

# Purposely parochial: three provincial dailies, 1930–1990

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In the capital cities, the trend over the past 40 years has been that newspaper circulations have declined as populations have increased. In the provinces, the story is often different, as this case study of three daily newspapers which the Dunn family published in separate cities in provincial Queensland shows. Why? To a large extent, the Dunn newspaper ethos of localism and integrity reflected the desires of their communities and won the loyalty of subscribers to their newspapers.

**A**USTRALIA, in common with the United States and the United Kingdom, has experienced a decline in so-called newspaper “penetration” in the past 40 to 50 years, as well as a decline in newspaper titles. Provincial newspapers, however, have provided some interesting case studies in survival and even success. This paper will examine in particular the circulation performance and content of the daily newspapers owned by the Dunn family, which became the principal shareholder in Provincial Newspapers (Qld.) Ltd.<sup>1</sup> Their circulation grew steadily from 1930 to 1975, and since then, while the Maryborough and Rockhampton dailies have not made significant circulation gains, the Toowoomba daily has. The three

1. PNQ was taken over in 1988 by a family trust linked with Dr Tony O’Reilly and his Independent Newspapers Plc of Ireland.

newspapers – the *Maryborough Chronicle* (or, since April 1993, the *Fraser Coast Chronicle*, with separate editions for Maryborough and Hervey Bay), the *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, and *The Chronicle*, Toowoomba – were still profitable enterprises as the 1990s dawned.

The trend common to western countries since the 1950s or 1960s, but not to India, has been for fewer newspapers to be sold per household, for circulation increases to fail to match population increases.<sup>2</sup> In Australia, this trend has been much less evident in some non-metropolitan areas and so, as will be shown in this paper, the Dunns' Rockhampton and Toowoomba newspapers, at different times, have performed strongly in circulation and in paging growth. In the United States, rates of daily newspaper circulation per household for the period 1850–1986 followed an S-shaped “curve of diffusion”, more or less typical of growth patterns followed by a variety of cultural innovations as these are adopted by a given population. By 1910, there was more than one newspaper circulated daily for every American household. Increases in circulation slowed after 1910, and since 1920 the newspaper has suffered a steady decline (De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach 1982, p.39).

Much the same picture is evident in Australia where, between 1933 and 1976, the number of people over 14 years of age doubled to 10.2 million, but the circulation of capital-city dailies almost trebled. These circulation rises, however, were much less than increases in population in comparable areas. Since the 1950s, Australia's population has climbed and the circulation of metropolitan dailies has, in general, either remained static or declined. The picture for provincial or regional dailies, however, is different. For metropolitan dailies, World War II and the immediate postwar period were the years of greatest circulation growth. The lowest growth rate, as is shown in Table 1, was

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2. Robin Jeffrey in “Press gangs curry favour”, *Good Weekend*, January 29, 1994, pp. 36–40, says circulation of Indian newspapers increased by 150 per cent between 1976 and 1993; the proportion of Indians who buy a daily newspaper nearly doubled in less than 20 years.

posted from 1954–1961, a period marked more by contraction than expansion in the business cycle (Goot 1979, pp.4, 7).

**Table 1: Percentage changes in circulation of dailies by state, 1933–1991**

Year	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas
	%	%	%	%	%	%
	1933 is base year of 100 for each state*					
1933	100	100	100	100	100	100
1940	117	128	143	116	144	141
1947	218	177	271	172	226	194
1954	220	211	362	206	308	247
1961	205	221	376	226	327	276
1966	223	238	389	252	351	294
1971	232	255	421	271	448	318
1976	252	246	444	297	474	329
1980	215	231	407	295	481	329
1986	229	186	451	278	435	324
1991	173	156	341	237	342	312
	*Actual circulations (in thousands) for base year					
1933	560	547	104	133	77	17

Source: the percentages are calculated on circulation figures in figures obtained from Goot, p. 7; Audit Bureau of Circulations; John Blackwell, *Australian Financial Review* circulations manager, telephone interview with author, December 7, 1993.

While circulation of capital-city dailies continually grew till the mid-70s, circulation relative to the population of newspaper buying age has, since the mid-50s, continually fallen. In 1933 approximately 30 papers were sold for every 100 people aged 15 or more. Between the mid-40s and the mid-50s this rose to 58, dropped to 54 by 1958, and declined to be 40 in 1982 and 39 in 1991. The turning point was remarkably similar to that for British national dailies (Goot 1979, p.8; Brown 1986, p.45; Audit Bureau of Circulations [ABC], September 1991; Ian Castles 1992, p.11). In Australia in the decade from 1979, there was a 5.8 per cent decline in the total circulation of metropoli-

tan morning dailies and 42 per cent for afternoon dailies. Population growth in the capitals was 17 per cent ("Australian newspaper circulations" 1989, pp.15–18).

The trend in the 1980s was for a distinct flattening out of circulation of weekday sales of metropolitan dailies and in the 1990s this has become a steady decline. The Audit Bureau of Circulations began issuing in the September semester 1990 three sets of circulation figures for metropolitan dailies: the Monday-to-Friday figures; the Saturday figures; and the usual overall average net paid circulation, Monday to Saturday. The contrasting factor has been the increasing circulation of weekend editions of the dailies and of Sunday newspapers and magazines.

For instance, in four years from September 1990, the circulation of the Saturday edition of the quality broadsheet, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, rose from 376,339 to 385,669 (up 2.48 per cent), after having hit 395,801 in 1993, while its weekday editions fell from 239,515 to 227,683 (down 4.94 per cent). Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*, which could be regarded as a "tabloid" broadsheet during that period, was similar: its Saturday edition climbed from 317,733 to 330,634 (4.06 per cent), and weekday average circulation was down from 233,666 to 225,019 (3.70 per cent). This meant the *Herald's* Saturday sales were 69.39 per cent greater than its average weekday sales, and the *Courier-Mail's* 46.94 per cent greater. Even with the strengthening Saturday factor, as is shown in Table 2, the *Herald* was able to increase its circulation by only 4,592 (1.78 per cent) from 1980 to 1990. Its tabloid morning rival, the *Daily Telegraph* slipped back by more than 25,000 (8.2 per cent).

Nowadays the advertising volume and overall size of the weekend editions of the dailies as well as their circulation invariably dwarf their weekday editions (ABC, with percentages calculated by author; Earl 1993, p.12; Best 1993, p.26; *Australian* 1992a, pp.19, 21; *Australian* 1992b, p. 20; *Australian* 1994, p.22).

**Table 2: Selected metropolitan daily newspaper circulations in 1980s**

	1980	1983	1985	1988	1990
SMH	258,175	258,685	255,745	263,741	262,767
Daily Tele.	308,801	281,053	267,093	285,499	283,388
Age	243,367	241,089	235,954	235,036	230,100
Sun	629,381	591,684	556,297	571,449	556,130
C-M	269,588	232,958	216,314	257,171	248,336
Advertiser	227,708	215,956	212,168	209,779	211,738
West. Aust.	252,603	242,902	235,377	252,088	255,003

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation figures, 1980–1990.

While their morning counterparts either made small gains or small losses in the circulation stakes in the 80s, the afternoon dailies ceased publication one after the other because their circulations (and, consequently, their attractiveness to advertisers) slipped precariously. When Adelaide’s *News*, with circulation dipping below 90,000, closed on 27 March 1992, the television age had written the epitaph of each of the country’s afternoon dailies (Chadwick 1992, p.5; “The closures” 1988, pp.3–4, 31–32; *Weekend Australian* 1992, p.12; Malcolm Brown 1988, p.1).

Since the arrival of television, the edition sizes of metropolitan newspapers have increased dramatically and of regional dailies less dramatically, presenting another facet of newspaper growth (viz. Beavan 1993a). Briefly, between 1948 and 1990, *The Courier-Mail* grew in paging, or edition size, nine times; and Melbourne’s *Sun* grew four times and its *Age* seven times. Regional daily newspapers have increased markedly in paging, too. The *Toowoomba Chronicle*, for instance, more than doubled its paging between 1930 and 1980, and Albury’s *Border Mail* increased its paging fourfold from 1948–90 (Beavan 1991, pp.33, 43, 56, 69, 90, 103).

By 1938, when provincial newspapers first submitted themselves for audit by the ABC, Toowoomba’s *Chronicle* had been operating its own circulation audit for 11 years. It claimed its circulation had jumped 34 per cent in the eight years to 1935

(Newspaper News 1932, p.2, *Newspaper News* 1933, p.2; *Newspaper News* 1935a, p.2; *Newspaper News* 1935b, p.7; Toowoomba Newspaper Co. minutes 1934). At the beginning of ABC statistics, the *Toowoomba Chronicle* (13,372) was about 4500 average net paid daily sales ahead of Rockhampton's *Morning Bulletin* (8817), as Table 3 shows. Rockhampton, however, had two dailies, for the Dunns also published the *Evening News*, which they had bought in 1929. During the war, the *Chronicle* increased its circulation by only 1000 whereas the *Bulletin* shot up by about 2300, no doubt largely because the Dunns closed the *Evening News* in 1941. But the *Bulletin* kept up a higher rate of increase than the *Chronicle* in the immediate postwar decade, jumping by 3100 to the *Chronicle's* 1300.

**Table 3: Net paid circulation of Dunn daily morning newspapers: Maryborough, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, 1938-1990**

	Maryborough	Rockhampton	Toowoomba
March 31, 1938	4150	8817	13,372
Sept 30, 1940	4357	9992	14,045
Sept 30, 1945	5502	12,355	15,072
Sept 30, 1950	6776	14,270	16,390
Sept 30, 1955	6898	15,460	16,490
Sept 30, 1960	7375	17,326	17,216
Sept 30, 1965	7846	18,964	17,747
Sept 30, 1970	8143	21,275	17,865
Sept 30, 1975	8871	21,476	21,335
Sept 30, 1980	8757	22,443	24,344
Sept 30, 1985	8873	22,084	27,626
Sept 30, 1990	9551	22,781	30,219

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations figures, 1938-1990.

In 1955, with the *Downs Star* entering the Toowoomba market, the *Chronicle* faced daily competition for the first time since 1922. By 1960, the Rockhampton daily, with the astute Lex Dunn in managerial control, had overtaken the *Toowoomba Chronicle*

and it cleared away in the 60s to be 3400 ahead in 1970. In October that year the *Chronicle* and *Downs Star* interests were merged. From 1970–75 the *Morning Bulletin*, with Lex Dunn’s managerial focus now the Provincial Newspapers (Qld.) Ltd. holding company, marked time, gaining only 200, while Toowoomba’s *Chronicle*, under younger editorial and managerial control and freed of the *Downs Star* tussle, virtually caught up with its Rockhampton cousin, increasing its circulation by 3400. In the next five years the *Chronicle* maintained its improvement (up 3000) and the *Bulletin* still struggled (up 1000). This trend continued throughout the 80s, so that at 1990 the *Chronicle* was 7400 ahead of the *Bulletin*. The Rockhampton increase slackened in the 70s and the figures have remained virtually static since, whereas Toowoomba began a steady rate of increase in the seventies and has maintained that pattern. At 1990, Toowoomba’s *Chronicle* (30,219) had increased circulation by 69 per cent in the 20 years from 1970, whereas Rockhampton’s *Bulletin* (22,781) had increased by only 7 per cent, despite experimenting with separate editions for the Central Highlands and the Capricorn Coast at various times in the 1980s (ABC; Palmer 1994).

*The most obvious causes of the Morning Bulletin’s poor circulation performance 1970–1990 were twofold, both internal: the 1970s was the period of the weakest managerial control the Morning Bulletin has experienced this century; concurrently, there developed an industrial situation where the printers, with about eight recalcitrant activists, dictated production-related procedures and practices at the Morning Bulletin. This often delayed production and, hence, distribution, interfering with sales. The disputes often caused short stoppages which prevented production of the newspaper. On occasions, such as in 1976 and 1985, the Bulletin was not published for weeks on end because of printers’ strikes (PNQ files on PKIU/McCamley Case).*

From 1938 to 1990, the *Maryborough Chronicle’s* circulation climbed from 4150 to 9551, with steadiness being the hallmark until 1975. At that point, the paper seemed to strike a circulation ceiling, despite specifically targeting the fast-growing conglomerate of centres forming Hervey Bay. Since 1981, it has

developed a split personality, with repeated changes in its masthead suggesting it is confused about its primary audience. Is it a Maryborough paper, a Hervey Bay paper, a mixture, or a regional paper that tries to cash in on the growing popularity of Fraser Island and other tourist resorts in its coastal district? After being merely the *Chronicle*, Maryborough, it called itself the *Maryborough-Hervey Bay Chronicle* from October 23, 1981 until October 29, 1988, when it reverted to its earlier masthead. It introduced a separate Hervey Bay edition when it renamed itself the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* on April 19, 1993. The separate editions continued when Fraser Coast was dropped from the masthead early in 1995 (ABC; *Chronicle*, Maryborough, 1981; *Maryborough-Hervey Bay Chronicle* 1981 and 1988; *The Chronicle*, Maryborough 1988; *Fraser Coast Chronicle* 1993; Martin Simons 1993; Sue Paxton 1995). The fairly static circulation was blamed on declining coverage of local news by one former *Chronicle* journalist who has lived in Maryborough since his birth in 1908 (Rendall 1982, 1986, 1987 and 1992). This judgment is supported by the author's study of the *Chronicle* files over the years.

Tables 4 and 5 provide yardsticks against which to measure the circulation performance of the Toowoomba Rockhampton and Maryborough dailies. They provide comparisons between roughly similar sized newspapers in communities with fairly similar geographical and circulation constraints. The "yardstick" newspapers have been selected from three different states so that different competitive environments come into play. The *Geelong Advertiser*, Victoria, is compared with Toowoomba's *Chronicle* because both are well placed for strong metropolitan daily newspaper incursion into their markets. Toowoomba's population was 50,134 at the 1961 Census and 75,990 at the 1991 Census; and Geelong's was 91,777 (1961) and 126,306 (1991), but a significant proportion of Geelong people either work in Melbourne or grew up in Melbourne, and so have allegiances to Melbourne newspapers. The *Townsville Bulletin* is used as a yardstick for Rockhampton's *Morning Bulletin*. Both are Queensland coastal cities that are distant from the capital and its lone daily newspaper, with Townsville (pop. 51,143 in 1961 and 101,398 in



1991), having become quite clearly the population leader in the north. Rockhampton's population was 44,128 in 1961 and 55,768 in 1991. The *Daily Examiner*, at Grafton, about an hour's drive from the beaches of the New South Wales north coast, is compared with the *Maryborough Chronicle*, less than half an hour's drive from the coast at Hervey Bay. In both instances, the industrial or commercial/tourism development of centres such as Coffs Harbour and Bundaberg has eluded them, and both those outside centres have faster growing daily newspapers. Maryborough's population was 19,126 (1961) and 20,790 (1991) and Grafton's was 15,526 (1961) and 16,642 (1991).

**Table 4: Yardstick circulation comparison of Dunn regional daily newspapers**

	(Net paid)			
	Sept 1960	Sept 1970	Sept 1980	Sept 1990
<i>Maryborough Chronicle</i>	7375	8143	8757	9551
Daily Examiner, Grafton	6232	6633	6890	7949
<i>Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton</i>	17,236	21,275	22,443	22,781
Townsville Bulletin	18,297	22,677	24,822	26,607
<i>The Chronicle, Toowoomba</i>	*17,216	*17,865	24,344	30,219
Geelong Advertiser	18,842	24,720	29,566	32,650

\* The *Toowoomba Chronicle* faced competition from the *Downs Star*, firstly a paid daily and later a free daily, from July 1955 till 1970 a period broken by its appearance less frequently (from July 1959 till February 1960 it was issued weekly and later twice a week; it resumed daily publication, as a "free", on March 1, 1960 and merged with *The Chronicle* on October 1, 1970).

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation figures 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990.

Table 5 shows that the Toowoomba and Geelong dailies both lifted their circulation by more than 70 per cent from 1960 to 1990. The Townsville daily's increase exceeded 40 per cent, Rockhampton's 30, and the Maryborough and Grafton dailies were just below 30. By comparison, in the capitals, the *Sydney Morning Herald* circulation fell by 11.78 per cent in the 30 years; the *Courier-Mail* rose by 5.98 per cent; and the *Age* rose by 37.72

per cent from a low circulation figure. The gap between the circulation performance of the *Morning Bulletin* and its yardstick newspaper was far greater than that between any of the other comparisons made. The *Morning Bulletin* result was more than 13 percentage points behind the *Townsville Bulletin* for the 30 years, whereas the gap between the *Chronicles* of Maryborough and Toowoomba and their yardstick publications was only about two percentage points, and in both cases the *Chronicles* were in front. This reinforces the contention that the Rockhampton paper had performed more poorly than its Toowoomba counterpart, for the reasons suggested above.

*Table 5 compares the circulation of the "yardstick" newspapers each decade from 1960 to 1990, using Audit Bureau of Circulations figures. It shows that the percentage increases over the 30 years were:*

**Table 5: Yardstick circulation comparison of regional daily newspapers: percentage increases, 1960–1990**

	%
<i>The Chronicle, Toowoomba</i>	<b>75.53</b>
<b>Geelong Advertiser</b>	73.28
<i>Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton</i>	<b>32.17</b>
<b>Townsville Bulletin</b>	45.42
<i>Maryborough Chronicle</i>	<b>29.51</b>
<b>Daily Examiner, Grafton</b>	27.55

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations figures, 1960–1990

#### **Percentage of circulation home-delivered**

	%
<i>The Chronicle, Toowoomba</i>	50 <sup>1</sup>
Geelong Advertiser	46 <sup>2</sup>
<i>Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton</i>	45 <sup>3</sup>
Townsville Bulletin	45 <sup>4</sup>
<i>Maryborough Chronicle</i>	45 <sup>5</sup>
Daily Examiner, Grafton	46 <sup>6</sup>

1. Phil Hartnett, telephone interview with author, 7 July 1993.

2. Barry Carter, telephone interview with author, 21 December 1993.
3. David Stretton, letter to author, 7 July 1993.
4. Ray Dickson, letter to author, 20 July 1993.
5. Toni Jones, letter to author, 15 July 1993
6. Warren Lentfer, letter to author, 27 August 1993.

It is widely acknowledged that the most important factor for healthy print runs is an ability by editorial staff to stay in touch with the concerns of their readers (Sykes 1992, p.71). Or, as *Border Mail* manager Gordon Beavan has put it: "The significant quality that sells a newspaper is the vitality and relevance of its content, and that mostly comes from its journalists" (Beavan 1993a, p.14). The Dunn family believed that to obtain results you had to produce a good newspaper. So did the Mannings of the *Daily Mercury*, Mackay, where W.J. Manning (editor, 1910-1941, and chairman of the board, 1917-1942) demanded:

accuracy and high standards from his journalists. He knew what was good for newspapers and what sort of news content was needed. He modernised the plant, put money into the newspaper and got the right people (Manning 1979).

In 1934, when the Dunn family members directing the fortunes of Rockhampton Newspaper Co. Pty. Ltd. were told that several new contracts had increased the *Central Queensland Herald's* advertising revenue considerably, they decided some improvement was essential in the weekly if they were to hold this revenue and give subscribers and advertisers a better service. They decided to provide an eight-page illustrated section and a good-class coloured cover so long as trials produced satisfactory results (Rockhampton Newspaper Co. minutes 1934).

The author's study of the content of the three major Dunn newspapers in March 1931, when the family owned five dailies and two weeklies, demonstrated that the principal emphasis in the editorial content was localism with a special effort being made to target all members of the community's families (*Morning Bulletin* 1931, *Toowoomba Chronicle* 1931, *Maryborough Chronicle* 1931). Regular features were directed at women, children, girls, motorists and gardeners, as well as those interested in sport, social events and the cinema, and those living in outlying communities. In the *Morning Bulletin* in 1931 regular editorial content included: previews of what was screening at Earl's Court, Rockhampton's "marvellous open air talkie theatre", or at Tivoli Talkies; sport; cable news, both national and international; a weekly leading article on a poet or a literary topic (for example, the Celtic spirit in literature March 21); Girls' Club each Tuesday;

fashion jottings; Motor Notes each Thursday; Children's Corner each Friday; From the Capital, a column of political comment from Canberra, each Saturday; Garden Notes each Saturday; and extensive coverage of local government. The *Toowoomba Chronicle's* regular features included a wide range of national news; the Children's Page (Tuesdays); previews of the talkies; church news; social jottings; sporting coverage; extensive reports on agricultural shows, such as Warwick and Toowoomba itself; and local government meetings, such as Clifton, Crow's Nest and Charleville. In the *Maryborough Chronicle*, Domain of Woman by "Eve" appeared each Saturday, as did Children's Corner by "Aunt Betty". The *Toowoomba Chronicle's* major news at the beginning of March 1931 dealt with the opening and blessing of Downlands College. It set the tone for the localism that featured so much during the month studied. Another example was the extensive coverage given to the eighth annual conference of the southern division of the Queensland Country Women's Association (March 11-13). Daily a "Local & General" column, studded with local news items of about 50 to 100 words, occupied one-and-a-half to two columns, and was probably the best-read section in the newspaper. At Maryborough, the *Chronicle*, too, featured extensive coverage of unheadlined local items, in a "General" column that ranged from two to three columns in most editions and also featured extensive local government coverage. Church news appeared regularly.

Each of the three newspapers relied heavily on district correspondents to provide "local news" for its more scattered readers, and to give the publication a wider appeal for the town-based reader. The *Toowoomba Chronicle* had district correspondents garnering news in centres such as Clifton, Pinelands, Leyburn, Warra, Pittsworth, Haden, Kooroongarra, Millmerran, Nangwee, Crow's Nest, Dalby, Umbiram, Chinchilla, Southbrook, Charleville, Pilton, Grantham and Gatton. The *Morning Bulletin* drew district news from correspondents at centres such as Alton Downs, Ambrose, Archer, Biloela, Blackall, Calliope, Comet, Goovigen, Miriam Vale, Mount Perry, Pheasant Creek, Rannes, Richmond and Than-gool. The *Maryborough Chronicle* had a similar wide circle of district correspondents.

In 1930 the *Maryborough Chronicle* published special issues in April focusing on the communities of Wondai, Biggenden and Goomeri, leading the newspaper board's acting chairman, Andrew Dunn jun., to conclude that these issues had shown that the people conducting the paper were able and willing to do good service to the community. The Wondai feature, covering 16 pages, focused on the district's evolution from grazing to dairying and dealt with the general history of the town and district and the key people serving it. Advertisers supported the feature generously (*Maryborough Chronicle* 1930; Maryborough Newspaper Co. minutes 1930).

In the first half of 1932, when the *Chronicle* suffered a circulation decline, mainly in the South Burnett, the advice issued was: "Continue to produce a good paper." The *Colonist's* special section for Mundubbera and district (Biggenden, Gayndah, Eidsvold, Mulgildie and Monto) in 1934 sometimes as big as 20 pages was credited with helping boost the circulation of the weekly from 810 on June 30 1933 to 970 on August 11 1934 (Maryborough Newspaper Co. minutes 1932 and 1934; *The Colonist* 1934; *Maryborough Chronicle* 1934, pp.5-8). In 1947 the directors continued publishing the ailing *Colonist* because it was "a good thing to keep readers in our hinterland Gayndah to Monto in touch with the district's development". The paper carried extracts of the main Maryborough news from the *Chronicle* as well as columns of news from district correspondents. It was not labour-intensive, being virtually put together by a compositor (Maryborough Newspaper Co. minutes 1947; Rendall 1993).<sup>3</sup>

The *Toowoomba Chronicle* moved its offices and plant from one side of the street to the other in 1928 so that it could upgrade its equipment and provide a better service for readers and advertisers. Boasting that it had improved its contents commensurately with the improved production facilities, it said "every event of public interest finds record in our columns". There was extensive coverage of the minutiae of the district's affairs, but the author's study of the files suggested the promotion of community causes and the pursuit of larger issues aside from those strictly aligned with political motivations was rare. The *Chronicle's* circulation area had extended to cover practically the whole of south-western Queensland from Laidley (85km west of Brisbane) west and south to the borders of the neighbouring states (*Toowoomba Chronicle* 1928, p.13).

3. In 1994 the South Burnett Times Pty. Ltd. was allowing compositors virtually to put together, without editorial layouts, the Blackall, Biggenden and Charleville weeklies, the author found when he visited Kingaroy on May 27 that year.

After World War II, with radio grabbing an increasing share of the advertising cake, the format of the *Toowoomba Chronicle* changed a great deal. New layouts and improved types were introduced, and there were more action shots in the pictorial coverage. The stringencies of World War II taught journalists some good lessons. When newsprint was rationed during the war, space had to be saved by condensing reports, restricting headlines, and making extensive use of small type. When rationing was lifted, headings, pictures and type became bigger, but the journalists had learned the lesson of condensation and never reverted to long reports of meetings, speeches, court cases, sporting events and so on (Hinchliffe 1976). These changes were not peculiar to the *Chronicle*. They applied almost universally to the Australian press scene. The journalists were encouraged to follow a more personalised form of reporting but without undue resort to trivia.

Local news, as the Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Maryborough experiences suggest, is the lifeblood of regional dailies and of less-frequently published provincial publications. Within their pages should be encapsulated "the whole story of local endeavour"; they should mirror the local life (Sommerlad 1936). They should set out to be "purposely parochial", as Emerald's *Central Queensland News* did and does (Gibson 1980; Irwin 1993; *Courier-Mail* 1985).

Regional newspapers in the 70s and 80s found it increasingly necessary to express their attachment to their communities through more than just their news columns and the personal involvement of key staff members in community organisations and/or local government. The newspapers have become heavily involved in organising and or sponsoring community events, especially related to sports, entertainment, community welfare and education. They are concerned that if they fail to support these events financially, other media will quickly fill the vacuum and gain valuable publicity and goodwill. The daily newspapers at Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Maryborough follow this pattern. By 1986, the *Morning Bulletin* was contributing about \$100,000 to sporting and community organisations and by 1993 it was spending "substantially more than that" (*Morning Bulletin* 1986, p.2; Stretton 1993). At Toowoomba, *The Chronicle* has directly sponsored the Home Gardens section of the city's Carnival of Flowers since that festival's inception in 1950. Since 1969 it has also sponsored the Exhibition Gardens, which have become so much a feature of the carnival. From 1980 to 1991, the paper sponsored regular Free Entertainments in the Park (called FREEPs). *The Chronicle* has also become involved in:

a road safety campaign ('Survive This Drive') in 1981;  
 literary lunches and literary dinners (authors such as Sara Henderson, David Malouf, Bryce Courtenay as guest speakers);  
 sports sponsorships including a golf classic and an annual pro-celebrity tennis tournament; and  
 a Christmas toy appeal.

It has also run various competitions with prizes as big as a car or an overseas holiday (Hartnett 1993d; *PNQ News* 1981, p. 4; and *PNQ News-Print* 1986, p. 8).

At Rockhampton, the *Morning Bulletin's* policy in 1993 was to provide significant and widespread support for major community events, for example, Carnival Week in June, which includes the city's agricultural show and horse-racing meetings. It sponsored the small agricultural shows, too, such as at Marlborough, Biloela and Wowan. The *Bulletin* sponsored the Bauhinia Arts Award Festival, carrying one of the biggest art prizes in Queensland, and was "very heavily into sponsoring junior Rugby League and bowls carnivals" (Stretton 1993). At Maryborough, the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* in 1993 continued to be a major sponsor of the annual agricultural show, part of the sponsorship being to publish a lift-out show feature that is promoted widely in advance to ensure maximum publicity for the event. The *Chronicle* has been sponsoring the two-day Fraser Coast Boat and Leisure Show, which attracted 22,000 people in 1993. It also runs each year a contest to encourage private homes and businesses to decorate and light up for Christmas (Toni Jones 1993b).

Another factor that has affected the thinking, if not the actual circulation, of regional daily newspapers in Australia since the 1970s has been the "free" newspapers, generally weeklies, but sometimes bi-weeklies. In 1971 PNQ discussed a report on free newspapers from one of its directors, Edwin Hollingworth, and it was looking harder at free newspapers in 1979 when it instructed its subsidiaries not to print such newspapers for outside companies without obtaining board approval (PNQ minutes 1971 and 1979). In a bid to stifle existing or potential competition from free newspapers, most regional dailies began publishing free weeklies in their own areas by the end of the 70s, hoping to soak up any surplus advertising, and to take advantage of economies of scale in any "war" with a publisher issuing only a weekly. In 1981, largely because of the growing Hervey Bay area, Maryborough's *Chronicle* was issuing the bi-weekly *Sun* in competition with two free weeklies, the *Maryborough Times* and the *Hervey Bay Observer* (PNQ minutes 1981; *Maryborough Times* 1981; Rendall 1980). At

Rockhampton, the *Morning Bulletin* published a weekly, the *Capricorn Community*, which aimed at an advertising content of 70 per cent (PNQ minutes 1981). At Toowoomba, the *Chronicle* continued to publish the former daily, the *Downs Star*, as a free weekly, primarily to block the entry of another weekly (Kirkpatrick 1984, p.77). From its Maroochydore plant, the *Sunshine Coast Daily* published a wide range of weeklies at different times in the first half of the 80s: the *Nambour and District Chronicle*, the *Sunshine Coast Advertiser*, and five other editions of the *Advertiser*. By 1984, it had rationalised to three the number of weeklies it published in its prime circulation area: the *Sunshine Coast Weekly*, Maroochydore and Caloundra; the *Noosa News* (bi-weekly from March 31, 1987); and the *Near North Coast News*, Caboolture (J. Jones 1984; J. Jones 1988). Free newspapers have two big selling points for advertisers: they provide readers with a grassroots level type of reporting often lacking in the dailies; and they are delivered to every home. "A lot of people get their world news via the telly and their local news in their free newspaper" (Carter 1993).

Clinging to existing readers and gaining new readers are key aspects of newspaper survival. For even though actual sales contribute only 20 to 35 per cent of a newspaper's revenue, the 65 to 80 per cent gained from selling advertising space is based on those sales, but also, increasingly, on actual audience size, as determined by six-monthly readership studies, and on demographics — the age, education standard, employment, income, interests, and so on, of the reader. Newspaper managers have generally regarded high levels of sales by home delivery, as opposed to over-the-counter, as desirable. In 1989 John Sellars, promotional director for the Regional Dailies of Australia Ltd., told regional daily managers that newspapers "must build home delivery, but don't make it hard for the single-copy purchaser" (Sellars 1989, p.76). Home delivery, running at 40 to 50 per cent of circulation for weekday issues of metropolitan and regional dailies, lies at the centre of a continuing debate on how to increase circulation (Newspaper Advertising Bureau of Australia Ltd. 1991, pp.6, 16).<sup>4</sup> For home delivery, a circulation area is physically circumscribed by distance in two ways.

1. Distance from newspaper office to newsagent: under the tied newsagency system the newspapers must be delivered in bulk two or three hours before 7am.

2. Distance from newsagent to reader.



Both sets of distance translate to transport time, which must be added to printing time. This helps determine news copy deadlines for the journalists producing “history in a hurry” (Gordon 1976, p.9). When Beavan was the general manager of the *Morning Bulletin*, he found that if “the press started later than the time the postal and bread runs left the city, we would have missed the circulation at Blackwater and Emerald” (Beavan 1993b; Brenchley 1993, pp.46–47; Davies 1993, p.36; “Victoria’s new distribution system” 1993, p.17; Beverley 1993, pp.3–4; “New distribution systey” 1993, pp.8–9). At Toowoomba, for instance, delivery of newspapers to far-flung western centres has a bearing on copy and production deadlines. In 1993 the press run had to begin in time for the first 3000 *Chronicles* printed to be packed on to the western truck that left the Toowoomba Newspapers Pty. Ltd. building at 2am, delivering to Oakey at 2.30, Dalby about 3.15, Chinchilla about 4.15, Miles about 5.15 and the westernmost point of the run, Charleville (which sold about 120 *Chronicles* daily), about 10.30. Both Oakey and Dalby newsagents home-delivered *The Chronicle* (Hartnett 1993a, 1993b and 1993c; *The Chronicle*, Toowoomba, 1981, p.4).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that home delivery rates have dropped because of the tied newsagency system, which gives each newsagent a monopoly over a specific delivery area. The argument is that newsagents want “shop traffic” in order to sell their other lines of merchandise, and so do little to encourage home delivery. Publishers argue that newsagents actively discourage home delivery so that people who come into their shop to buy newspapers make additional purchases at that time such as scratch tickets, Soccer Pools, Lotto and Tattersalls tickets. Beavan has observed that the belief that home delivery is at best “one of the great myths of circulation management, although trying to convince a group of circulation managers that this belief is erroneous is very difficult” (Beavan 1993b). In the United Kingdom, Nottingham’s *Evening Post* has demonstrated, however, that a campaign designed to increase home-delivery levels can also increase total average daily sale. The *Post* took its home-delivery proportion from 59 per cent in 1983 to 76 per cent in 1987 with a two-tiered pricing policy that favoured buyers who had the paper home-delivered. Circulation rose by 4500 copies in the second year (Teague 1987).

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4. John Fairfax Holdings Annual Report 1993, p. 18, says the *Sydney Morning Herald* home-delivers 40 per cent of its circulation, the *Age* 41 per cent, and the *Australian Financial Review*, 50 per cent.

Demonstrating their faith in home delivery sales as opposed to over-the-counter sales, various Australian newspapers have tried different strategies to persuade over-the-counter buyers and non-buyers to have the paper home-delivered daily. Melbourne's *Herald Sun*, formerly the *Sun News-Pictorial*, has for years offered free life insurance for readers who sign up for six or seven days a week home delivery (Beavan 1993b). Provincial newspapers have been innovative. At Maryborough and Hervey Bay, the two localised editions of the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* (formerly the *Maryborough Chronicle*) publish a weekly "Friendly Neighbour" advertisement encouraging readers to nominate "new neighbours" for two weeks' free home delivery of the *Chronicle*. The "new neighbours" receive two weeks' free home delivery and, after the two weeks, are encouraged to continue with a paid subscription (Toni Jones 1993a; Simons 1993). In Victoria, Shepparton's *News*, since switching from afternoon to morning publication on August 6, 1990, has introduced discount deals for people taking home deliveries and also for over-the-counter buyers paying in advance. The *News* also introduced a Reader Club. The two strategies led to an increase of more than 30 per cent in committed purchasers by the end of the September semester audit in 1993 (McMillan 1993a, 1993b and 1993c). At Townsville and Geelong, the *Bulletin* and the *Advertiser*, respectively, canvassed door-to-door in 1992 and 1993, offering discounts to new home-delivery subscribers. For the *Townsville Bulletin*, this contributed to a 2.7 per cent circulation increase to September 30, 1992 over the corresponding six months in 1991 and 2.5 per cent to March 1993 (Dickson 1993). At Geelong, the *Advertiser's* circulation department has operated a continual door-to-door canvass of newsagents' areas in the daylight saving months of the year since 1985 (it canvasses by telephone the rest of the year), offering those householders not receiving home delivery a 13-week discount offer. Approximately 25 per cent of non-subscribers accept the offer and more than 25 per cent of those continue at normal rates after the discount period ends (Carter 1993a). *Advertiser* circulation manager Barry Carter told a Brisbane newspaper seminar on November 20, 1993 that the retention rate, initially 20 per cent, had reached 35 per cent.

the April-September audit period in 1992, 40.6 per cent of *The Chronicle's* total circulation of 30,037 was home-delivered by the company in Toowoomba alone. (In 1976, for a comparable period, the percentage of home deliveries was 42.6 per cent.) More than 11,000 *Chronicles* (including "outside" home deliveries made by country-town newsagents) were sold outside Toowoomba City daily in the 200,000 square kilometre circulation area. In all, 50 per cent of *Chronicles* were home-delivered (Hartnett 1993a). Each of the dailies published at Rockhampton, Toowoomba and Maryborough, and their "yardstick" comparisons, had a home-delivery rate in 1993 of between 45 and 51 per cent, as is shown in Table 5.

tutions. This was reflected in what they published in the pages of their newspapers and in the steadily growing circulations and edition sizes. This case study shows that strong local news content is important if a provincial daily newspaper is to build and maintain a solid circulation base. It has also been shown that newspapers can no longer afford to rest on their circulation laurels. They have to promote themselves constantly by becoming explicitly involved in community activities through sponsorship of, for instance, sporting events and through programs designed to retain old readers and win new ones. Regional newspapers have to keep an eye not only on maintaining their own readership, but also on the emergence of competitors, especially in the "free-distribution" newspaper market. It has been shown that the general technique adopted by entrenched newspaper interests is to produce a weekly publication from the daily newspaper's stable to discourage potential competitors.

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