

How the Colorado Press Association Modernized Public Notice with Column

In December 2019, a committee from the Colorado Press Association (CPA) met to discuss the future of public notice. Amid efforts to move public notice from newspapers to government websites, the CPA's choice of a new technology partner could determine the survival of newsrooms across the state.

To make a strong argument for why local media should remain the distributors of public notices, the CPA needed to modernize their statewide public notice website — an online database of all notices published in papers of record across Colorado.

The committee sought a solution that would enhance the user interface and search functionality for all Coloradoans. After meeting with the Column team, asking hard questions, outlining some dream features and discussing a transition plan, the CPA and Column finalized a partnership agreement.

Column offered a modern, category-leading public notice website completely free of charge, allowing the CPA to eliminate a budget item and save thousands per year. But the CPA didn't just save money — they gained an aligned technology partner committed to helping secure the future of public notices for community journalists in Colorado and beyond.

Over the next few months, Column set to work building Colorado's new public notice website. To make finding notices easy for users, Column configured keyword and phrase-based search, wrote machine learning algorithms to categorize notices by type and implemented custom search filters by date, publication and county. Through a notice subscription feature, Column also empowered users to receive email digests of new notices matching their search criteria.

Jill Farschman, CEO of CPA, commented, "The security, searchability, graphical appearance and overall design are vast upgrades."

In addition to constructing a modern, attractive user interface, Column migrated the CPA's archive of public notices to the new website, enabling users to search through several years of past notices.

By June, the website was ready to go live! But first, Column and the CPA needed to work collaboratively to inform newspapers on how to upload their public notices to the new database. Column provided credentials to each CPA member, then held a series of webinars and one-on-one phone calls to guide newspapers through the registration process. According to Jill, Column's customer service made the transition seamless for CPA's member newspapers.

"They are the friendliest, most patient, competent and responsive partner I've ever worked with in my long and eclectic career," Jill said.

Within three weeks, all legal newspapers in Colorado were ready to flow notices to the new website. On July 15, the website went live at publicnoticecolorado.com.

Column offers three simple ways to upload notices to the site. Newspapers can set up an automated FTP-feed, they can manually upload files or they can copy-and-paste their notices in Column's public notice platform.

Implementing the new public notice website served as phase one of the CPA's exciting new partnership with Column. Now that Colorado newspapers have Column accounts, they all have the option to take advantage of Column's suite of public notice software tools as a free member service. These tools include Column's collaborative public notice placement portal.

Jill recommends that newspapers utilize Column's full platform, which she believes "has the promise of combatting the customer complaints our industry suffers from due to inconsistency, lack of quality assurance and cumbersome manual procedures."

Newspapers that adopt the self-serve portal won't have to worry about uploading their notices to the statewide website — that will happen automatically through Column's platform.

With the website live and running, Column is eager to roll out enhancements that make public interest information more accessible and useful to the people of Colorado. As Jill explained, a stronger public notice website ultimately supports journalism across the state.

"Column will continue to enhance their offering, giving our members numerous opportunities to tout our responsiveness and innovation — which, in turn, legitimately strengthens our legislative arguments," Jill said.

Column is always eager for feedback on our products. If you have suggestions for ways to improve Colorado's public notice website, contact us at colorado@column.us. As we partner with press associations across the country, we hope to provide the best possible solution to keep public notices where they belong: in the pages of local newspapers.