

CASE STUDY

Kansas Publishing Ventures Sees "Instant Rewards" with Column

After nearly doubling their newspaper production, Kansas Publishing Ventures experienced numerous issues with their process of publishing public notices. Column helped Kansas Publishing Ventures modernize this process.

Background: Kansas Publishing Ventures Expands to Deliver More Local News

After Kansas Publishing Ventures had acquired three new newspapers in 2018, Tommy Hornbeck was brought on during an exciting moment of expansion for the organization.

Now, as the technical director and distribution manager of KPV, Tommy oversees the production of six newspapers, delivering local news across three counties in Kansas.

With 20 full time employees and a handful of part-time staff, local news will always be KPV's "bread and butter" — they leave state-wide and national stories for other publications to cover and remain committed to delivering local news.

Public Notice: "A Pretty Clunky Process... Terribly Inefficient"

Shortly after starting at KPV, Tommy noticed plenty of problems associated with the process of publishing public notices. According to Tommy, publishing notices was "a pretty clunky, hands-on process... with a lot of different hands." Between KPV's six newspapers, there was no standardized process for receiving, billing and publishing public notices.

"The process was terribly inefficient," -Tommy Hornbeck, Kansas Publishing Ventures

First, there were too many avenues for receiving public notices. Some customers were dropping off physical copies at the office, while others were mailing or faxing them in. Public notices could come in "sideways and coffee stained." Even when choosing to email public notices, customers would frequently email notices to different people within the same paper.

"Anyone and everyone would receive notices," explained Tommy. "Editors would receive notices, graphic artists would receive notices at other papers... they all just knew they had to get it in the paper."

Because different newspapers had different rates for notice publication, the billing process was a mess. When newspaper officials didn't know how much it would cost to publish, they would frequently pass the baton onto another person. This often resulted in billing errors and failures.

With "too many cooks in the kitchen," there were plenty of embarrassing and costly mistakes, whether it was a forgotten notice, a notice running in the wrong paper or a notice running for free. Tommy grew frustrated.

As for generating affidavits and notaries? Tommy commented: "I was tired of hearing from my partners about how little fun this is. No one likes arts and crafts time."

So when Tommy heard about the prospect of digitizing the public notice process with Column, he was all ears.

Onboarding with Column: "Instant Rewards"

According to Tommy, the Kansas Publishing Ventures staff experienced "instant rewards" after onboarding with Column.

"The benefits of using Column were immediate." - Tommy Hornbeck

After implementing digital tools to manage the public notice process, Tommy could easily oversee every step to make sure that each notice got into print. With Tommy as the administrator, notices were no longer going to anyone and everyone.

"It was beautiful to me," said Tommy. "It was clean, well-organized and made sense."

Tommy explained that the new standardized process is quite simple. First, he will receive an email notifying him that a new notice has been submitted for publication. Next, Tommy will confirm the notice's run dates and its size for publication. From there, all he needs to do is create an invoice and download the ad to save to his files. Voila — with just three clicks, Tommy is done.

"Before, I was handing off work. Now, I don't have to lean on anyone else," Tommy said. "I don't have to ask anyone to fill out a proof for me, so I can guess the size. I don't have to ask anyone what to bill because that's already set. I don't have to wait for anyone to get back to me before an ad can run."

With respect to the affidavit process, Tommy does not have to spend an afternoon making multiple copies by hand. Everything is handled through the mailing system on the back-end of Column.

And all that paperwork Tommy had cluttered around his desk? No more. Tommy has loved having a digital dashboard where "everything lives."

"It doesn't matter where I am — I could be walking down the street and scan a notice into our system, and walk away from the paper copy."

Time Savings: "We get more of our time back"

Digitizing the public notice process provided major time saving benefits for Kansas Publishing Ventures. "It was really nice to have a structured means to funnel the process and take away some steps," said Tommy. "Anywhere we can gain more time in our day is absolutely beautiful."

Working at a newspaper is certainly no nine-to-five. "As a salaried employee and as a member of management and a partner in the company, you don't really clock out until the work is done," explained Tommy. "So, I just get to clock out earlier."

Tommy knows that it's not just his time that he's getting back — "I knew I was saving someone else time down the road, too."

What is Tommy doing with some newfound free time? Now, he is able to spend more time with his kids — helping them with their math homework or starting a new art project.

Customer Satisfaction: "Happy to have something more structured and organized"

Transitioning KPV's customers to using Column was not a challenge. As Tommy explained, "There was no pushback from people that placed ads. Sometimes, there were customers that were concerned that they wouldn't have support through the process. But we gave them a quick reassurance that not only are we still here as the newspaper, but having Column as a partner, we've got great support on that end too. We'll get the notice in the paper no matter what."

Once customers began using the system, any premature worries faded away. "There may have been some fear of the unknown," Tommy said, "but just getting in and knowing that they didn't have to worry about it not running eliminated that concern on the first go."

Customers were quickly satisfied with the improved process. "Our typical law offices didn't blink at all. Larger city clerks were happy to have something more structured and organized."

An Easy Transition: Working with Column

"It was really easy to work with Column," Tommy said. "When I met with the group out of the gate, they were energized, they were attentive, they were curious about me and our business. It wasn't a technology company looking for their next signed contract that they needed to push into implementation."

Tommy knows that if he has any concerns, he'll get a quick reply from the Column support team. For instance, if a client changes a mailing address or a payment detail needs to be adjusted, he'll send Column a quick message.

"I've never had to go, 'Oh, they forgot about that, maybe I need to go ask them again. Maybe that got buried in their pile of support tickets.' I don't have to set a reminder to make sure it happened. I've never had to worry."

Would Tommy encourage other publications to start using Column? The answer is a resounding "yes."

"No matter what the process is today, you will save time if you adopt it. The time you take to learn how to use Column, you'll recoup in pretty short order. And as you go through that change, Column will be behind you 100% of the way."