

**A SURVEY OF THE TIMES-UNION:
*How Do The Readers Perceive It?***

**A Report
Prepared for the
Kosciusko Leadership Academy
Warsaw, Indiana**

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"All I know is what I read in the papers," American humorist and philosopher Will Rogers once said. He, like many Americans of his era relied heavily on the press for information, entertainment, and opinions.

With the advent of radio and television, the force of the newspaper changed. Where it once was the only source of news for a community, it now had to compete with media which could take the information to the people more quickly.

Yet in many communities like Warsaw and Kosciusko County, it still plays an important part in the life of the citizens. It performs a key role in informing readers about community issues, entertainment, and developments.

Exactly how *do* the readers perceive the newspaper was a question that we asked as we began to determine our project. Therefore, we decided to conduct a readership survey of the Times-Union to find out exactly how they felt.

Each of us had a different reason for wanting to do such a project. "As a reporter for the Times-Union for four years, I often wondered how the readership in general reacted to our product," says Liz, who is now promotional secretary for Brethren Home Missions in Winona Lake and a correspondent for the newspaper. Jeff has been selling advertising for the newspaper for three years. "I felt such a survey could help me better represent the paper," he says. "I am vitally interested in the community," adds Jane, the wife of Times-Union managing editor Tom Swenson and the administrator of the Warsaw Community Development Corporation and marketing director at Kosciusko Community Hospital.

We also felt the survey could be of use to the management of the newspaper in determining style, format, and content.

The survey was included in three separate issues of the Times-Union, on April 7, 11 and 13 and went to more than 12,000 homes. Each individual was asked to complete only one survey and return it to the Times-Union by April 15.

We have no way of determining the actual number of surveys sent, other than the approximately 12,000 households reached on each occasion. A total of 240 were returned. Although in a scientific study, this is not a satisfactory response, it provided some interesting insights for our purposes. The questionnaire and its results are included later in the paper.

We spent an evening talking with Reub Willams, owner of the newspaper. In opening our interview, we asked him the same questions included on the survey and received some enlightening answers. We also asked him to respond to some of the allegations most often made against the newspaper.

A sampling of newspapers also provided information regarding the actual number of inches of advertising and news stories as outlined in the survey. Two weeks were used, the week of December 13, 1982 and the week of February 14, 1983, on the rational that December is usually a month of larger newspapers, while February generally has a smaller amount of pages. These statistics are also included.

The Survey

Several trends were apparent as we tallied the survey responses. We discovered that those who answered were, on the most part, very loyal readers of the Times-Union. Many of them had subscribed to it for quite awhile, including one who had taken it for 50 years.

While many had both positive and negative comments to make, it often took the form of constructive criticism. Answers which ranged from "too much" of a topic to "not enough," generally balanced each other out.

In fact, we discovered a sort of yardstick was established by the statistical results of the specific topics. When compared together, the "too much" and the "not enough" sections give interesting insight. We realize you can never please all of the people all of the time, but when you have nearly equal numbers noting too much and not enough of an item at the same time, in our opinion, you are as near perfect as you can be.

We also discovered the mean respondent is a female, age 56 to 70, married and living in a household of two people. She lives in her own house and has subscribed to the newspaper for more than 21 years.

The Interview

The interview with Reub Williams was revealing in terms of the newspaper business, and of the man himself. On the whole, his responses reflected the opinions of the majority of the survey respondents; however, there were a number of differences reflecting both his private readership style, and his role of publisher and professional journalist.

Williams differed from the majority of respondents most radically on four issues. First, in response to survey question six, dealing with the topic of unbiased news reporting, the majority of responses (28.5 percent) rated the Times—Union a three on the scale of one to five. The publisher rated his paper a five along with 11.8 percent of the respondents.

Williams stated, "To actually be biased in this newspaper, we could cut any of these politicians to ribbons by nitpicking. They don't have a newspaper to come back... You don't ever use the newspaper for personal gain or vengeance. That's very unfair."

The second area where his response was not in line with the majority opinion was in question number eleven, dealing with the topic of editorial coverage. An overwhelming majority of 71.7 percent felt the newspaper contained the right amount of editorial opinion, while Williams sided with the 12.7 percent minority who felt there was not enough. He said he would like to see the re-establishment of the Saturday editorial page and would like to have more local editorials, if personnel and budget would allow.

Also in question number eleven, Williams, while agreeing with the majority in his role of reader, felt that as a publisher he was never satisfied with the amount of local news. He disagreed with the respondents who stated there was the right amount of hospital news, news service photos, and special features, stating that each of those categories could be increased. In the area of comics and entertainment, he said there aren't enough of the good ones for his tastes, but the reason they aren't used is because of the high cost of the service which provides them.

As the publisher of the Times—Union, the two questions which dealt with the amount of advertising presented the fourth area of difference. Williams stated, "The reason I don't think you ever get enough classified advertising, speaking of the liners ... isn't the money involved. The small liners constitute one of the biggest reader interests in your paper. More people, day in and day out, will consult the classified ads than any other feature in your paper....It has real, genuine reader interest."

In discussing the issue of advertising and its importance to the newspaper, the publisher added, "The newspaper can be no better than the economic support from its market, and that's the bottom line." He said that while many people may

think a second newspaper in Warsaw would cause the Times--Union to improve because of the competition, they are very wrong. Two newspapers in Warsaw would probably result in two mediocre papers, he said, because there is not enough advertising lineage to adequately support two papers of the present quality of the Times--Union. There are very few cities in Indiana which now can support two daily newspapers, he noted.

In answering question twelve, regarding the changes in the Spotlight television section, he replied, "I would put more local in if it were possible, but we don't have the staff to handle it...we don't have the wherewithal to hire the people to do it. I would put features into Spotlight to improve it."

He said that he would also like to see more local movie information, and the week's list of bestsellers.

In response to the question of additions and changes to make the newspaper better, number seventeen, Williams stated, "I would like to see us print a combination Saturday/Sunday paper, but it would also contain colored comics ... it would look like a Sunday paper, but we would call it a weekender. But you can't do that yet. It would require much more advertising lineage."

Responding to the eighteenth question of the survey, Williams again expressed a minority opinion, and voiced dissatisfaction with the delivery system of the Times--Union. "Delivery is a tough problem....," he said. "Circulation has always been a bugaboo with me. The distribution has always been a pain in the neck. We should have a circulation of a minimum of 15,000, but we can't get them into the area fast enough."

He says there are always things that can be done. "The most critical person of this newspaper is myself....," he noted. "As long as you're in the business a good publisher will never be satisfied with his product. Never! There's always improvement that you can implement if you have the money and the personnel to do it.... We are certainly covering many more facets of local activities than in the history of the newspaper.... There are always places for improvement. There always will be."

Recommendations

The Times-Union has many positive qualities. It is a local newspaper, written for the local people. But, as with any product, it will probably never suit everybody.

There are, however, a few recommendations we would like to make as a result of our study:

- Improved accuracy. A common complaint was the inaccuracy of the television listings in *Spotlight* and grammatical, typographical, spelling and paste-up errors. A closer eye should be kept on the physical product to help lessen these errors.
- More local photos. Since this is a hometown newspaper, it should have considerable photographic coverage of the community, in both news and feature photos.
- Add a full time editorial writer to the staff. Williams expressed the opinion that a newspaper is not really a full paper if it doesn't have a daily editorial page. We would like to recommend that a staff member be given full time responsibility for that section to insure continuity of thought and consistency of presentation.
- Use this survey as a yardstick in developing a more salable product. The statistics revealed that almost even numbers of respondents were satisfied or dis-satisfied with the amounts of news presented. Where there is a great deal of difference, we suggest re-examining those areas for effective news coverage.

1. Where do you get most of your information about local news?

Times—Union - 204 (86.8 %) Radio - 12 (5.1 %) TV - nine (3.8 %) Another Newspaper - 10 (4.2 %).

2. Where do you get most of your information about national news?

Times—Union - 47 (20.3 %) Radio - 20 (8.6 %) TV - 136 (58.8 %) Another Newspaper - 28 (12.1 %).

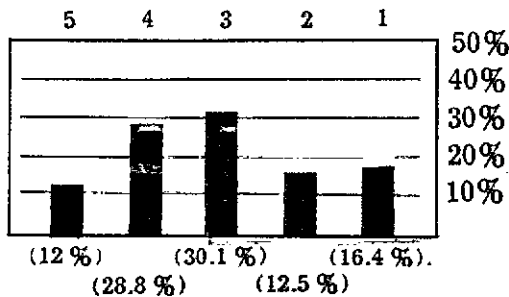
3. Where do you get most of your information about local sports?

Times—Union - 173 (81.9 %) Radio - 19 (nine %) TV - six (2.8 %) Another Newspaper - 13 (6.1 %).

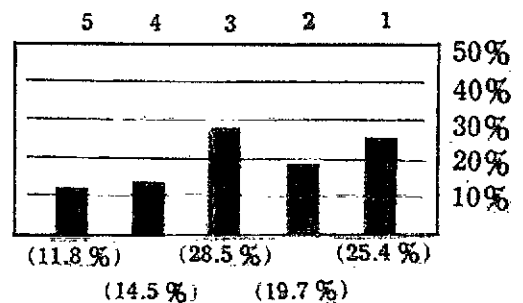
4. Where do you get most of your information about national sports?

Times—Union - 39 (18 %) Radio - 21 (9.7 %) TV - 129 (59.7 %) Another Newspaper - 27 (12.5 %).

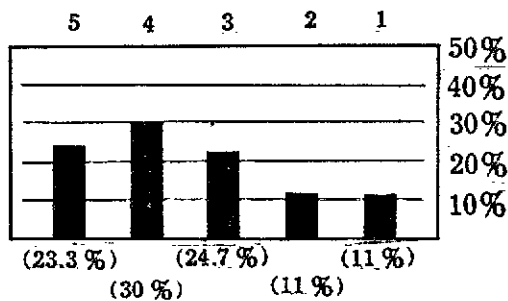
5. On a scale, how would you rate The Times-Union for accurate news reporting? (5 is high and 1 is low)



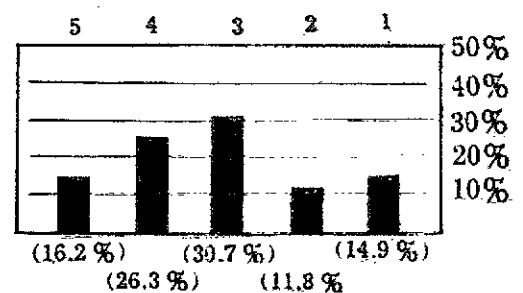
6. On a scale, how would you rate The Times-Union for unbiased news reporting? (5 is high and 1 is low)



7. On a scale, how would you rate The Times-Union in its effort to keep you informed? (5 is high and 1 is low)



8. On a scale, how would you rate The Times-Union in its effort to entertain you? (5 is high and 1 is low)



9. Where do you get most of your information about television programming?

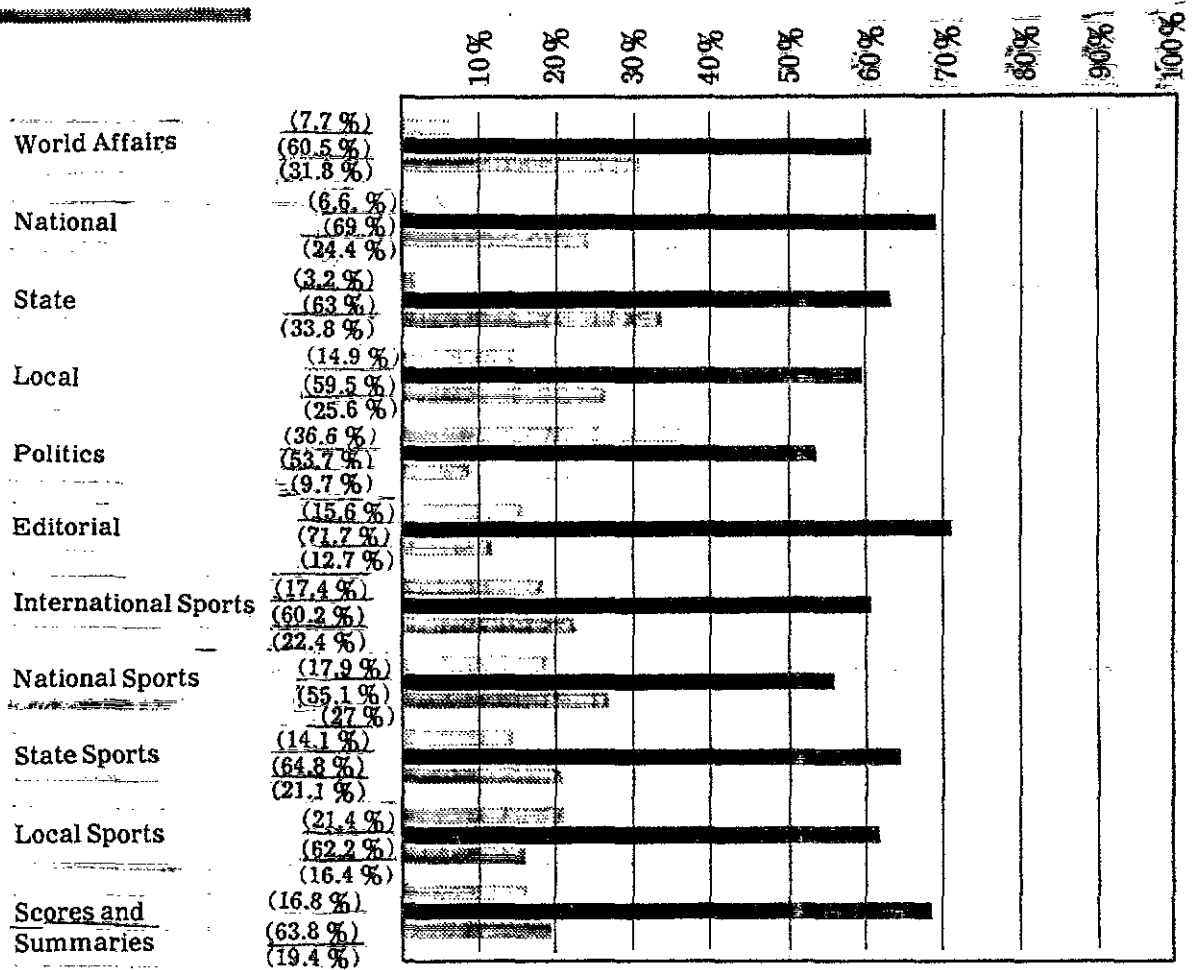
Times-Union Spotlight - 137 (62 %) TV Guide - 67 (30.3 %) HBO Guide - 0 Another Newspaper - 17 (7.7 %).

10. Do you read or use our Spotlight television section?

Yes - 176 (75.5 %) No - 57 (24.5 %).

11. Does The Times-Union print TOO MUCH, RIGHT AMOUNT, or NOT ENOUGH of the following:

TOO MUCH ██████████
 RIGHT AMOUNT ██████████
 NOT ENOUGH ██████████

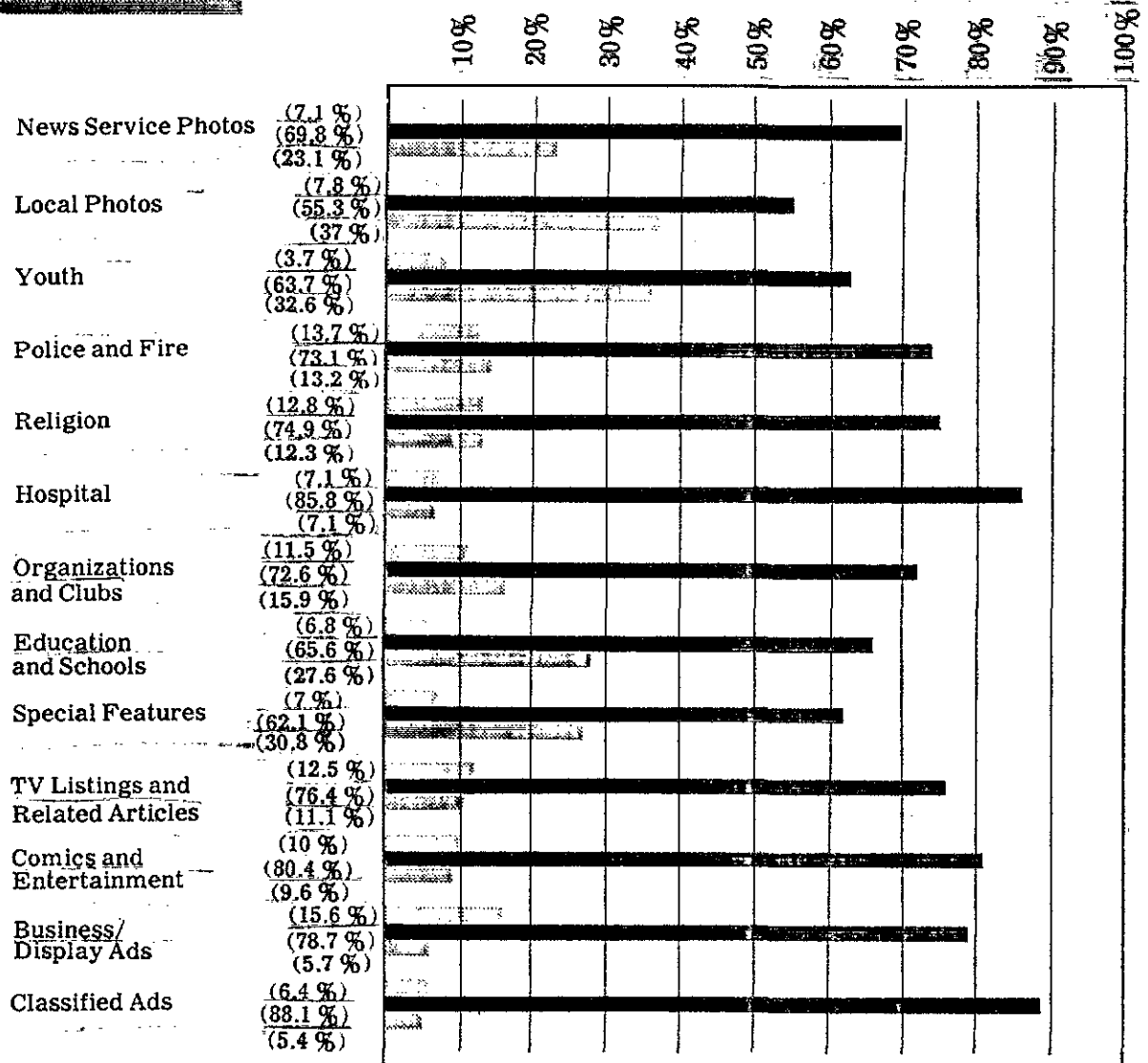


Does The Times-Union print TOO MUCH, RIGHT AMOUNT, or NOT ENOUGH of the following:

TOO MUCH ██████████

RIGHT AMOUNT ██████████

NOT ENOUGH ██████████



12. Do you feel any changes are needed in the Spotlight television section? If so, what? Common changes listed included adding movie ratings, HBO and Movie Channel listings, and more recipes. Other suggestions were improved accuracy and a format change.

13. Do you feel any changes are needed in the sports section? If so, what? Comments ran the gamut of too much sports to not enough sports, and more sports photos to not enough photos. A common complaint was not enough coverage of school sporting events outside of Warsaw.

14. Do you feel any changes are needed in photography coverage? If so, what? More local photos was a common request and requests to not show victims in accident photos were frequent. Again, "too much wire photos" and "not enough wire photos" were common remarks.

15. Do you feel any changes are needed in the editorial pages? If so, what? Many individuals expressed a dissatisfaction with local editorials and requested objective comments on pertinent issues. Others suggested too much space is devoted to editorial comment and questioned the "name withheld by request" policy with regard to Letters to the Editor and.

16. What other special features would be of interest to you? Local, club, and business news, as well as better comics were requested the most. Respondents also suggested that the Potpourri column be eliminated.

17. What would you add or change to make The Times-Union a better newspaper? It was often suggested that the newspaper staff re-evaluate their policies with regard to news coverage, particularly what meetings or what sporting events at which schools were covered. Many felt the inclusion of more local news and "good" news would improve the publication. Better proof reading was another comment, while still others questioned the 25-cent price tag on the paper. Some felt a little competition would also improve the paper. Despite these comments, there were many that simply answered, "do nothing, it's a good paper."

18. Are you satisfied with the delivery of The Times-Union? Most respondents were pleased with the delivery.

19. How long have you subscribed to The Times-Union?

Less than one year - nine (4.1 %)	1-3 years - 20 (9.1 %)	4-10 years - 56 (25.6 %)
11 to 20 years - 53 (24.2 %)	21 years or longer - 81 (37 %).	

20. Is the respondent to this survey...

male - 110 (47.8 %)	female - 120 (52.2 %).
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21. What is your age?

16-25 - 13 (5.7 %)	26-40 - 60 (26.2 %)	41-55 - 59 (25.8 %)	56-70 - 64 (27.9 %)	71 or older - 33 (14.4 %).
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22. Are you...

married - 187 (82.4 %)	single - 40 (17.6 %).
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23. How many people currently reside in your household?

1 - 33 (14.3 %)	2 - 97 (42.2 %)	3 - 41 (17.8 %)	4 - 33 (14.3 %)	5 - 18 (7.8 %)
6 - 5 (2.2 %)	7 - 2 (.9 %)	8 plus - 1 (.4 %).		

24. Do you own or rent where you reside?

Own - 206 (88.2 %)	Rent - 27 (11.2 %).
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25. Is your residence a...

House - 203 (88.3 %)	Apartment - 10 (4.3 %)	Mobile Home - 17 (7.4 %).
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The Control

On the next page is a graph (labeled Times-Union Inches Tabulation) which became the control of our project. Two complete weeks of the Times-Union were measured to determine the actual amount of space, or inches, devoted to each of the twenty-four categories found in our survey (i.e. national news, local sports, entertainment, etc...). Each bar represents a heading and the percentage of the available news space that was used.

Like any advertiser-supported newspaper, the Times-Union's size is directly proportional to amount of advertising. Management dictates the proportion of news to commercial ads to be used in each day's paper. The area in which the news is presented is known as the news space.

Bibliography

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Williams, Reub, owner of Reub Williams and Sons, Inc., publishers of The Times-Union, personal interview, April 22, 1983.

**TIMES—UNION
INCHES TABULATION**

