmaster:** Kermit Williams

**Senior Media Editor:** Charity Chukwu

**Goal:** Develop a digital platform and tech stack to improve our digital presence, be competitive, and continue to engage with our community.

**Tech Used:** Newspack, Nota, Monday.com, Social News Desk and Parse.ly

**How has BloomLab helped:** "Since working with the BloomLab, we have gained much knowledge about how to expand The Dallas Examiner's audience and reach," according to Chukwu.

**Belt on the sales impact:** "Our sales department had serious problems leaving off significant ads from large agencies. Not only did we lose income, but we were getting a bad reputation with these agencies. Apryl Pilolli worked one-on-one with our VP of advertising to show him how to use Monday.com for his run sheet every week, and he has not lost any more ads. Additionally, she has worked with him on how to use the many functions of Monday.com for sales. Hence, we are building an advertising system that will result in increased and sustained advertising revenue."

**Williams on the tech impact:**

- **Improved user experience:** "Our website now offers a more intuitive and user-friendly experience. Streamlined navigation, optimized page load times, and enhanced functionality have contributed to increased user satisfaction and engagement."
- **Enhanced efficiency:** "From simplified checkout processes to streamlined newsletters, these enhancements have reduced friction points and enhanced overall operational efficiency."
- **Positive feedback:** "The positive feedback received from users is a testament to the effectiveness. Customers appreciate the improvements made to our website, citing enhanced usability and a more polished online experience."

**Chukwu on the editorial impact:** "Of all the programs, I think the best are Newspack, Social News Desk, Nota and Parse.ly. These have helped me streamline the process of getting all our stories online efficiently and on schedule.

- **Newspack** has simplified the article uploading process and combined all other necessary programs in one place.
- **Social News Desk** has given me a way to automatically schedule posts throughout the day so that our audience knows when to expect new content, and I don't have to go across social media platforms to stay engaged with our followers.
- **Nota** has helped in all aspects of keeping The Dallas Examiner ahead of SEO, so we attract more and more people.
- And **Parse.ly** helps me keep track of all it by constantly updating me on the number of views we get on our stories without figuring out how to make complicated reports through Google."

# SMART MARKETING SEMINAR



*"I have to say that I was nervous about putting this together, but with help from BloomLab and Leslie Green, Golden Life Ventures, our team was able to host a top-notch event that was well attended. Feedback from the event was very positive and I look forward to planning another one later this year or early next. Thank you to the BloomLab for encouraging us to take this leap."*

**Denise Rolark Barnes,**  
**publisher and CEO,**  
 The Washington Informer



*"It was a pleasure to hear you at the Digital Marketing Seminar! Extremely insightful! Thank you for sharing this with our team."*

**Seminar attendee**



The BloomLab team worked with The Washington Informer in Washington, D.C., to host a Smart Marketing Seminar to help inform business owners on how to raise brand awareness and grow their businesses through their respective print, digital and social solutions. Apryl Pilolli, technology director, and Robert Walker-Smith, digital revenue director, served as presenters.

**Key benefits:**

- BloomLab publishers shared up-to-date trends in audience, digital, marketing, media, technology and information on today's consumers and how to keep them loyal.
- Information provided on growing revenue in a challenging environment and the importance of consistent advertising during any economic environment.
- Gave in-depth information on Black media's competitive advantages and how combining print, digital and social is a winning combination.

**Key outcomes:**

- Over 100 attendees at the event including former and current clients, and lead opportunities for new business.
- Over \$10,000 in new revenue opportunities from previous clients which include multichannel solutions of The Washington Informer (print, digital, social, email and WIN TV)
- 5-7 new business opportunities from aged leads who attended the Smart Marketing Seminar.

# SUMMIT: AI, AUDIENCE & VIDEO TOP TALKS

Local Media Association hosted the **LMA Local News Summit in February 2024** in Austin, Texas. Lab cohorts and partners gathered for three days to share resources, discuss important topics, and gain insight into where the local news industry is headed. During the summit, publishers from BloomLab Cohorts 2 and 3 met as a combined group to converse on subjects such as AI, email newsletter growth tactics, sales tips, strategies for understanding viewer preferences and behavior, internal communication plans, approaches for expanding audience and best ways to convert print audiences to engaged video viewers.

## LOCAL NEWS SUMMIT TAKEAWAYS



**Brittany Winkfield**, associate publisher at Denver Urban Spectrum

"Austin was great for networking. It was helpful to hear what's working in the field. My biggest takeaway was the power of the newsletter and that's what we are implementing/restructuring in the next 30 days. It was the confirmation I needed!"



**Andre Stark**, associate publisher at The Bay State Banner

"I loved learning about the AI capabilities, and used an AI generated picture of a Grammy Award for this week's paper. No searching for free photos. The production team loves it. I used Microsoft Copilot. I do need a project management software so we can get ahead of our programs. I am trying out Monday software this week."



**Michael Diehl**, director of strategic planning at Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder

"My takeaway was learning ways to expand our newsletter revenue opportunities. Using certain categories such as health and wellness as a newsletter focus could attract our partners to contribute vital information via newsletters on an ongoing basis. This is a great revenue opportunity we can include in our annual programs."



**David Miller**, co-owner at Our Weekly

"I was most impressed with the ability to use AI and how it could actually streamline our day-to-day work flow. In addition, getting the knowledge from publishers who are using this state of the art technology. Although the workshops were a bit overwhelming ... they helped us to better understand if we apply it, we will grow."

———— “ ————

The Knight x LMA BloomLab has been a smashing success. It’s great to see the second and third cohorts of publishers achieve successes similar to their colleagues in Cohort 1. The future for these organizations is brighter thanks to the BloomLab.

———— ” ————



**Jim Brady**  
Vice President/Journalism  
Knight Foundation

# THE KNIGHT X LMA BLOOMLAB TEAM



**JOHN CELESTAND**  
Program Director,  
Audience and Community

## **JOHN CELESTAND**

John brings a wide range of experience, including journalism, public broadcasting, program management, community engagement, business development and much more.



**APRYL PILOLLI**  
Program Director,  
Technology and Innovation

## **APRYL PILOLLI**

Apryl is a neurodivergent technology, content and marketing expert who started at age 16 in the local media industry. Her career has included numerous product roles in sales, content and marketing.



**ROBERT WALKER-SMITH**  
Program Director,  
Sales and Marketing

## **ROBERT WALKER-SMITH**

Robert is an accomplished sales executive with a strong background in audio, digital and print solutions. He has managed sales teams to drive revenue growth across audio, digital, events and social in medium to large-sized markets.

# SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM

The Knight X LMA BloomLab is one of the essential programs the Local Media Foundation provides to support journalism through a range of initiatives designed to create sustainable business models for local news. We welcome support for all our programs and initiatives.



[\*\*givebutter.com/LMF\*\*](https://givebutter.com/LMF)

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