

# Explain to your readers why due diligence matters

As all of you work through the challenges you face in publishing during these difficult times, there are a number of important thoughts that you should ponder on days when you have a moment to ponder.

The term “fake news” has become a joke. We all laugh at times when we hear it, but it is not something we should take lightly. Whatever your political persuasion, each of you realizes that having the trust of your readers is critical to your paper’s survival. Your local community needs to know you are a source of truth in your town. They need to know to come to you for the latest information on schools, local government and, of course, COVID statistics.

Of course you are working hard to bring them that information and to make sure it’s as accurate as possible, because you are all good reporters. But have you taken time to explain all of that to your readers?

What do I mean? I mean that we all know how hard you work to gather the data you present. We know as journalists that it is important to have sources who have accurate information and to learn which sources you can trust to have that accurate information. You have learned, through trial and error, that some sources are careless or simply are not accurate and so you have learned who you can trust to provide you solid data. Many of your readers do not understand those nuances. They do not understand what you do and how hard you work.

One reporter who called on the hotline recently was frustrated that the information being sought on the county’s data was being posted on the community’s Facebook page. Was that legitimately an “official source” for such data, she questioned? Of course, all of us realize that we cannot rely on Facebook as an accurate source of community information. Most reporters want to see data on official communications from their community. While social media can at times be accurate, most reporters want to be sure readers understand where their information came from – what

was the source – and how that can impact the accuracy of what is reported. Those are important truths to convey to your readers.

But more than that, do not hesitate to explain to your readers how hard you and your reporters are working to gather accurate information. Explain to them about the time your paper takes

to sift through data and to double-check what sources tell you. Help them understand that what they read on their Facebook pages may just as well have been planted by a Russian bot or a source that is attempting to create confusion or animosity in our country. I see items on Facebook pages on occasion that a quick check with Snopes.com makes clear has no basis in truth. The stories we read in the national news tells us that foreign countries are attempting to influence our election and some of that filters

down into Facebook posts in your own communities.

Does that mean you have an obligation to publish “fake news” in order to discount it? Are you adding credence to “fake news” when you publish it to discount it? Those are more like ethical questions that you need to consider as you think about these issues.

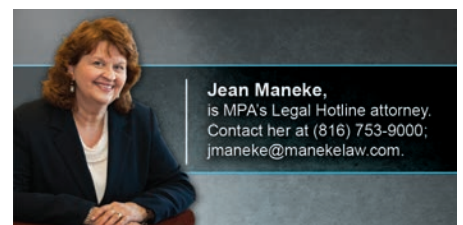
Just help your readers become discerning readers. You are trained to evaluate sources and weigh information. You can help your readers gain the very skills you use to do the good job you do and help bring discussions of issues in your community to a higher level.

## AND TWO FINAL THINGS:

The loss of legal notice papers in communities is creating one significant concern of note — while statutes in Chapter 493 of the Missouri Statutes address the general issue of legal notice papers, there is one particular statute you need to also consider. IN REGARD TO FORECLOSURE NOTICES ONLY, Section 443.320 is specific that the paper in which a foreclosure notice runs must be a paper “published in such county” where the land is located. No out-of-county paper can be used.

Secondly, there has been some caselaw clarifications lately regarding the use of photographs from Instagram. For many years, lawyers have recommended that those seeking to use a photo should “link” to it rather than copy and embed it. That is still true. But now the Instagram app has adopted rules making this mandatory regarding any material posted on that site. Let me know if this raises questions.

*"Do not hesitate to explain to your readers how hard you and your reporters are working to gather accurate information."*



Jean Maneke,  
is MPA's Legal Hotline attorney.  
Contact her at (816) 753-9000;  
jmaneke@manekelaw.com.