

# EDUCATIONAL ARTICLE

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## **SERVING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, PRESERVING DEMOCRACY**

By: John Dobberstein, BA Sentinel

When the Broken Arrow Ledger closed in 2017, it was a big blow to the city. The 100-year-old icon employed hard-working people who covered local sports, news and events. It trumpeted the city's successes and gave residents a voice to showcase their civic pride or air their grievances.

Broken Arrow wasn't alone in this loss. More than 2,600 daily and weekly newspapers across the U.S. have closed since 2006. The consequence of this not only lost wages and livelihoods, but the loss of a local voice.

For several years I read or heard comments from residents who wished Broken Arrow still had a newspaper. After much internal reflection, I decided that if anyone was tooled to rebuild a local news source it was probably me, owing to the 30+ years of media experience that I have.

In 2021 I founded the Broken Arrow Sentinel as an independent online news operation that includes a website and daily e-newsletter. In just 30 months, we've published more than 1,500 local new stories, events, videos and more – which collectively has produced nearly 500,000 page views.

We've broken big stories. Our six-part series on the area's battle against fentanyl was a finalist for a national award. We've celebrated the city's successes and highlighted challenges when we felt it was necessary.

Why is this important? Whether it's with education, economic development, public safety or other matters, clearly many big decisions are being made about the future of Broken Arrow.

We're also facing a future of technological innovation that is both promising but disruptive, and not in a good way. The dawn of artificial intelligence will make many of our everyday tasks easier to do, but its ubiquity means it can be exploited for deepfakes and scams. In many cases, it will become even harder for people to trust the information they are reading.

Residents need a dependable, unbiased source of information, rather than relying on rumors and social media trolls to provide it.

But we aren't here just to cover the news. We want to be a resource for the business community, one that can help Chamber members and all businesses be successful.

Metrics show our audience is very engaged with our content, with open and click-through rates for our daily e-newsletter up to three times higher than the industry average. Recently, via a competitive grant award from LION Publishers, we launched a new website with more robust features to further increase audience engagement and enhance opportunities for marketers and advertisers.

We offer a full complement of advertising spots, including the ability to create sponsored posts to catch the eye of readers. We also have places to promote your brand in our e-newsletter, and we'll offer customized reporting to share how ad investments with us are performing.

Also in the works for this year are printed and digital special reports targeting special audiences and interests that will give local businesses another place to shine.

What does this mean for Chamber members? You have a resource that is intimately engaged with Broken Arrow residents to provide higher-quality traffic and results than you might get from social media, which can be loaded with inactive or fake accounts that artificially inflate their advertised reach.

Facebook in particular is continually pivoting to suit their corporate desires and is now loading up the feeds of followers with ads and content that is often irrelevant to them. Although Facebook wants to be "fun" again, what they're really saying is they want to be more like TikTok. That doesn't make it easy for businesses trying to get their name in front of real customers.

Of course, the Broken Arrow Sentinel has a Facebook page, too. But that's not all we do. Our website and daily e-newsletter offers an opportunity to not only grow your business, but let your brand be seen as one that supports a local business that is invested in keeping our city engaged and informed. Broken Arrow deserves better than to be thrown into the dustbin of media history.

I'd love to have a conversation with you about your business' goals and what we can do to help you reach them. And through your support we can continue to grow and fulfill our mission to restore a crucial resource for Broken Arrow and the surrounding area.



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