



The photos above show The Herald-Sun's composition department in Durham, N.C.

21 Papers Combine Advertising Composition Efforts into 'Super-Hub'



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Paxton Media Group newspapers in Georgia and North Carolina have banded together – with an assist from some new technology – in an arrangement that has led to cost savings in their production departments.

In all, 21 newspapers in North Carolina and Georgia have combined their advertising composition efforts into creating a “super-hub” at [The Herald-Sun](#) in Durham, N.C. The move reduces costs for the newspapers, which have eliminated that function at their local sites.

“Like most businesses these days, we’ve been focusing on opportunities to drive efficiencies across the board,” said Leonard Woolsey, group publisher of Paxton’s three Georgia daily newspapers. “Revenue is only somewhat controllable – expenses provide a much more direct impact on the bottom line. Technology is the best and quickest way to capture those efficiencies.”

In short, over the last year, The Herald-Sun has taken over all of the advertising design for Paxton’s Georgia and North Carolina properties, building a hub featuring talented designers who use new technology to work quicker, allowing the other newspapers to eliminate their own in-house departments.

“There are several advantages. The first and most obvious is a cost savings. In the traditional newspaper model of the past, there would be an ad design staff at each newspaper. We have 15 designers handling 21 newspapers,” said Rick Bean, publisher of The Herald-Sun.

“The second benefit is that in Durham, we have an abundance of really talented people in the market. That’s not always the case in all of our smaller markets. Having said that, we did talk to some of our smaller-market folks whose departments were being closed and offered them a position in Durham, so there was talent out there.

“The final advantage we saw was that we were able to retain jobs within at least some of our markets as we consolidated. All of our consolidation has been done through and with existing Paxton newspapers.”

Paxton began investigating the idea of centralizing its advertising production more than a year ago. "(The company) recently began testing software applications in different sites – finally settling on a vendor who worked well within our structure. Once we'd established an attractive partner, we moved ahead," Woolsey said.

For newspapers such as Carrollton's [Times-Georgian](#), the process for getting an ad designed has changed only slightly. "Salespeople now submit advertising – very much like they did before – but electronically. After a couple laps around the track for them, it is actually a much more efficient manner of production," Woolsey said. "We actually get proofs back quicker than when the creative staff was working across the room without the benefit of the technology."

In Durham, a slightly larger staff than what the newspaper had originally now does the work of 21 newspapers. "A couple of years ago we had 12 people in our ad design department," Bean said. "Today we have 15. We've also invested in software that has streamlined the process and made these folks more efficient. We operate two work shifts, one a day shift and one more of a second shift, working until 11 at night, later if needed."

"The software ... links the advertising insertion order to the layout information provided by the sales rep. We function much the same way as departments did several years ago, with the exception that we are dealing with electronic files instead of clip art, grid sheets and hand-written insertion orders. We have not changed deadlines in any of our newspapers, something we're very proud of. If a deadline ad is sent to us electronically before the sales rep leaves for the night, he or she should expect to receive the ad back by the time he gets to work the next day."

While the newspapers have the advantage of working together within the Paxton family, Woolsey said it's a process that could work for unaffiliated newspapers willing to cooperate on a similar project. "(There) are probably 'sharing' opportunities others could develop. Additionally, many times a simple upgrade in technology can result in a significant up-tick in efficiency to offset the investment," he said.

"Today if you're not aggressively taking advantages of available technology, you're leaving a tremendous amount of opportunity on the table," he added. "And in today's challenging revenue environment, you can't afford to ignore such opportunities without risking the future health of your organization and its employees' welfare."

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