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Chris Nickless

The 100 Mile House Free Press publisher discusses a job he was asked to get into

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In 1990, Chris Nickless began his career as a publisher of his own newspaper, the Agassiz-Harrison (BC) *Observer*, not just due to his experience in the newspaper industry, which dates back to 1965, but also because the community asked him to.

"It was the choice of the community," said Nickless.

Having worked for a year at the Agassiz-Harrison (BC) *Advance* as its advertising manager, Nickless, along with his wife Val, decided they did not like the way the *Advance* was run and left the publication.

In 1982, the couple started Agassiz Press Limited, a commercial print shop and stationery store. While running the print shop, Nickless says he was approached by numerous merchants in the area who were not happy with the *Advance* and they requested he start his own publication. Because of these requests, the first pony-tab versions of the *Observer* were born. After selling the print shop in 1987, Nickless was still pursued by area businessmen to launch the *Observer*



Chris Nickless

as a full-time operation.

"The community came to us and said they still want a paper," said Nickless on his decision to become a full-time publisher.

Despite this link to the Agassiz-Harrison community, Nickless found himself only seven years later in a position where he felt it was time to move, not because the community had stopped being a satisfying place for him to be, but because of what he saw as the increased pollution in the area.

"It wasn't the newspaper we had enough of," said Nickless.

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Chris Nickless Continued...

The biggest concern for Nickless presented itself when his then seven-year-old daughter, Shelby, came down with health problems due to what Nickless described as the brown haze that had developed in the area over the years.

"It's like the smog that they say Los Angeles used to have."

Around this time, Black Press presented Nickless with an offer to purchase the newspaper and offered him a position with the 100 Mile House (BC) *Free Press* as publisher.

"We didn't have to think too long because the pollution was coming into the valley," said Nickless on his decision to sell the first paper he had ever published.

While he professes to enjoy all aspects of the field, Nickless has always been more interested in the advertising/marketing side of the community newspaper business as opposed to the editorial side.

"I don't pretend to have any knowledge on how to write a story," Nickless said.

"The marketing side for me is what I enjoy the most; I'm not a journalist." Nickless began his community newspaper career in 1965 in advertising sales at the Stratford (ON) *Beacon Herald*. Nickless had left high school after completing grade 12 and found he was wondering what the future might hold. He answered an advertisement for the position and quickly found himself enjoying the work that he discovered.

"It allowed the creative side of you to be involved because of designing ads, as well as the personal selling side of it; if you're outgoing and you enjoy talking to people then there's nothing better than being in

advertising sales," said Nickless.

From Stratford, Nickless began a career that took him to advertising positions in three different provinces. After working for five years at the *Beacon Herald*, Nickless's love of nature and the outdoors prompted him to move to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, to run his own 320-acre farm for six years. Having had enough of the farming industry, Nickless jumped back into community newspapers with the Yorkton (SK) *This Week* as advertising manager. After four years with that publication, the opportunity with the *Advance* in British Columbia presented itself.

"Gee, you know, that climate after the prairie winters is kind of appealing," said Nickless.

Throughout his career, Nickless has never worked at a daily. He finds that anyone he's met over the years that's worked for one has been far more business-oriented. Nickless feels the weeklies he's worked for, without having the pressure of a constant deadline, have far more freedom to get involved in the community, making them better able to connect with their readers. "We are the thread that runs throughout the community every week," he said.

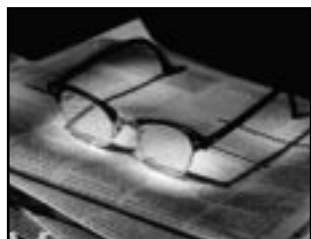
Nickless has now held the position of publisher at the *Free Press* for seven years. The *Free Press*' challenge is being in a community of 2200, but the paper actually serves an area made up of 10 smaller satellite communities with a population close to 18,000. The way Nickless confronts this challenge is to have correspondents represent each community receiving the publication.

"We ask those correspondents to be the voice of their communities," said Nickless. "We treat each one as an independent community and wrap them together."

National Newspaper Week
October 5 - 11, 2003



BCYCNA announces changes to the Newspaper Excellence Awards categories



The BCYCNA board of directors has approved changes to the Newspaper Excellence Awards categories for the 2004 Ma Murray Awards.

Newspapers will no longer have to win at the regional level before moving on the national level. Because of this change, the judging criteria no longer has to match that of the CCNA. The BCYCNA has therefore revised the current circulation categories in order to make them more equal and representative.

The new circulation categories are:

- * Circulation under 2,000
- * Circulation 2,001-4,000
- * Circulation 4,001-13,000
- * Circulation 13,001-27,000
- * Circulation 27,001-45,000
- * Circulation 45,001 and up

Entry packages for the Newspaper Excellence Awards will be mailed out to member papers in early December.

CIBC Run for the Cure: Who are YOU running for?



The 12th annual CIBC Run for the Cure will take place in 39 cities across Canada on October 5th.

Breast cancer is the second largest killer of women, but surprisingly it does not only affect women. An estimated 140 Canadian men will be diagnosed with this cancer this year, and 40 will die from it, according the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation.

Breast cancer has affected us all. Many of us have known a friend, a family member, a mother, daughter, sister, grandmother or aunt who has been diagnosed with this cancer. They have either won the battle or waged a courageous war against it.

The BCYCNA encourages all of its member papers to take part in this very important event. For more information, please visit:

www.cbcf.org/cibcrunfortheure.

Runs site information and times:

Abbotsford

Location: Rotary Stadium
Start of Run: 10:00 AM

Castlegar

Location: Castlegar CIBC
Start of Run: 10:30 AM

Golden

Location: Dogtooth River Café
Start of Run: 10:15 AM

Kamloops

Location: Rotary Bandshell, Riverside Park
Start of Run: 10:00 AM

Kelowna

Location: Waterfront Park, 1200 Water Street
Start of Run: 10:00 AM

Nanaimo

Location: Caledonia Park, Wall Street
Start of Run: 10:00 AM

Port McNeill

Location: Ministry of Forest Office (Mine Rd.)
Start of Run: 9:30 AM

Vancouver

Location: BC Place Stadium
Start of Run: 9:30 AM

Victoria

Location: Pier B, Ogden Point
Start of Run: 9:00 AM



Creating ads that win attention

By John Foust, Raleigh, NC

Advertising judges are a lot like readers. Both make split-second decisions on the value of advertising.

Once I was invited to be a judge in a print advertising competition. There were hundreds of ads to evaluate – and only two other judges. The entries were divided into standard categories: best full-page, black and white ad...best black and white ad, less than full-page...best use of color...etc. We were given three hours to pick the top four ads in each category.

In working through the first category, we took time to discuss the merits of each ad before voting. In the second category, we realized that we had to work faster in order to finish by the deadline. So we talked less and went with first impressions.

By the third category, we kicked it into high gear. We decided to narrow the entries into good and bad – and to give only the good ones closer inspection. A quick nod sent entries to the bad pile on the floor or to the good pile on the conference table. As we worked, we commented that this was a realistic way to rate an ad's impact. After all, readers make decisions at the same pace when they turn the pages.

Here are a few observations:

1) The best ads had clearly written headlines. We didn't have time to read every word of every ad. Like typical readers, we scanned headlines in search of relevancy. If a headline didn't say what the ad was about, it ended up on the carpet.

John Foust conducts on-site advertising training for newspapers, press associations and advertisers. His "Basics of Layout and Copy" video is being used by newspapers from coast to coast. For information, contact: John Foust, PO Box 97606, Raleigh, NC 27624 USA, E-mail: jfoust@mindspring.com, Phone 919-848-2401.

2) The best layouts had a single graphic hook. As we sifted through the mountain of ads, the cluttered layouts were dispatched to the floor. They didn't rate a second glance, because they all blurred together. The entries which featured large, bold graphics stood out from the crowd.

3) The best layouts had lots of white space. Many advertisers feel that white space is wasted space, so they cram everything in the world into their ads. That's why white space has always been – and always will be – a rare and precious commodity. And that's why the entries which remained on the table were those with plenty of breathing room.

4) The best ads used easy-to-read typography. Legibility was a key factor in the judging. Ads were quickly disqualified if they featured reversed body copy (white type on a black background) or heavy blocks (blobs!) of upper case type. Most of the winners used simple serif fonts in the body copy.

5) The best color layouts demonstrated restraint. Evidently, a few of the contestants interpreted the phrase "best use of color" as "most use of color." We saw purple star bursts, green and red boxes, yellow backgrounds and blue headlines. Sometimes all in the same ad.

The most effective ads in that category combined a lot of white space with a little color. I remember one which was black and white, except for a simple red logo at the bottom. It was a winner.

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ENDNOTES

The 23rd Annual **Okanagan Wine Festival** will take place from October 3 – 12. The Festival has been ranked one of the "Top 100 Events In North America" for the past seven years by the American Bus Association. For more information, visit www.owfs.com.

Hollinger Canadian Newspapers has appointed **Wanda Yu** as Director of National Advertising. Yu was previously a national account manager at Van Net Newspapers.

The Investigative Reporters and Editor, Inc. and the *Canadian Association of Journalism* are joining to host a second border workshop on investigative reporting. **Crossing the 49th: Investigative journalism techniques from both sides of the border** will take place on October 4th, in Montreal. For more information, please visit: www.ire.org/training/borderworkshop.html.

BCYCNA Update

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