

# Media interconnectivity



**Philip  
Dine**

**W**e're often told we live in an increasingly interconnected world, sometimes phrased as a shrinking world, and indeed we do.

The reference generally is to the economic realm—trade, globalization and the like. And that, of course, has implications—some troublesome—for labor.

The trend is true in another area as well, one relevant to the work so many of you do to get our message out to the public and its elected representatives: We also are dealing with an increasingly interconnected media operating in a shrinking environment.

That may not appear to be the case. Where once we had three or four television stations, now there are hundreds.

Newspapers abound, and there are untold numbers of Internet news sites, along with an explosion in radio talk shows.

But consider this: The number of independent newspapers has sharply declined, partly because papers are folding, partly because many of the remaining ones have been subsumed into mega chains. Many of those radio talk shows, including the thriving conservative ones, are part of a few corporate-owned entities. In important ways, the TV landscape has expanded less than we think. We still have the same networks—CBS, NBC, ABC and public broadcasting—plus just a handful of cable networks that matter in terms of political issues; networks that focus on fishing or old movies aren't among them. Meanwhile, news magazines are by and large fading.

So where once the media scene resembled a huge number of small, isolated ponds, that's evolved into a few very large ponds—a trend driven by societal pushes for mergers/acquisitions in the broader economy, and by factors specific to the media business.

**The growing dominance of media conglomerates has implications for what we do.**

For one, it means that when you get a letter or commentary piece published in your local newspaper, chances are that the paper is part of a regional or national chain—and that your thoughts will be read by journalists at the other newspapers as well. That's all the more probable with an issue like ours, which has national scope—meaning if you make a strong case, the sister newspapers may run your piece; at the very least it will likely be read by, and influence, those journalists.

The prospect of broader resonance for your work is reinforced by a separate development. The 24/7 news cycle, which has become the rule in the media environment, sparked by the Internet and cable news outlets, means that news edi-

tors, directors and producers are constantly on the lookout for anything new that they can use—before someone else does.

All this means that no newspaper, no electronic media outlet, is too small for us, because wherever our piece begins, it may well reach a larger audience via the ripple effects described above.

It also allows us to think strategically. If you want to write something in a local paper, and if there are several in your region, you might opt for the one with the best reach in terms of its overall ownership. If, for example, one of those papers belongs to the Gannett chain, it might offer you the most bang for your buck. Or conversely, if *USA Today*—Gannett's flagship paper—runs a piece that gets you thinking, the most welcoming local vehicle might be the Gannett paper.

The growing media interconnectedness also transcends national borders. Not only are media barons such as Rupert Murdoch driving this with their transnational news empires, so too are the general globalization trends as well as the fact that more people—including Americans—travel abroad.

**We're positioned to capitalize on these shifts in the media landscape, because our issues are simultaneously local and national in scope and because the Postal Service—and letter carriers—are known entities that require no introduction and are of interest to people throughout our country and beyond.**

The recent work in Nebraska of Ken Nickerson, Kearney Branch 312 president and Congressional District 3 liaison, reflects this. His commentaries in various newspapers have sparked some highly favorable editorials or blog postings that have assumed a life of their own. Ken's efforts also have generated TV, and political, interest.

On the national/international level, President Rolando rebutted a hostile piece in *The Economist* with a succinct and well-reasoned letter. Why do we care about a British weekly magazine?

Because half of its 5.3 million readers worldwide are Americans. Because many of its readers are European political or business leaders who talk to their American counterparts. Because American journalists read and learn from what we say. Because it raises our stature as the go-to folks on postal issues.

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*The Postal Record* (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

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Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

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