

# It's not 'Fake News'; it's propaganda

I had the pleasure of taking part in the City Club's Friday Forum last week on "News Media in a Post-Fact World." Myself and Kimberly Wilson, former Oregonian reporter and communications director with Meyer Memorial Trust, were joined by Ben DeJarnette from the University of Oregon's Agora Journalism Center for the conversation.

Many of the questions posed to all of us had to do with the current media climate, how the industry is changing and

## DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer



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what it means to be consumers of news.

One of the topics was fake news, a term we at Street Roots have come to despise. Fake news isn't news at all; it's propaganda, plain and simple. We should stop using the term. People creating content not based in fact is not news. Again, it's propaganda.

In a time when people are accessing news in new ways, mostly online, it's hard at times for the general public to understand what is real news and what is propaganda. It's even more difficult when the president of the United States is targeting actual news organizations like CNN or NBC, calling them purveyors of "fake-news."

Another question posed was: How do we respond to a climate where the general public no longer trusts media institutions? That's a hard one. Understanding that prior to the internet, many consumers of news had less access to a variety of newspapers and media outlets than we do today, I think it's up for debate on how much the general public has ever really trusted the newsroom.

Given that many editorial boards throughout the years defended slavery, Jim Crow, the Vietnam War, the notion that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and on and on. It's not as if there was actually ever a golden age of journalism across the board.

But that said, that doesn't mean journalism doesn't play a key role in maintaining democracy, or helping shape public opinion and understanding of the world around us. It does. It's just that many of the platforms people use to access the news have shifted with the emergence of social media and other platforms that deliver the news. Whereas readers once bought a newspaper filled with everything from sports to local politics, now they cherry-pick their news on an article-by-article basis.

It's also a reality that newsrooms are shrinking. Couple this with the emergence of Twitter and Facebook — you're bound to have a variety of narratives that not only shape the way we view the world, but also allow voices from all ends of the political spectrum to have a platform.

It's my belief that great journalism presents both problems and solutions in our community and the world and drives people toward the idea of solving problems and highlighting the solutions.

Obviously, the media also serves to provide a watchdog component for both society and government. The makeup of a newsroom, the chosen content, and how an editorial team

decides on presenting the news can shape how the public perceives the validity of "real news."

Wilson spoke about the need for newsrooms to reflect the communities that they serve.

The reality is if you don't have reporters in a newsroom that come from different backgrounds, it's going to show and ultimately have a negative impact on communities that are either being discriminated against or struggling to have their voice heard in the community.

It's my opinion that much of the injustice that we see today is shaped by individuals and organizations taking advantage of social media platforms and newsrooms that have remained both insular and white.

Many good reporters have a natural instinct and ability to read people and situations. Sometimes those instincts can't be taught in journalism school or won't come from your traditional trajectory of going from college to working in journalism.

If you're a poor kid that is lucky enough to make it through journalism school, it's almost impossible to survive in your 20s working to build out your career and eventually land a job in a newsroom. Meaning that, for the most part, only people with a safety net have the ability to go into journalism. It means that many people with shared experiences of the very things that matter to our community aren't there on the front lines reporting the nuances of the news, or able to give context.

More so, the entire industry is a crapshoot. The traditional mechanism of supporting newspapers and advertising is no longer a viable option to maintain record profits at a newspaper.

In many cases, newspapers are still making money, it's just not the record profits they once enjoyed.

Plus the platform in which advertising is being sold by many newspapers has moved from print media to online advertising. What this means for the consumer is that the content begins to matter less and less, so long as people are clicking on and commenting on the stories themselves. Each time a troll makes a comment on a story in The Oregonian, it serves as leverage for the newspaper to go back to advertisers to make money. It's a sad affair.

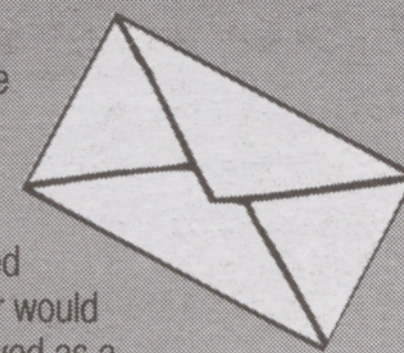
The smartest people in the business don't know exactly how to survive. Every newspaper is shrinking and losing resources, sometimes little by little and sometimes by a lot all at once.

When people say, what about Street Roots? Isn't it growing? It's apples and oranges. We are small potatoes in the larger landscape of the media, and we don't have the resources to fail, period. That's not to take away from our great reporting, or the fact that the media landscape is made up of more and more small, issue focused media outlets that are doing more with less. After all, we are just one grant or major donation away from having to downsize ourselves. Journalism isn't free. Nothing is.

It's easy to beat up on the media industry or to critique it in a way that delivers more negative than positive criticism. The reality is we do have some amazing reporters in Portland working long, hard hours to get the story right and deliver it in a way that's both informative and serves the broader public. That's not going to change anytime soon.

## Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Executive Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, [joanne@streetroots.org](mailto:joanne@streetroots.org). We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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