

CASE STUDY

Column Streamlines Public Notice for The Manhattan Mercury

In summer 2019, the Manhattan Mercury played host to a ragtag group of young software engineers. Hailing from Kansas City, the East and West coasts and "The Little Apple" itself, Column's founders hoped to learn about public notice by studying the Mercury's legals process.

Day after day, the team watched Mercury staff take public notice orders over phone, craft affidavits with scissors and hand-deliver documents around town. By the end of the summer, Column developed a prototype for a software product that would streamline public notice for newspapers like the Mercury.

Over the next year, publications across Kansas and Colorado switched to Column, swapping a cumbersome and outdated process for a modern solution. On August 24, 2020, the Mercury made the transition, too.

In July, Sam Fosha had moved from the Mercury's legals department to graphics. After years handling public notice, Sam worried that a new staff member might struggle to take over the complex legals process — especially amid the newspaper's transition to Column.

But to Sam's surprise, Robin Phelan, the Mercury's regional advertising and digital director, decided not to appoint a new full-time legals manager in Sam's place. Instead, the Mercury simply trained staff members Odessa and Sandy to use Column.

"With Column, you don't need someone who has 15 years experience running legals." - Robin Phelan, The Manhattan Mercury

Though she was unfamiliar with public notice, Odessa quickly grew comfortable using Column. After the second time running through the system — confirming a notice, generating an invoice and uploading an affidavit — Odessa said, "I managed the whole process start to finish without any help!"

With Column, public notice doesn't have to be a full-time job. Rather than onboard a new staff member, the Mercury saved time and resources by adopting Column's free public notice platform. At the same time, the Mercury drastically improved their legals process.

"The biggest time saving was the consistency and the ease of the affidavit system," Sandy said after learning to use Column. "It used to be that we had to cut things out, mail letters or drive around to deliver affidavits. With digital affidavits, our system is easier, more consistent and saves us time."

Digitized invoices and affidavits made the Mercury's public notice process more accurate, convenient and collaborative. Sandy noted that "since we have one legals inbox, we were able to centralize our account in order to check each other's work and collaborate on different notices."

Thanks to Column's customer support team, the Mercury's transition couldn't have been smoother.

"The support I received from Column when I had questions was incredible. Every time I needed help, someone was responding within 10-15 seconds with the answer I needed," Sandy said.

Built from inside a local newspaper, Column strives to simplify public notice for people like Sandy and Odessa, who do the hard work of managing local newsrooms. That's why Column provides one-on-one training sessions, live chat support and custom account configurations for our newspaper users.

The result? Newspapers like the Manhattan Mercury can leave the gruntwork of public notice to Column, putting more time and resources toward the vital work of local journalism.