

CCJ: How we will embrace audience planning

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Why do we need to emphasize audience planning?

Faster subscriber and PV growth:

The CCJ's audience team optimizes content for maximum reach and focuses on premium stories – two essential areas to grow new readers and foster loyal relationships.

Greater focus for editors and reporters:

The audience team frees up editors and reporters to focus on creating impactful news for their communities by owning the logistics of daily print production.

Smarter sharing of our journalism:

The audience team will be on the frontline for Network content sharing – statewide, within the CCJ, with the regional teams and to USA TODAY – which will help local reporters' work reach a wider audience and also supplement local production with relevant, interesting stories from other markets.

A tiered approach to **support** our biggest opportunities

Producer/Planners who work within the CCJ support only CCJ newsrooms. Regional planning and audience teams support sites that remain in the regional structure.

- We will continue the best practice of coordinating Network resources on major regional, national and international news.

A tiered approach to assigning Producer/Planners to the largest markets with the biggest growth opportunities will accomplish:

- elevating the content of those sites.
- creating room for topical and optimization specialists.
- providing a more manageable workload for the Producer/Planner team to avoid quick burnout.

CCJ audience job responsibilities and priorities

These are empowered decision makers for newsrooms in a digital-focused position with minimal print workload.

Platform management and optimization

Schedules and sets up Home front boosting, push alerts and social media posts. Time of day for target audience is top of mind.

Optimizes premium and high-potential content for SEO, recirculation and deeper audience engagement time

Creates, schedules social cards for high-potential posts

Curates the Daily Briefing newsletter (specialized newsletters are owned by editor or reporter)

Content scheduling

Maintains digital content calendar and determines embargo times to reach target audience (Birds-eye view of content across newsroom and Network)

Regularly checks Parse.ly and Google Analytics to make data-driven decisions, advise on opportunities targeting the audience funnel

Manages project planning: Writes advisories, advocates for sharing, plans multi-site promotion as relevant

Maintains print schedule at least one rolling week in advance. Post daily lineups for Design Center. (Do not over-engineer print.)

Enforces deadlines for print and digital. (Only breaking news or planned live coverage should come in on weekends.)

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Newsroom, Network collaboration

Attends newsroom/team meetings. Runs daily meetings. This is the main venue to advise on how stories/platforms fit into audience funnel and plan accordingly.

Partners with editors on premium schedule and makes sure strategy is executed.

Helps newsrooms swarm breaking news and trending by suggesting (and sometimes writing) stories targeting search and social.

- High importance: SEO optimization and formatting on live blogs
- All-hands-on-deck approach for breaking news needs, which may include creating content

Shares content to other planners and newsrooms and searching for content to promote on yours, including USAT and sites in regional structure.

Enforces planning card use, follow up with reporters and editors as stories development

Newsroom connections

Producer/Planners will be assigned to primary newsrooms and will work with the same reporters and editors consistently.

This will allow Producer/Planners and editors to collaborate on content strategy and the overall vision for a site.

Reporters and editors need to view the Producer/Planner as a member of their newsroom, not as help on the side.

Owning the same sites every day will make it easier to build trust, understand the nuances of a given community and track big-picture projects and content calendars.

When assigning Producer/Planners to sites, minimizing editor pairings and maximizing sharing capabilities must be top of mind.

Having editors communicate with a single planner (or as few as possible) and having planners talk to as few editors as possible will create much-needed efficiency in conversations around content and strategy.

The more sites share content, the easier it is to plan and optimize a higher number of sites. (Example: The three Alabama sites should have a single news Producer/Planner.)

What this team does not do or does not do alone

- They cannot make up for lack of editor or reporter discipline in the workflow — filing planning cards, coordinating art, meeting deadlines and so forth.
- They do not line edit, and they don't copy edit. *These tasks are the responsibility of the editors, although any journalist who encounters an error is obligated to fix it.*
- Editors and reporters will need to self-publish and peer edit. Premium stories and breaking news can be optimized and will be prioritized for planning.
- Reporters and/or editors will need to share in scheduling stories for social platforms.
- Editors will need to be trained on boosting and push alerts in case of breaking news due to limited staffing on the weekends.
- This team is not responsible for finding/assigning visuals.
- Both editors and planners will be tagged on 1A proofs. If it is not reviewed with the 30-minute window of posting, designers may typeset per SOP.

Responding to **breaking news**

Producer/Planners will play a key role in delivering breaking news to readers and helping newsrooms swarm follow-up stories. Building a structure that allows flexibility to do so is crucial.

P/Ps will assist newsrooms in breaking situations: SEO optimization, creating live blogs, suggesting stories to fill holes in our coverage, sharing content with other sites in the Network.

Team leads may need to temporarily reassign coverage to allow resources for ongoing breaking news situations.

For regional/national breaking news, team leads and/or the director will need to step in to help send push alerts, post to social and pin/boost stories on Home fronts.

Reinforcing the high school sports **playbook**

High schools, high schools, high schools: High school sports – especially football – is a critical subscription driver for community newsrooms that must be the main focus of sports planners/producers in the CCJ.

Sports specialists: While some Producer/Planners may have hybrid news/sports roles, there should be sports specialists who focus only on sports optimization, planning and assisting in Friday night football coverage. Align their shifts with key sports events/schedule in each season.

Follow the playbook: Most of our sites have a few years' worth of success drawing subscribers through high school sports coverage that is about delivering insights and highlighting successful athletes in each season:

- Team-by-team season previews (top games, predictions, etc.)
- 'Players to watch' lists
- Athlete of the Week reader voting
- '3 things we learned' analysis from games or whole weekends of games
- 'Top Performers' lists
- Naming postseason teams honoring best players in each sport.

Reinforcing the high school sports **playbook**

Sports planners' role: A key function of sports planners/producers in the CCJ is **to map out the high school sports playbook** for each season.

Planners lead or co-lead preseason and in-season planning huddles with sports reporters and CCJ sports editors to ensure the type of content and flow of content meets audience interests and needs - leading into each season, during each season, at playoffs time and in postseason team honors lists/projects.

Season-by-season approach: The planning horizon extends one high school season at a time, with a pacing and rhythm and expectations for which types of content publish when clear to all.

Content of interest beyond the local community: CCJ's sports editors connect as needed with nearby metros and/or regional sports editors and/or USA TODAY sports team on high-interest sports coverage that goes beyond the local community. Preseason planning summits and creation of a Teams channel key to coordination so that sports reporters in the CCJ are included in conversations on larger coverage.

Thank you.

Find more training
at <https://training.usatodaynetwork.com/welcome-to-the-ccj/>.

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