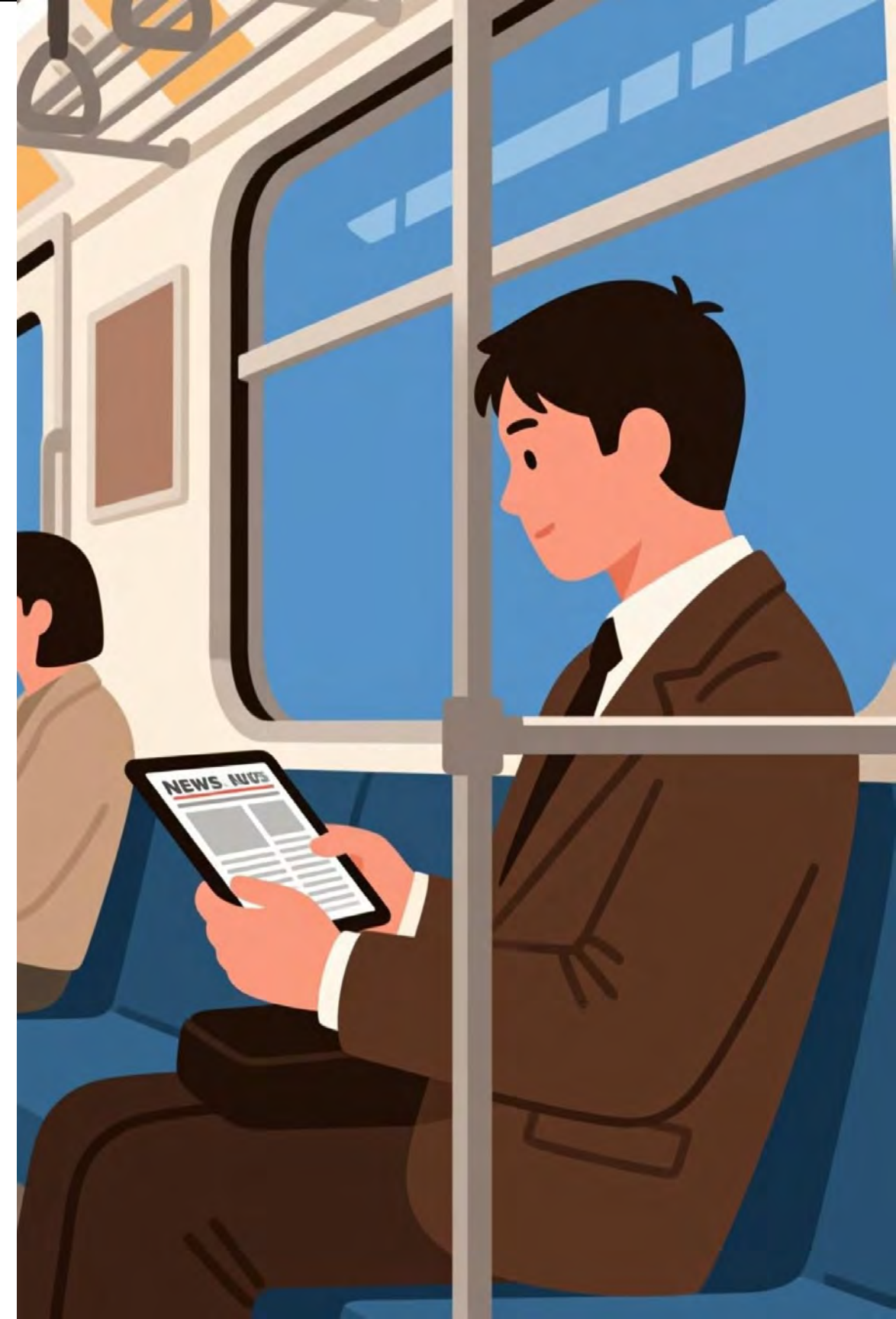


Unlocking Engagement: The Future of Native Content

Presented by Korena Keys

KeyMedia Solutions

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Why This Topic, Why Now?

- **U.S. newspaper** ad revenue has dropped 60% over the past decade
- **Native advertising** is a \$600B global industry
- **Trust in media** is fragile, but local journalism still holds the highest trust scores
- **The opportunity:** bring in new dollars *without* losing reader trust



What we'll cover

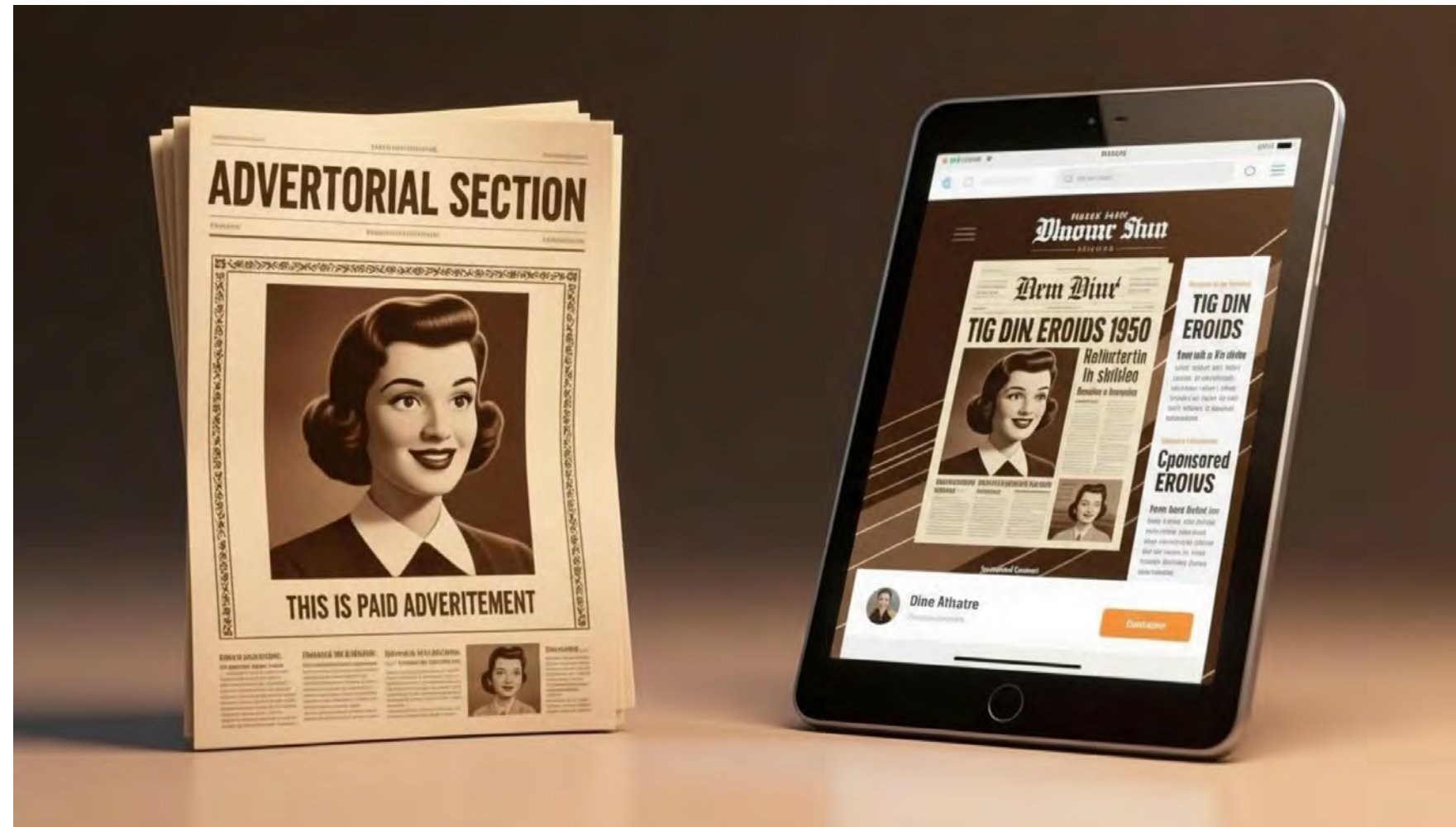
Objectives for Today

- **Understand** the evolution of native & sponsored content
- **Review** consumer response
- **Explore** new formats and monetization ideas
- **Learn** from newspaper success stories
- **Discuss** ideas on how to sell digital without “stealing” from print
- **Leave** with a checklist to act on next week



Quick History of Sponsored Content

- Print "advertorials" early branded content in newspapers.
- 2010s: BuzzFeed, Forbes, The Atlantic pioneers of digital native.
- 2015: FTC publishes native ad guidelines.
- 2020s: Native expands into podcasts, video, newsletters, tools.



Current State of Native



Formats

- In-feed stories
- Sponsored newsletters
- Interactive tools



Why it works

- Blends in
- Earns attention
- Drives results



Publisher challenges

- Clear labeling
- Editorial guardrails



Sales opportunity

- Deeper campaigns
- Higher margins



Consumer Response— Trust is Earned

- Consumers say *transparency* is critical in sponsored content
- Poorly labeled or deceptive ads increase bounce rates and damage trust
- Clear, well-integrated content builds credibility
- **Relevance** = acceptance
- **Trust** = engagement



Looking Ahead - Native in 2026

- Personalization powered by AI
- Video -first storytelling
- Interactive and immersive formats
 - (polls, maps, calculators)
- Hyperlocal verticals
 - (e.g. Health, Education, Local Business)



Selling Digital and Native



Case Study

Philadelphia Inquirer “Restoring Hope”

- A special sponsored editorial series in partnership with Jefferson Health.
- Focused on social health issues like gun violence and mental health, a high value current topic in the community.
- Took on a branded journalism approach: deeply reported, sensitively handled.
- Used clear labeling: "Presented by Jefferson Health" throughout.
- **Outcome:** A positive community response and long-term sponsorship.



Idea Worth Replicating

Philadelphia Inquirer “Restoring Hope”



Why

- Attracts institutional budgets (foundations, universities)
- These are not typical print advertisers

Packaging Ideas

- 6-12 article series
- Homepage and native content
- Video and social extensions
- Print feature wrap or special section

Sales Hook:

“Own the conversation around [issue] in your community.”



Case Study

Minneapolis Star Tribune "Inside the Boardroom"

- "Inside the Boardroom" series co-created with advertisers.
- Launched sponsored content that mimics its business section layout.
- Appears alongside editorial content, designed to match visual tone.
- Transparent labeling: "Content by the Star Tribune Brand Studio."
- **Outcome:** Positioned sponsors as thought leaders in Minnesota business and engaged new advertisers.



Idea Worth Replicating

Minneapolis Star Tribune "Inside the Boardroom"



Why

- Focuses on reputation (not impressions)
- Targets B2B (banks, law firms, manufacturers)

Packaging Ideas

- Executive interview feature
- Roundtable inclusion
- Event or webinar tie -in
- Print spotlight + digital distribution

Sales Hook:

"We'll position you as a leader among your peers."



Case Study

Village Media “Hyperlocal”

- Local Ontario publisher runs hyperlocal digital sites ([Sootoday.com](https://sootoday.com)).
- Developed in-house branded content for advertisers with strong performance.
- Offers business directories and sponsored stories together as a package.
- Campaigns are written journalistically and labeled transparently.
- **Outcome:** Recurring advertiser relationships and growth in digital revenue.



Idea Worth Replicating

Village Media “Hyperlocal”



Why

- Always “on” community platform
- Builds ongoing partnerships
- Small business buy presence, not ads

Packaging Ideas

- Monthly sponsorship
- Sponsored content posts
- Directory + visibility placements
- Event/calendar integration

Sales Hook:

“Be part of your community’s daily conversation.”



Case Study

Quad Cities Times “Best of the Quad Cities”

- An annual “reader’s choice” contest that drive social engagement, ad revenue, and build trust.
- Nomination window (30 days), Voting window (3 weeks), and winner announcements
- The annual efforts delivers built -in audience engagement and repeat visitors, encourages social sharing, and creates a high -intent advertising opportunity.
- Creates year -round content, with minimal time, that lives beyond the contest.
- **Outcome:** a local business flywheel driving recurring revenue, expand content, and build credibility.

Publisher > Business > Audience Loop



Idea Worth Replicating

Quad Cities Times “Best of the Quad Cities”



Why

- Adds prestige
- Local Businesses opt -in (they want to be included)
- Creates new advertisers who weren't previously spending

Packaging Ideas

- Entry and nomination promotions
- Voting phase
- Winner amplification (print + digital + social badge)

Sales Hook:

“ This is not an ad —it’s a chance to be recognized as the best in your category. ”



Four Examples, Four Approaches

Example	Core Model	What It Sells	Primary Value
Restoring Hope (Inquirer)	Issue-based storytelling	Community impact alignment	Trust + purpose
Inside the Boardroom (Star Tribune)	Audience - based (B2B leadership)	Executive access & credibility	Premium advertisers
Village Media	Hyperlocal platform model	Ongoing community presence	Habit + scale
Quad Cities Best Of	Community voting + recognition	Visibility, validation, and leads	Engagement + advertiser demand generation



Bundle by Objective, Not Channel

Awareness Package

- Print (reach)
- Homepage Takeover (visibility)
- Social Amplification (frequency boost)

Authority Package

- Print Feature (branded story)
- Feature Series
- Video Interview

Engagement Package

- Native Article
- Social Amplification
- Retargeting Ads

Store Traffic Package

- Sponsored Section
- Social Amplification
- Email Inclusion



It's Not Print vs. Digital

Digital ad sales will not replace print revenue

As Publishers, you need to

- Build Participation (Best of)
- Provide Depth (Restoring Hope)
- Deliver Authority (Boardroom)
- Be consistent (Village Media)



Risks & Guardrails

- Transparency is non-negotiable
- Label clearly
 - "Sponsored by," not vague terms like "Partner Content."
- Editorial integrity must be protected
- Sales and newsroom teams need shared rules



Opportunity Exists , Take Your Next Move

- Build your digital native package: 3 -month series, fixed pricing
- Pick one vertical to start on (Health, Small Biz, Education)
- Train your sales team on storytelling, not ad selling
- Create clear labeling policies with editorial leadership



Final Takeaways

- Our industry is evolving —so must we
- Readers [still] value transparency, relevance, and good storytelling
- Small changes can yield big results
- The newsroom and sales team must collaborate
- It's not one or the other — create a collective impact



Questions & Contact Info

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Free Download

Native Content Starter Kit

