

Political reminder: Properly publish 'paid for' postscripts

By the time most read this column, Labor Day will be past and all the election campaigns will be in full swing. Take a minute to be sure somewhere in your ad department there is hanging a copy of the brochure from the Missouri Ethics Commission that lists all the "paid for by" language required in political ads. It is critical that every political ad your newspaper runs that relates to a ballot measure contains the proper attribution.

Remember that the failure of your paper to run such an attribution line can result in the imposition of a fine **against your newspaper**. The fine for such a violation can be in an amount up to \$1,000. Check on this today!

And also remember that the rules are slightly different for attribution in federal campaign ads, such as for a U.S. Senator or Congressman. Those materials can be found at www.fec.gov under the section on Special Notices on Political Ads, while the Missouri materials are at www.mec.mo.gov.

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Meanwhile, on another subject, I often look at issues that we have involving the Sunshine Law and wonder what lies in the future that will make such issues moot. Much of that speculation relates to how the gathering of data and manipulation of information is changing so rapidly across the country. One prime example of this is the reluctance of law enforcement at the moment to make public its bodycam footage and the tough fight there was in the Missouri legislature last session in terms of when or if such

footage would ever be made public. Frankly, many in law enforcement would prefer if it never had to make such footage public.

On the other hand, everyone around you today is carrying a video camera in their phone. The odds are great that when the next police incident occurs, it won't matter whether or not a cop with a bodycam was filming, because dozens of others will have the same video. The day will come, not too far down the road, when law enforcement gladly offers up their "take" of the scene in order to protect the credibility of their officers and in order to put their slant on public opinion of what happened.

In the same vein, an article in the July/August issue of Government Technology talked

about the place where "government interests meet community-minded activists." Citizen groups are seeking to improve their communities. Their governments have data showing snapshots of the community. "Hackathons" (Seriously! That's what they call them!) are not all bad – sometimes brainstorming by technology-minded adults can help create models for technology to help the city use its data to improve the community. For example, they can help a city use its data, overlaid on a Google Map, to create applications to show how land is used, how housing policies can be improved, how education can be improved in the city. A city that gives open and easy access to its data can lead the way for volunteers in the community to create solutions

through manipulation of government data.

Another example the article offered is in Seattle, where the founder of Open Seattle regularly runs such hackathons and other events to bring civic hackers together. Ideas arising from these lead to dozens of small projects. Some of these projects are not feasible businesses, but, instead, they are collaborating with local foundations to find less obvious income streams to make them sustainable.

When the time comes that communities across Missouri realize that sharing data openly and freely could lead to improvements for all their citizens, we'll have the dawning of a brand new day in the State. Platforms do exist for governments to use (read more by searching "OpenGov" online). One of the heroes in working on these projects? The Knight Foundation! Our friends! Our state is just slow to move in this direction. For example, last year one company which gathered data on property values, necessary for local banks making mortgages in your town, was blocked from access to data it needed, and ultimately it pulled out of this state. Homeowners have no idea their local government, in hoarding data that belongs to the public, creates such losses to its citizens.

Every time you do a story on open government, you help citizens understand the benefits they get from the data that government gathers. You help change public opinion. There is a constant tension between privacy rights and public information. Far too often, privacy issues become the focus. When you have the chance, remind your readers that there are many benefits that come from greater access to information.

See you at the convention!

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