

News is the only media channel protected in the First Amendment. It's how we interpret the world. And it's facing an existential threat. In the last ten years, 1,600 local newspapers, some 20% of all Metro newspapers have shuttered their doors. In fact, industry wide these closures have created a knock-on effect, leading to this...47% fewer journalists than 10 years ago.

And while professional journalists, those hard wired to base their perspective on facts, are being decimated, another source is rising. A source where the editorial process is being subverted by the volume of feed first unverified news content produced and often given the same legitimacy as professional news outlets.

America is concerned, with 79% of Americans wanting action taken to stem this proliferation, according to Pew Research. Fake news however, is 'winning', as thousands of communities across America now rely on unverified news to make decisions and shape their world view.

But if this is the diagnosis of malady, what is the cure?

Money.

Local, professional journalism is on the brink of extinction because it depends on advertising dollars for its revenue. Ad revenues for news organizations have fallen 62% in the last ten years. And while you could argue that not all local news outlets adapted to a digital world as well as they could have done, as agencies and brands we need to admit that we are also culpable - buying news inventory programmatically instead of direct with corresponding inventory sold at pennies to the dollar, or worse, adding news to exclusion lists and blocking that revenue altogether.

So, we decided to act, launching Protect Our Press, an initiative that aims to restore revenue to local publishers to preserve and reverse this decline. Our initiative is built around a simple mechanic. A Pledge to rethink the lazy ways of media investment and embrace the power of news content adjacency. First, we conducted research to prove that 'News Engagers' were sizable, valuable and highly engaged – some 27% more than 'News Rejectors'. Critically we also showed that news reading audiences were 20% more efficient in their response to paid media campaigns. With this information we then started to recruit support – with both the 4As and ANA endorsing our program. Others followed, from interdependent publications through to global media companies such as Havas Worldwide. And the pledges rolled in, in their thousands.

As an agency we've already made significant strides, moving the percentage of our programmatic buys in news from 13% to 20%. We've also set up direct "Protect Our Press" buys with clients such as the Museum of Science and the Boston Globe – forming unique thought leadership programs and even creating a new ad unit that shows support for the initiative.

And we're only just getting started. Some agencies will take on client work as 'pro bono' – this was not the case for us. Our hope is to drive awareness of an industry wide malaise born of dated and lazy thinking, to instead create Work for the Good of America. For verified news truth, not opinion based punditry.