

The dos and don'ts of good public notice in newspapers

Keeping Public Notices Where the Public Notices

We should not underestimate the importance of public notices and the care with which they must be managed. Newspapers have an obligation to provide readable, accessible public notices to the public, and the fees paid to newspapers for publication require adherence to certain standards.

Newspapers also must encourage the general public's readership of printed notices. Write articles to report on notices in your newspaper or other papers in your coverage area and refer readers to the actual printed notice. Promote readership of notices in your printed newspaper, on the newspaper website and on social media when appropriate.

The DOs and DON'Ts of public notice publication for newspapers

As state legislatures and public officials take steps to eliminate public notice requirements—or begin putting notices online—local newspaper publishers risk losing an essential element to their role as community chroniclers. How publishers respond to this threat will have an enormous impact on the future of public notice requirements. While publishers understand that providing proper notice of government or other legal actions is essential to democracy, your readers and your legislators may not.

Here are a few DOs and DON'Ts to help publishers tap the power they have to influence the outcome of this continuing debate.

DO ... tell your readers—regularly—about the importance of public notices and your role in publishing notices

- DO ... give public notices a prominent—and permanent—position in your newspaper.
- DO ... make public notices easier to read and to understand.
- DO ... train your staff on the importance of public notice and any requirements for the notice.
- DO ... use public notice as a source of news stories.
- DO ... let customers know you're the public notice expert.
- DO ... work with PNRC to monitor public notice legislation.
- DO...display notices (or a link to them) prominently on your website.

- DON'T ... treat public notice as just another classified advertising category.
- DON'T ... assume your readers know you're the source for local public notices.
- DON'T ... put your least-experienced staff member in charge of public notices.
- DON'T ... think that this is only about revenue for your newspaper.

MAINTENANCE:

ARCHIVE: One advantage of printed newspaper notice is that it is easily archived. This may be done through stored print editions or as PDFs on a storage device. Notices are legal and historical documents that may be used in lawsuits several years or decades after publication.

CUSTOMER SERVICE:

ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT: Notify customers to confirm receipt of each notice to be published. Have a template response ready to send via email, fax, etc.

PROOF: Send a proof and bill to the customer after the first publication of a notice to verify accuracy before additional publication days.

PROMOTING READERSHIP OF NOTICES

INDEX: Promote in the print paper directing people on which page to find public notices. List in Page 1 index.

BENEFITS: List why notices are important and beneficial to the general public on page with notices.

GLOSSARY: Consider including a glossary of terms frequently used in notices.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Promote on the newspaper's social media accounts.

HEADLINES: Consider putting news-type headlines on certain notices, such as city, county and other notices of general interest.

PHOTOS: Insert corresponding photos/graphics where applicable as they draw in the reader. Example: a map to identify one or more locations in your notices that day.