

NEWSPAPERS

Unlike big dailies, small papers prosper

The Bismarck Tribune, the daily paper in North Dakota's capital, doesn't have a lot of competition encroaching on its turf.

"What news there is out there is generally found by us," says Editor Dave Bundy. He says his staff of 10 reporters and seven editors is by far the biggest in the area. A recent front-page article explored why remote lock devices attached to drivers' key chains weren't working in the parking lot of the new Kohl's department store. A popular feature is the Photo of the Day, often taken by readers. "People can email their photos to us and we'll run their cute kid or vacation pictures," Mr. Bundy says.

With a local focus and a near-monopoly on its market, the Bismarck Tribune has helped its publisher, Lee Enterprises Inc., produce revenue and profit growth admired by many in the newspaper industry. The paper is among a tier of papers with circulations of 50,000 or less that is proving relatively resilient in the face of a prolonged slump among larger papers.

While big newspaper companies are increasingly battling the Internet and other sources of information and advertising, small papers have been able to keep a hold on their markets, concentrating on local politics, sports and community events. Most rural areas don't yet have the same access to the Web that urban markets do, protecting small papers, for now, from the Web competition that has hurt major papers.

Source: Joseph T. Hallinan, The Wall Street Journal via The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette