

GETTING THE NEWS

Technology Changes Habits



by John Baldrige and Bill Whitsitt

Montanans highly value their news and are increasingly using mobile devices to access news over the Internet. Among younger Montanans, ages 18 to 34, 58 percent reported obtaining news online or by mobile device every day. And young people aren't the only ones who are tech-savvy news consumers. Montanans in every age group – including 65 and older – are reading the latest news stories on phones, tablets, and computers. But they also rely on traditional news content producers like television stations, and they actively seek local news.

In a world with a growing wealth of Internet-based news and information, some vital questions were recently addressed by first-of-its-kind, Montana-based survey research conducted by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research for the Greater Montana Foundation, an organization that encourages communication, with emphasis on electronic media, on important issues facing Montana. The questions addressed were:

- What do Montanans believe are the most important issues facing our state?
- Where do Montanans prefer to get trusted information on these issues?

The findings of the survey are especially important since they come at a time of revolutionary changes in media technology, in addition to the growth in Internet use worldwide and in Montana. Such changes mean that there will undoubtedly be new media business models in the future, so the preferences of Montana's information consumers are key. In addition, from the perspective of citizen engagement, the wealth of today's information raises questions about which sources of information, both within and outside Montana, are or should be trusted.

The survey results demonstrate that Montanans appear to be discerning. They have trusted media sources. In addition, traditional news sources are critical to Montanans' ability to receive information on key issues, led by television. And

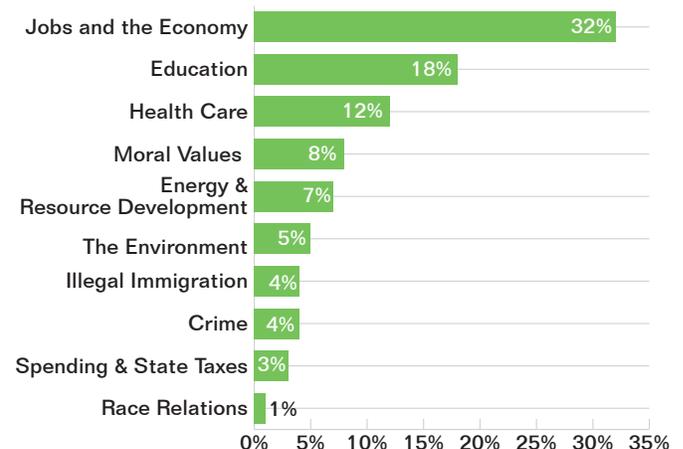
despite growing use of the Internet as a news conduit, for now it appears that traditional sources hold their own and are well-trusted by Montanans.

This article describes the survey's findings about the issues that were most important to Montanans, their current preferences for and sources of news and information, and the role of the Internet in providing Montanans with news and information.

Jobs and the Economy, Education, and Health Care are Most Important to Montanans

Jobs and the economy was cited most often (32 percent) by adult Montanans as the most important issue facing the state. The next most commonly mentioned issue was education, cited by 18 percent as most the most important issue facing the state. Other issues rated most important by Montanans included health care (12 percent), moral values (8 percent), energy and resource development (7 percent), and the environment (5 percent).

Q Which one of the following issues is currently the most important issue facing the state?

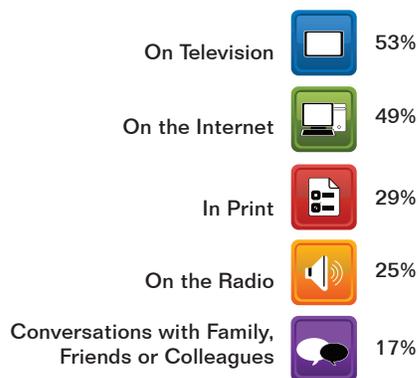


These survey results are particularly important because they offer Montana's news organizations an assessment of which topics news consumers find most important. These findings provide an opportunity for Montana's news organizations to tailor their coverage to Montanans' preferences, thus remaining competitive and relevant in today's rapidly changing news and information market. As this survey demonstrates, many of the most rapid changes in this market are occurring in the methods Montanans use to consume news and information.

Montanans Access Traditional News Sources in Old and New Ways

Most Montanans reported turning to television or the Internet to get news. When asked where they got their news and information over the last seven days, a majority of adult Montanans (53 percent) reported getting news from television. Similarly, 49 percent said they got news from the Internet over the previous week. A lower proportion said that they got news in the last week from a print source (29 percent), on the radio (25 percent), or from family and friends (17 percent).

Thinking about the news, how did you get your news in the past week?



It is important to note that getting news and information from the Internet can refer to a large number of possible sources including television websites, newspaper websites, radio websites, Internet-only news or information sites, and social media sites like Facebook or Twitter. In fact, it is apparent from this survey that newspaper news consumption among adult Montanans occurs via print and via the Internet. While fewer Montanans reported consuming news via radio compared to other sources, 61 percent of Montanans reported listening to radio. And like newspapers, many Montana radio stations now deliver their content via streaming on the Internet or by presenting news articles on their station's website.

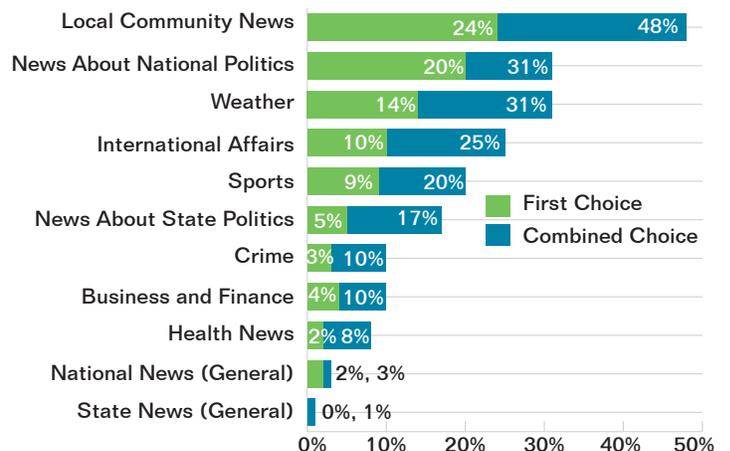
Two implications of this finding stand out. First, the Internet is a vitally important source of news and information for Montanans. Montana's news organizations must continue to offer news in formats that are compatible with this method of news consumption. Second, traditional Montana news organizations remain critically relevant as producers of news content that can be delivered to Montanans both on and off the Internet.

Montanans Highly Value Local News

Montana news organizations are uniquely positioned to provide news content that Montanans want, according to the Bureau survey. Local news sources are more sought after by adult Montanans than are national news sources. More than three-fifths of adult Montanans (64 percent) reported regularly or sometimes watching local television news. In addition, 63 percent reported regularly or sometimes reading a local newspaper like the Billings Gazette or the Missoulian. Finally, 52 percent of Montanans said that they regularly or sometimes read a local weekly community newspaper. In contrast, the most sought after national news source was nightly network television news, which 43 percent of Montanans reported watching regularly or sometimes.

In addition, the survey found that local community news interests Montanans more than other types of news and information. When asked which types of news and information programming are most interesting, 48 percent of adult Montanans answered local community news. This preference was followed by news about national politics (31 percent), weather (31 percent), international affairs (25 percent), and sports (20 percent).

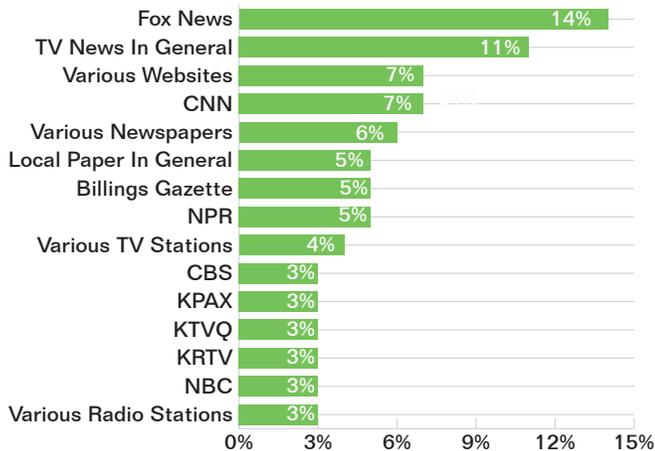
Which two or three types of news and information programming interest you the most?



Trusted News Sources

Montanans do make distinctions regarding the trustworthiness of news sources, whether these sources are local or national. More than three-fifths of adult Montanans (62 percent) said that they have one source of news that they trust most. Montanans, as a whole, mentioned a very broad spectrum of sources as most trustworthy. Fox News was cited as the most trusted news source (14%). Television news in general was cited by 11 percent of Montanans as most trustworthy. “Various websites” were named most trustworthy by a combined 7 percent of adult Montanans, while CNN was also mentioned as most trustworthy by 7 percent of adults. Various newspapers were cited by a combined 6 percent of adults as most trustworthy, while the Billings Gazette specifically, and NPR were each mentioned by 5 percent of adults.

Q What specific news source do you consider a trusted source of information?



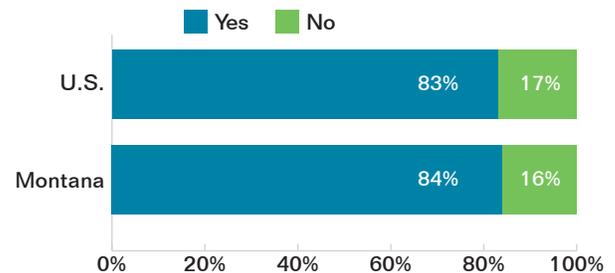
It is particularly interesting to observe the prominence of traditional news content producers on the list of Montanans’ most trusted sources. Television networks and stations, newspapers, and radio stations were frequently cited as trusted news sources. However, these traditional sources of news content can be delivered to consumers in quite non-traditional ways, meaning via the Internet. In addition, newly established sources of news content, represented in the survey findings as “various websites,” also appeared among the sources of news Montanans trust most.

Internet Access and News Consumption

To use the Internet to obtain news people must have Internet access. Eight in 10 adult Montanans (84 percent) reported having Internet access in their homes. There is no

statistical difference between this proportion of Montana households and the proportion of all U.S. households reporting Internet access in 2013 (83 percent).

Q Do you have Internet access at your home?



This high level of Internet access among Montanans implies that Montanans in general are exposed to the same possibilities for sources and methods of Internet news consumption as are people around the country. However, there are differences in Internet access between urban and rural Montanans.

Rural Montanans are somewhat less likely to report Internet access in their homes than are urban Montanans. Almost nine in 10 residents (89 percent) of Montana’s seven most populous counties reported having Internet access in their homes. In comparison, 75 percent of residents of the remaining 49 Montana counties reported having Internet access in their homes.

The implication of this finding is that rural Montanans are slightly more reliant on traditional methods for consumption of news – print, radio, and television – than are urban Montanans.

Frequency of Internet News Consumption

The substantial penetration of Internet access in Montana households sets the conditions for significant use of the Internet by adult Montanans to obtain news. Two-thirds of adult Montanans (66 percent) reported consuming news online or using a mobile device at least weekly. More than four in 10 adult Montanans (43 percent) reported getting news via the Internet daily. An additional 23 percent reported getting news through the Internet weekly.

This substantial frequency of Internet use to obtain news and information by Montanans has very large implications for Montana’s existing news organizations. Montana’s news consumers increasingly seek news content via the Internet. Competing for Internet business is thus vital for the survival of Montana’s news organizations.

Getting News over the Internet is Generational in Montana, but

While the survey does support the commonly held belief that younger people are more likely to use the Internet to get news than are older people, the survey also shows that a substantial portion of Montana's seniors are "wired."

Almost six in 10 Montanans ages 18-34 (58 percent) reported getting news online or by a mobile device every day. Only 4 percent of Montanans ages 18-34 reported never getting news online or by a mobile device.

In contrast, about one-quarter of Montanans ages 65 and older (26 percent) reported obtaining news online or by a mobile device every day. Another 22 percent of Montanans ages 65 and older reported that they never consume news online or on a mobile device.

Survey Methods

The statewide media habits survey was administered in April – May 2015, among 526 adults Montana residents and has a margin of error of +/- 4.3 percent.

The survey was fielded by the Bureau, with questionnaire and analytical assistance from Nicole McCleskey of Public Opinion Strategies, a national research firm.

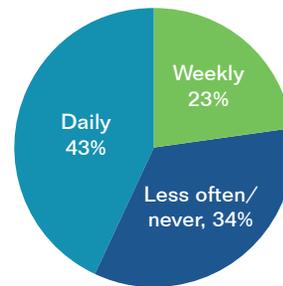
The methods used for this survey are:

- Population represented: Montana residents ages 18+.
- Type of sample: Probability.
- Mode of data collection: Telephone (landline and cell)
- Are the data weighted? Yes, to state targets from U.S. Census Bureau, Gallup, and phone type estimates by U.S. National Center for Health Statistics.

Full question wording may be obtained from John Baldridge at John.Baldridge@umontana.edu.



How often do you get news online or on a mobile device?



Most Commonly Cited Websites

The survey provided a first glimpse at the specific websites Montanans use to get news. When asked which websites they use for news and information, adult Montanans most often mentioned aggregator or search-engine sites like MSN (14 percent), Yahoo (13 percent), and Google (10 percent). Fox News (8 percent) and CNN (7 percent) were next most frequently mentioned. Facebook and the Billings Gazette were each cited by 6 percent of adult Montanans.



What are the one or two websites you use most frequently for news and information?



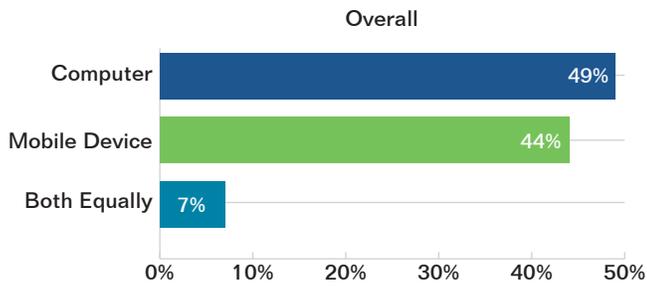
The survey results in this case raise as many questions as they answer. Clearly, aggregator websites are an important path chosen by Montanans to access news. But where do they go on the Internet from there? In addition, Montanans frequently access local news content producers like the Billings Gazette and other local news sources, but do they also access these websites through aggregator websites? The survey presented here just scratched the surface of these issues. But the survey did examine another important characteristic of Internet news consumption, and that is the use of handheld devices like smartphones.

Smartphones

Nearly half of Internet news consumers who are at least 18 years old and live in Montana (49 percent) reported using desktop computers to obtain news, but nearly as many reported using mobile devices like smartphones (44 percent). The small remaining portion used both equally (7 percent).



Do you get more of your online news using a computer or a mobile device?



Clearly, to remain competitive, Internet news content producers must make their offerings compatible with small-screen formats used by smartphones. In addition, the prominent use of handheld devices by Montanans to consume news tells us much about where and when Montanans are consuming their news. No longer are they only consuming news at the breakfast table or in their living rooms. Rather, they are consuming news on the move and at their places of work. This may imply that news content should be tailored to grab the attention of a consumer who is distracted by other events. Finally, a new type of Internet content has emerged worldwide and in Montana that is adding even more change to the news market, social networking.

Social Media Networking

The rise of Internet-based social media networking is well underway in Montana. Focusing only on news, the survey found that fully one-third of adult Montanans (34 percent) use social networking sites to access news and information. Just over three in 10 adult Montanans reported using Facebook to access news, while 5 percent reported using Twitter.



Do you use Facebook, Twitter, or other social media sites to access news or information?



Again, these survey results raise many important questions. First, what news websites do Montanans access through social networking sites like Facebook? Second, to what extent do the posts of friends on social networking websites influence the news that Montanans consume? Among this latter category, what factors influence what is posted, and how accurate is it? Additional study is needed to shed light on these very important questions.

Conclusion

This survey found that recent, revolutionary changes in media technology and growth in Internet use are having profound impacts on Montanans' news habits. That's seen in the survey results by the blurring of media sector lines. TV reporters now write for their websites. Newspaper reporters shoot video for their publications' websites. Radio content is streamed. This news and information is often delivered to Montana consumers over the Internet and is accessible by handheld devices. And, yes, Montanans rely heavily on traditional news content produced in traditional ways such as print newspapers and over-the-air broadcasting. But all of this is evolving, and changes mean there will undoubtedly be new media business models in the future to address the preferences of Montana's information consumers. □

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Social Media as a News Source

Three in five (60 percent) of Montana women ages 18-49 said that they get news from a social networking website like Facebook or Twitter. Just under half of men ages 18-49 reported consuming news via a social networking website.

Far fewer older Montanans access news via a social networking website. Only 18 percent of women ages 50 and older reported using a social networking website to get news. Similarly, just 12 percent of men ages 50 and older said that they got news from a social networking website.

The generational nature of this news consumption pattern is striking. But much remains to be learned about what news sources are accessed via social networking, to say nothing of the possible influence of friends' posts on people's news consumption.