

# **A Buzz Becomes A**

# **RACKET**

**Final Capstone Report**

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## Situation Analysis

### Background

The August 2021 launch of Racket, a writer-owned, reader-funded digital news website serving the Twin Cities metropolitan area, was met with celebration and endorsement. Racket was founded by four former City Pages editors, the nationally-acclaimed Twin Cities alternative newspaper that abruptly shut down in 2020 after more than 40 years in circulation. The Star Tribune, which bought City Pages in 2015, stated that the challenges brought on by the pandemic left the paper “with no feasible options” other than a complete shutdown as coffee shops, restaurants, and music venues closed en masse (Ramstad, 2020). No attempt was made to adapt to these challenges and move City Pages online. The Star Tribune, which is owned by American billionaire Glen Taylor, made the choice to pull the plug on City Pages. The abruptness of the closure— and the tragedy of it— made City Pages readers eager to redirect their support toward Racket: a new, but familiar, enterprise.

Racket intends to carry on City Page’s prodigious legacy in some ways while also establishing itself as an entirely new media product that is not just equipped for the digital age but designed for it. For starters, there is no physical issue. Instead, Racket is entirely online, and its staff occupy no physical office space either. Racket has quickly become a robust source for news that captures the zeitgeist of the Twin Cities, ranging from local politics to arts and culture. it needs more subscribers to continue its trajectory upwards and become financially secure into the future.

### Racket’s Purpose and Goal

The age of social media has resulted in a proliferation of instantly accessible information that can be shared and distributed widely at breakneck pace. If the earliest promise of the

internet was its potential to be a democratic equalizer, giving all citizens a chance at equal opportunities, reality has played out differently. Inaccurate information can spread freely and quickly, while newsrooms staffed with fact checkers and reporters are increasingly feeling the financial pressure to put their stories behind a paywall. We are now in an environment where people are less connected with what's going on in the communities in which they live.

Because Racket is not beholden to advertisers when making editorial decisions, the organization's founders believe Racket is uniquely positioned to offer local news without interference or influence. This is Racket's core value proposition, and it's also important to Racket's core audience, who tend to be voracious news consumers who already have significant exposure to news media. Racket's different perspective and alternative viewpoint is a key differentiator from other local outlets, such as the St. Paul Pioneer Press and the Star Tribune.

This differentiator is woven into Racket's business model as well as its messaging to the public. According to its website, Racket is writer-owned and reader-funded "because it's a super bleak time for media ... Because you can never have too many outlets representing workers, artists, and independents. Because the Star Tribune is owned by a billionaire and the Pioneer Press is owned by a vampiric hedge fund" (Racket, 2022). It's clearly important to Racket that its readers are able to recognize this differentiator—and how the outlet's business model is directly tied to its purpose and goal.

### **Current Situation (SWOT Analysis)**

Racket's strengths and opportunities; weaknesses and threats; are outlined in the following table.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Experienced staff that works well together</li> <li>● High-quality reporting on issues and topics of relevance to the Twin Cities</li> <li>● Engaged, enthusiastic, and supportive audience who “get” Racket’s mission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Limited number of staff can result in bandwidth/capacity/scaling limitations</li> <li>● No full-time marketing or business operations staff member</li> <li>● Limited funding available for paid marketing and advertising efforts</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Groundswell of energy surrounding the “support local journalism” movement to bring in new readers</li> <li>● Other media (multimedia, print, etc.) not yet explored by Racket</li> <li>● In-person events returning to the Twin Cities offers opportunities for more physical touchpoints between Racket and the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● General public accustomed to receiving news and content for free</li> <li>● Competition from large dailies, smaller local news outlets, and digital media companies</li> <li>● Evolving technology of how people want to receive news and in what format</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Racket SWOT Analysis

**Key Learnings**

The Racket brand benefited from having established a clear voice and direction at its launch. Research findings revealed consistency in how Racket resonates among its core audience, as summarized in the Brand Resonance Pyramid. Survey participants of the non-representative online opt-in survey were prompted with the question of what they hope to gain from being a Racket supporter. Responses include *“Non-corporate media viewpoint. Answers to questions a neighbor would have rather than answers/views an advertiser or lobbyist wants to deliver to me”*; *“A laugh. A non-mainstream angle. Awareness of local events”*; and *“Cool local news stories that actually have meaning in my day to day life.”* These key learnings are supported by the following findings, and summarized in the pyramid below.

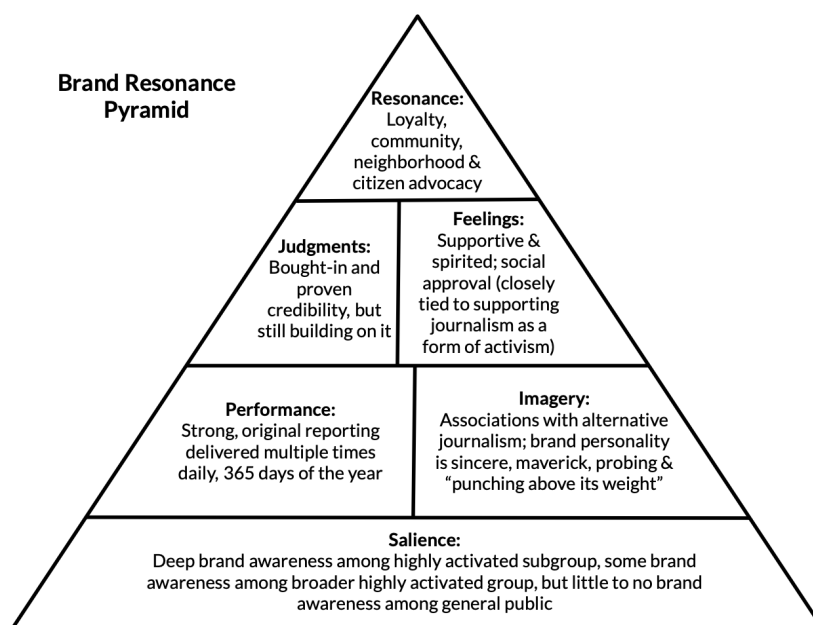


Figure 2: Brand Resonance Pyramid

## Stakeholders

The audience stakeholder group can be divided into different sub-segments (Figure 3). First, there are Racket members. These are members of the Racket community who have elected to pay to obtain unlimited access to the Racket news site. There are also tiers of paying subscribers: Lookout (\$50/year), Accomplice (\$100/year), and Racketeer (\$999/year), with different benefits at each level. Another Racket audience subgroup is its email newsletter subscribers. These are people who have signed up to receive emails from Racket but are not necessarily paying subscribers (some are, some aren't). They have access to less than five articles on the website each month before they encounter a paywall. Another segmentation of Racket's audience are Twin Cities residents who live in the neighborhoods and communities that Racket covers throughout its reporting. Racket has a responsibility to this stakeholder group by contributing to the artistic, cultural, and recreational life of the community (Richardson, 2015).

Another stakeholder group for Racket to consider is community leaders. This group can include leaders of advocacy groups, politicians, law enforcement, local small business owners, public relations officials at large Twin Cities-based businesses, and other individuals who are frequently in contact with the media to provide information relevant to their organization or cause. With this group, it's important that Racket is a visible and known news entity in the community, which would raise Racket's profile in the community.

Racket also has a stable of freelancers and contributors that it works with. As an organization that covers labor issues extensively, it follows that it would be important to Racket's founders to provide fair compensation for contributors' work. Thus, maintaining a positive relationship with this volunteer and contributor stakeholder group is important to Racket's mission. As Racket continues to grow in size, this stakeholder group will likely also grow in number. It's also possible that some contributors transition to part-time or full-time employment status at Racket as the organization scales.

Finally, Racket must also consider advertisers as a key stakeholder group by recognizing mutual needs and interests (Richardson, 2015). Although it is baked into Racket's business model that the majority of its revenue comes from subscriptions, Racket does allow some brands to advertise on the site. Advertising displayed on the site is unobtrusive and feels thoughtfully, intentionally placed—ads are thought to clutter and detract from both the story and the user experience—and Racket intends to keep it that way. This serves the advertiser stakeholder group well, because their ad will not be competing with other ads. Maintaining a positive relationship with this group can help ensure this stream of revenue remains strong.



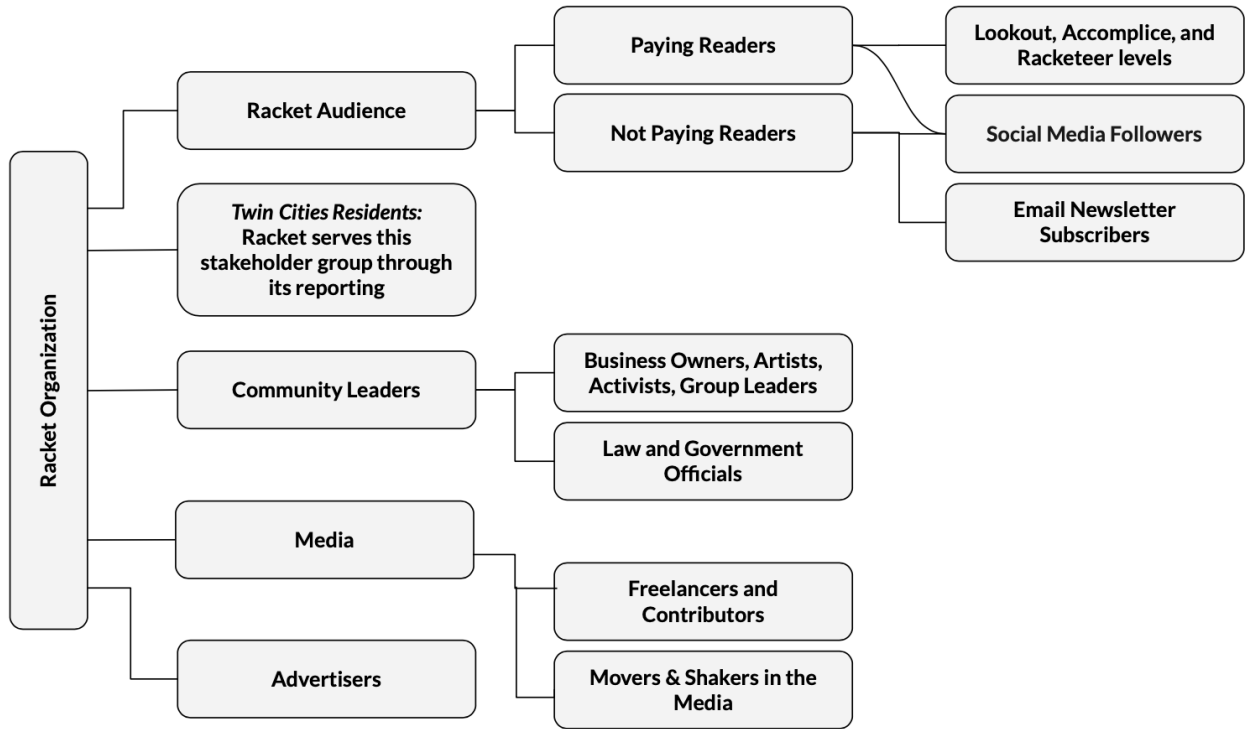


Figure 3: Racket Stakeholders

### Industry Competition

It is unquestionable that the media landscape has changed dramatically with the advent of a hypersocial internet. And yet, while Americans have more choices in where they receive their news, studies show that the average American is no more informed than historical levels of public knowledge (“Public Knowledge of Current Affairs Little Changed by Information Revolutions,” 2007). This presents challenges for news organizations, but it also represents an opportunity to meaningfully reduce information gaps.

Another important attribute of the industry competition landscape is how intertwined the news media is with other media competing for the user’s attention. Racket is an all-digital news organization. On social media and in email inboxes, Racket is competing for space alongside a cacophony of tweets, posts, and unread emails from a wide mix of authors: people

in the user’s social circle, brands, influencers, other news outlets, and even bots and spam.

Figure 4 summarizes the variety of media choices available to consumers.

Within the Twin Cities, notable news outlets include the two large daily newspapers, the Star Tribune and the St. Paul Pioneer Press; the University of Minnesota’s daily college newspaper, the Minnesota Daily; chain news organizations that are beginning to branch out into local markets such as Axios; local nonprofit news organizations like the Sahan Journal and MinnPost; and others. While Racket is certainly not the only voice in the village, it’s singular in the Twin Cities for its alt-weekly soul. Outside of Racket, no other news organization fills the alt-weekly void that City Pages left. This differentiator is crucial to the Racket brand.

Print Media	Broadcast Media	Digital/New Media
Newspapers Magazines Books Journals and publications	Television Radio Film	Social media Video platforms Websites Mobile apps E-books Podcasts Email newsletters

Figure 4: Media Types

**Organizational Constraints**

Racket’s size of four staff members helps to make the product nimble and tightly packaged—a clear strength. It can also be a constraint. The Racket staff consists of its four co-founders, Keith Harris, Jessica Armbruster, Jay Boller, and Em Cassel, who divide up the majority of the duties. Some freelancers and contributors, such as Dan Savage’s *Savage Love* relationships column, fill in the blanks. Scaling Racket’s operations can present a challenge if the expanding workload is not met with an equal or greater amount of funds available to scale.

Additionally, at the core of each Racket staff member's day-to-day duties is writing, reporting, and editing. This can leave little room for activities that will help grow the business or connect with its audience outside of covering stories. Thus, time is another constraint. "In terms of our growth, we're at this point where we're still concerned about growing the product itself," explains Harris (personal conversation, March 2, 2022). Racket is growing primarily because it is continuing to produce stories that readers are connecting with. There is no staff member whose sole role is to find external ways to grow the business, such as through marketing or community relations efforts. Instead, these duties are divided among the four founders. While this arrangement is working now, it could become a constraint in the future as it becomes increasingly difficult to find new audiences to tap into. More resources may be needed to focus on business solutions.

Overall, the capacity and bandwidth of the staff are the biggest organizational constraints; there is only so much a person can do in a day. Entrepreneurs can attest to fatigue resulting from shifting across too many tasks throughout the day. Switching between business duties and reporting duties may result in either task not receiving enough attention, or too much. Finding the right balance is key to mitigating the effects of this constraint.

### **Message Testing**

A 2019 study titled "'Stay informed', 'become an insider' or 'drive change': Repackaging newspaper subscriptions in the digital age" seeks to answer the question of what types of marketing messages create the most impact on target audiences in driving newspaper subscriptions (Nechushtai & Zalmanson, 2019). The authors examined 55 of the most-read newspapers in the U.S. and how each newspaper framed their call-to-action in asking readers to subscribe. Historically, newspaper advertising has centered around the audience's need for

obtaining useful and valuable information, and for many years, this was sufficient messaging for news organizations to meet their subscription targets. In recent years however, newspaper subscription advertising has emphasized “the benefit of offering a value-driven product,” underscoring how the reader’s newspaper subscription “represents a contribution to broader societal goals” (Nechushtai & Zalmanson, 2019). Obtaining information alone was not a strong enough reason to subscribe; the reader must also feel compelled to ‘support a cause.’ This idea is known as the ritual view of communication, where “communication is linked to terms such as ‘sharing’, ‘participation’, ‘association’, [and] ‘fellowship’” and where newspaper use is both a rational (information-gathering) and non-rational (social prestige-seeking) act (Carey, 1988).

To examine message testing of like-organizations to Racket, it may be useful to look beyond the top 55 most-circulated newspapers and examine smaller alternative outlets, such as Defector, which Racket is in part modeled after. Defector’s call-to-action reads, “Our goal is to create a financially stable and independent publication that exists for reasons beyond squeezing out profits for some people in a boardroom, or fattening itself up for an acquisition. We hope you’ll join us.” The Brick House Cooperative’s call to action highlights its commitment to free-thinking journalism that is “not beholden to Jurassic-era media barons, vulture capitalists, or fickle billionaire patrons” (Rourke, 2019). Both normative pitches appeal to the reader’s sensibilities that reader-funded, writer-owned news organizations are societally healthier and less mired in conflicts of interest.

Racket’s core audience is generally well-read, well-informed, and supportive of journalism as a societal good. In the Racket survey, 74.8% of survey respondents are subscribed to at least one other outlet other than Racket, with 28.4% subscribed to Racket plus three or more news outlets (Figure 5). These readers likely subscribe to different news outlets for

different reasons. To determine what pitch Racket’s ideal audience would find most compelling, it’s worth noting that the Nechushtai and Zalmanson study found that norm-based pitches, or appeals that the newspaper is contributing to broader societal goals, are slightly more common in the Midwest than in the rest of the United States. This is consistent with Racket’s argument that its business model is contributing to a healthier media ecosystem. It’s not just journalism for the public good, but independent journalism for the public good.

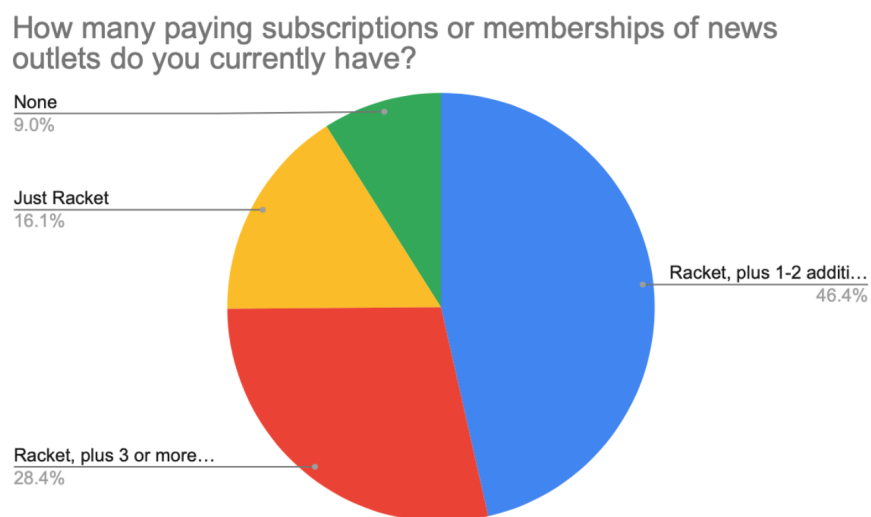


Figure 5: News Outlet Subscription Habits of Racket Audience

### The Problem

Racket is primarily reader-funded. This means that subscriptions make up the bulk of Racket’s revenue. Its website and newsletter offers limited space available for advertising, with the goal for Racket to be as minimally beholden to advertisers as possible. In order to do this, Racket needs readers to financially support its mission by becoming paying members. Racket’s central challenge is to support its business goals by increasing its base of subscribers.

Within the Media Funding Model, Racket is still firmly in the “launching a new media” phase of its maturity (Figure 6). A wide variety of funding options are often available at this

early growth stage: grants, crowdfund, bootstrap. Low entry costs and small teams are also hallmarks of new media organizations at this stage. As the media organization grows, finance gaps may arise between the early-stage seed funds and what is needed to allow the organization to continue to grow. This stage is known as the “getting over the hump” period. There is also a significant increase in organizational complexity as the organization prepares to scale its operations during this phase. As Racket grows and matures, its challenge will be to continue growing and to avoid some of the common pitfalls of the “getting over the hump” period; primarily, finance gaps.

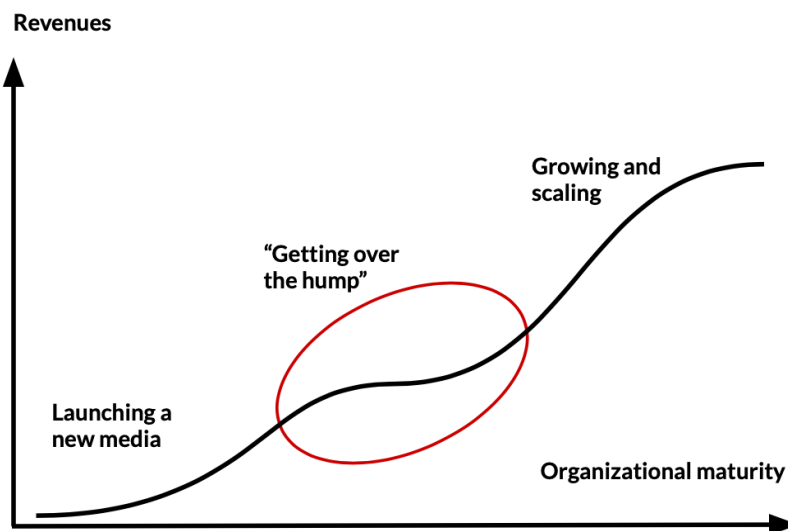


Figure 6: The Media Funding Model (WNIP, 2022)

## Communications Goal and Objectives

### Goal

Racket's business goal is to be able to financially sustain the four founders' full-time salaries in addition to paying its freelancers. Racket needs to bring in enough revenue to achieve this goal. In its first year, Racket is projected to fall short of this goal. This isn't automatically a problem: Finance gaps exist in virtually all new business ventures, but it is something to be aware of over time. The organization needs to take action to increase its membership base in order to bring in more revenue. Racket has been growing at a steady clip since its launch in August 2021, but it needs to increase the rate at which it is adding paying subscribers to its membership pool. "Racket is running at a reliable rhythm for the four of us. First hurdle: making this a full time position," explains Cassel (personal communication, February 11, 2022).

A communications plan can provide strategic insights into what this action would look like, such as raising awareness as part of that solution. "Our product is good, but nobody knows about it. We need more brand recognition and awareness that would translate," says Boller (personal communication, February 14, 2022). As a potential solution, Racket is in need of broader brand recognition that would translate into an increase in revenue. There is always an option to increase the amount of revenue the organization takes in through advertising; however, this plan will focus primarily on how communication can be used to increase the number of subscribers.

In order to increase the number of subscribers, Racket must increase readership. "We're working on appealing to advertisers and ways to bring in new readers" explains Armbruster (personal communication, March 10, 2022). "We've kind of gotten the base group of people enthusiastic [about our product] and now we've got to find ways to reach out to new people."

While brand loyalty among Racket members remains a priority, Racket's most urgent objective is to reach new readers. Communication can help Racket meet this goal.

## **Objectives**

Primary communications objectives include increasing awareness and engagement. These objectives are interrelated. Racket has a devoted following who supports the organization's work, but they do so mostly privately. Forty-nine percent of survey respondents indicated that they have never posted, commented, shared, or interacted with Racket's content in any way other than reading. Yet, these same respondents articulated a high degree of enthusiasm and desire to support Racket. One way to build brand awareness is to invite Racket supporters to socially engage with the brand. For better or worse, search engines and social media sites are engineered to prioritize engagement. The more backlinks a website has, the more it is prioritized on the Google search engine results page, and the more likely Google is to show Racket's content to new users. The same basic tenets are true for social media sites. The more interactions a post has, the higher the likelihood that the post will be shown to new users. Increased visibility online can also come in more organic forms as well: when people share, recommend, and vouch for content, their friends are more likely to trust and receive that content. In this way, increasing engagement can also raise brand awareness. The following section will outline further steps to build brand awareness and increase engagement.



## Planning

### Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR) Models

The below SMCR Models (Figures 7 & 8) provide an overview of two different messaging strategies. The first model centers on a message designed to introduce Racket to an audience that hasn't heard of it yet. The message to new audiences is to "Get in on the Racket." The channels to deliver this message are physical, in-person marketing opportunities: an out-of-home display and event marketing. The second model centers on a message intended for existing Racket followers. Through newsletter and social media as a channel, Racket's audience of followers is invited to voice their support of Racket to their social circles.

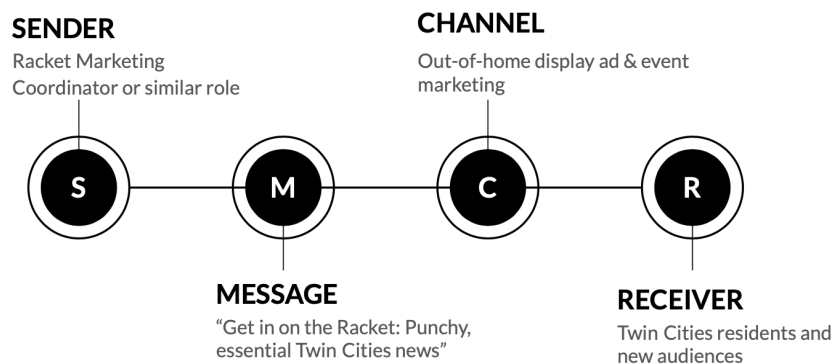


Figure 7: SMCR Model for New Audiences

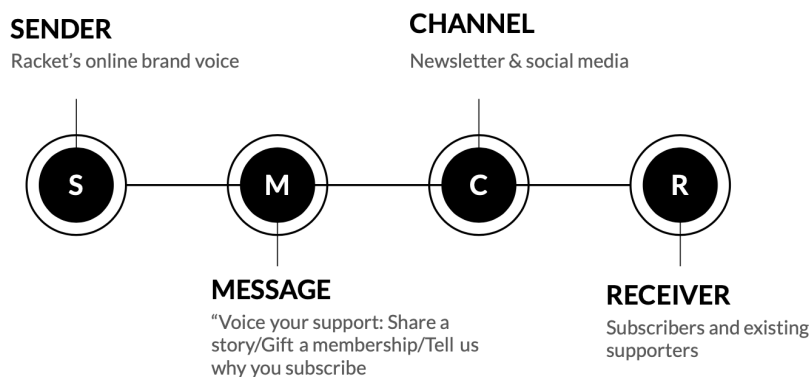


Figure 8: SMCR Model for Existing Audiences

## Target Audience

When Racket launched in August 2021, many long-time readers and avid supporters of City Pages quickly became Racket subscribers. Racket’s founders benefited from already being part of the local journalism community. Many friends and colleagues in journalism, who tend to have larger-than-average social media followings, were eager to help spread the word. Racket also benefits from a vibrant media landscape in the Twin Cities: Minnesota is home to a variety of news outlets, both large and small. Racket opened its digital doors to a receptive audience.

Racket readers tend to be well-read and well-informed. These readers are engaged, activated, and organized citizens. This group also tends to be smaller relative to the overall population; it takes time, effort, and resources to maintain this level of engagement and activation year-round. The benefit to Racket attracting such an activated group is that this group also tends to be more influential over other groups. Their opinions are relevant to decision-makers, such as politicians and lawmakers. This group also tends to have social influence within their own social circles. As the figure below shows, information tends to flow from the mass media (including news outlets) to opinion leaders and then to the public. It follows that Racket’s base of support are opinion leaders; their peers look to them for information.

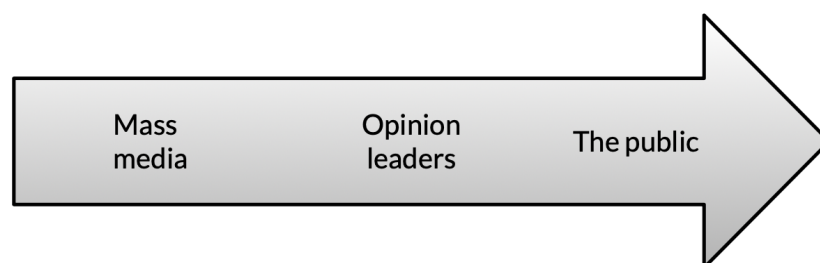


Figure 9: The Two-Step Flow (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1957)

## Media Use Habits

The email newsletter is experiencing something of a renaissance in journalism. Substack, a popular email newsletter platform, has grown from 100,000 paying subscribers in March 2020 to more than 500,000 in February 2021 (Dean, 2022). Significant social events, from COVID-19 to the 2020 U.S. presidential election, contributed to the rise in demand for high-quality, hyper-specific information. News consumers are typically reading newsletters not exclusively as an alternative to institutional, traditional media sources, but rather as a supplement to them. They are omnivorous media consumers who get their news from a wide variety of sources, including both traditional and digital media. Lastly, as trust builds between author and reader, email newsletters often serve a social, relational, and community function as much as informational. Readers feel they are supporting something greater than themselves and contributing to a community, in addition to obtaining information.

In addition to newsletter consumption, social media consumption is also high. Forty-five percent of survey respondents cited that the last time they felt personally inspired by something they saw on Racket, it was because they came across it on one of Racket’s social media pages.

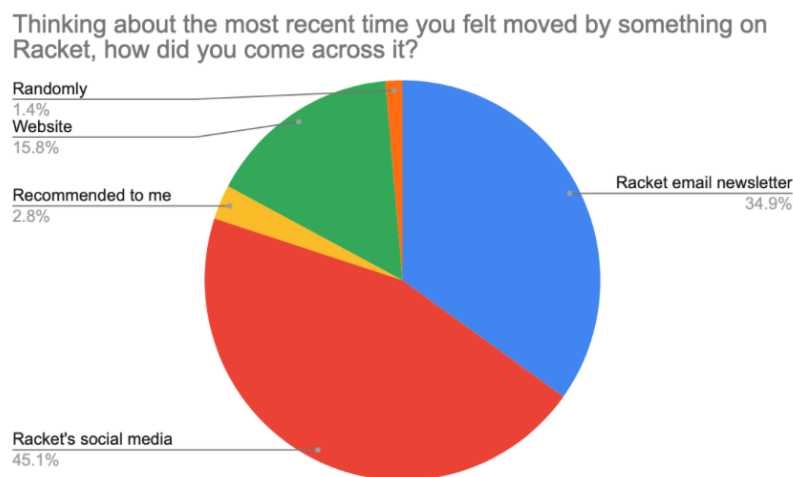


Figure 10: Discovery Habits of Racket Audience

## Personas

The use of personas can help bring these target audience characteristics to life. The following four personas outline potential reasons why someone who fits Racket’s target audience would want to become a Racket subscriber.

<b>Persona 1: The Discerning News Curator</b>	<b>Persona 2: The Alt-Weekly Romantic</b>
Name: Muna Age: 34 Industry: Nonprofit Location: St. Paul, MN Education: Bachelor’s Interests: Voracious consumer of all types of news who is seeking nuanced, unique perspectives on local and state government	Name: Joe Age: 62 Industry: Arts; Self-employed Location: Minneapolis, MN Education: Some college Interests: Music news and criticism in the vein of City Pages, stories that matter to artists, workers, and independents
<b>Persona 3: The Local Entertainment Seeker</b>	<b>Persona 4: The Aspiring Co-Producer</b>
Name: Jakob Age: 40 Industry: Engineering Location: Edina, MN Education: Bachelor’s Interests: News around the neighborhood, interesting places to eat and drink, local entertainment options	Name: Xavier Age: 55 Industry: Advertising Location: Minneapolis, MN Education: Graduate school Interests: Brand storytelling and marketing with a sartorial taste for what’s trending and current

Figure 11: Racket Audience Personas

## Brand personality and voice

Racket has a distinguishable brand narrative that has been clearly articulated since the organization’s launch. In determining what aspects of Racket’s brand identity resonate with its target audience most potently, the Racket reader survey can offer some insights. Survey participants were asked, “Imagine you're talking to someone who had never heard of Racket.

How would you describe Racket to them?” Of the more than 200 responses, some strong patterns emerged.

First, noting Racket’s alt-weekly identity and City Pages roots proved to be the most common response type. Example responses that would fall into this category include *“Remember and miss City Pages? Then you MUST read Racket”* and *“alt weekly but online.”*

Second, respondents made frequent mention of Racket as a truthful, independent media outlet—and they were careful to note that its independent status is key to that unfettered truthfulness. Responses that fall under this category touched on the lack of corporate pressure placed on the organization. Example responses include *“Honest, local, independent news”* and *“Another point of view that is willing to say and cover things bigger publications won’t. Good local insight.”*

Lastly, a category of responses called attention to the lighter aspects of Racket’s personality; respondents described Racket as humorous, entertaining, and witty. Examples include *“Local indie journalism that goes in depth when necessary and has a fun voice”* and *“A fun, very local paper with a good mix of silly and serious content.”* For this group, Racket’s brand appeal is an irreverent combination of style and substance.

Because the questionnaire was an opt-in survey, its methodology does not allow for us to make generalizations about how other readers and subscribers think about Racket. Despite this limitation, it is encouraging that the respondents’ view of Racket lines up squarely with how Racket has publicly defined itself. This is evidence that Racket’s messaging about itself—writer-owned, reader-funded, ‘fun and fearless’ journalism—is resonating with its core audience.

## Recommended strategy and positioning

I recommend Racket hire a communications manager to oversee the communications plan. As Kendall Paul writes in *The New Entrepreneur's Guide to Setting Up and Running a Successful Business*, "Your website has gone live and your doors are open, now what do you do? The answer to this is to employ staff to run your business while you spend your time administrating" (Paul, 2018, p. 65). Racket's owners can spend their time writing and reporting as well as overseeing the strategic direction of the organization. The implementation of each tactic pertaining to the overall strategy can be carried out by the communications manager.

The staffing plan would be based upon the dollar value of sales per employee. For example, a target revenue for a team of five could be \$250,000, or \$50,000 per person. The initial investment in a communications manager can be drawn from a bank loan or line of credit. An additional amount can also be taken out to provide available cash to carry out paid advertising and marketing tactics. Budgetary considerations for either a part-time or a full-time hire are provided in Figure 13.

Sales Volume	Year	Number of Staff
\$200,000	Jan. 2022 - Dec. 2022	4
\$200,000 + loan	Jan. 2023 - Dec. 2023	5
\$250,000	Jan. 2024 - Dec. 2024	5
\$300,000+	Jan. 2025 - Dec. 2025	6+

Figure 12: Revenue and Staff Targets by Date

	<b>Full-time Hire</b>	<b>Part-time Hire</b>
<b>Salary</b>	\$50,000	\$20,000
<b>Employee Benefits</b>	\$14,000	\$0
<b>Marketing Costs</b>	\$12,000	\$12,000
<b>Total</b>	\$76,000	\$32,000

Figure 13: Budget Breakdown

As an alternative to a loan, Racket could consider converting to nonprofit status and pitching donors to raise funds to cover the costs of the communications personnel. However, that would be a significant time commitment without a guarantee on the amount of funds raised. At the same time, Minnesota’s nonprofit scene is vibrant and growing (Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, 2022), and supporting a “reader-owned” news site could resonate with Minnesota givers.

Hiring a communications manager is a strategic move. It allows Racket to “broaden and deepen” its capabilities through team expansion (Seppänen, 2020, p. 53). It allows Racket’s founders to focus on Racket’s strategic direction without getting bogged down in tactical considerations. If they desire it, it would allow Racket’s founders to be able to step away from advertising or marketing tasks that could take valuable time away from the full-time job of reporting, writing, and editing, not to mention the mental tax switching across tasks demands. And most importantly, it would allow Racket to accelerate its growth. Racket could increase its subscriber base, increase revenue in memberships and partnerships, and increase its presence and profile in the Twin Cities community with a qualified communications professional devoted to attacking these objectives on a concentrated, full-time basis.

Acquiring means	Description
Founders' initial capabilities	The initial experiences, knowledge, skills, and competences of the founders.
Additional capabilities through team expansion	The experiences, knowledge, skills, and competences of new team members.
Additional capabilities through team growth	The experiences, knowledge, skills, and competencies gained in a learning-by-doing manner during the actual development work.

Figure 14: Means to acquire team capabilities (Seppänen, 2020)

### Recommended communication strategies

There is no other news outlet in the Twin Cities doing what Racket is doing, and its positioning should reflect that. While other digital news startups champion their status as independent and writer-owned, this messaging may not go far enough in the Twin Cities to motivate someone to subscribe, since the Twin Cities is already home to other independent or nonprofit media outlets: namely, Sahan Journal, Bring Me the News, and MinnPost. Thus, Racket's unique identity as an "alt-weekly" can be a compelling differentiator from other independent outlets. While the other independent media outlets also perform essential journalism and do excellent work, no other outlet has its ear to the ground in the Twin Cities arts and entertainment and food and drink scenes than Racket, thanks again to its individualist, alt-weekly roots. Positioning Racket as a tastemaker and authority on the Twin Cities cultural zeitgeist sets itself apart from other independent news outlets. Larger outlets that cover life in the Twin Cities—Mpls.St.Paul Magazine, Star Tribune, Twin Cities Business, among others—are not as fearless as Racket in taking an adversarial tone when appropriate. Letting Racket's distinctive personality show through its communications is key to its positioning.



I propose two key messages: one key message to introduce Racket to new audiences, and one key message to nudge existing supporters toward a desired action. To introduce Racket to new audiences, the message I recommend is “Get in on the Racket.” To nudge existing supporters toward a desired action, the message I recommend is “Voice your support.” I recommend the following channels to convey these key messages.

## Implementation

The following section will address the specific tactics associated with each proposed media channel, the budget available to apply these tactics, the timing and formation of a preliminary event calendar, and the staffing capacity necessary to carry out these tactics. This research also considers how to measure the success of each tactic.

### Tactics

A summary of channels that support communications objectives is provided in the table below.

<b>Owned Social Media</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Twitter threads</li> <li>- Video and multimedia content</li> <li>- Content that encourages user engagement</li> </ul>	<b>Paid Social Media</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ads during quarterly 'member drives' (4x annually)</li> </ul>	<b>Website</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Events calendar</li> <li>- Evergreen SEO content</li> </ul>
<b>Email</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Push' emails sent to on-the-fence subscribers</li> <li>- "Gift a membership" prompts to existing members</li> </ul>	<b>Out-of-Home Advertising</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Junior poster or small billboard in urban area</li> </ul>	<b>Event Marketing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Booths at festivals, fairs, and other events</li> <li>- Booths at parks and local businesses</li> <li>- Event sponsorship</li> </ul>

Figure 15: Summary of Tactics

### Owned Social Media

Twin Cities readers seeking better ways to receive local news need to receive the message that Racket is home to punchy, pertinent local news. The potential media that could work best in reaching this group is Racket's owned social media channels. Because news consumers in Racket's target audience are very well-read and very online, it makes sense that they would discover Racket while online.

One area of focus could be Twitter. Presently, Racket tweets out a link to each of its articles that it posts. This is a great way for existing Racket followers and subscribers to keep up with Racket. However, someone new to Racket's audience may be less likely to click the link if they are unfamiliar with Racket, provided the only context they have is the tweet itself. While Racket should continue to post links to continue driving traffic to the site, I also propose Racket create short tweet threads that summarize its articles as a way to involve new audiences. These tweet threads should leave a bit of intrigue so that users are still compelled to click on the link to read the rest of the article. This practice should not only create more interest in Racket's original reporting, but it can also serve to develop and sharpen Racket's unique brand voice on Twitter. For some Twitter users, they may need to become familiar with Racket's presence on the platform before they feel confident visiting Racket's website. Using Twitter in new and strategic ways can help build brand awareness.

There is also an opportunity to increase engagement on Racket's owned social media channels. For instance, lightly adapting Racket's stories and posts on Instagram to optimize for Instagram's algorithm could make the act of engaging more attractive. For example, Instagram currently prefers showing users video content over images (McLachlan, 2022). Creating video and multimedia content can be a full-time job. Some ideas for how to make this task more manageable include hosting live Q&A sessions with Racket journalists, including more polls and interactive features to drive engagement, and inviting supporters to help co-create content.

### **Paid Social Media**

Conversations with Racket co-owners have revealed that paid social media advertising has not yielded impressive results in the past. While this tactic is not a high priority, there could be some benefit in turning on paid social media ads during quarterly member drives. Taking a

precise approach with a specific call-to-action within a short-term campaign time period could result in increased memberships.

### **Website**

Racket's website is primarily home to its entire library of articles as well as its landing page to become a Racket member. I have identified two additions that Racket could consider adding to its website, in line with its communications objectives.

First, Racket could consider adding a calendar to its website. This is something that I have heard in conversations with Racket's founders as well as with readers. The communications benefit of adding the calendar is that the addition would increase Racket's visibility online. People searching for events in the Twin Cities could discover Racket through its calendar. Additionally, it would give existing readers a reason to bookmark Racket and continually revisit.

Racket could also consider adding more evergreen content to the website, such as Minnesota travel, nature, and entertainment guides. While the purpose of this report is not to make editorial recommendations, the inclusion of this type of content on the website could help make it easier for new users to discover Racket through relevant keywords on search engines. This SEO initiative would increase traffic to the website. Taking these two steps to increase website traffic would serve the communications objective of increasing awareness.

### **Email**

Racket's email newsletter will work best to communicate a key message that nudges existing supporters toward a desired action. This could involve helping newsletter subscribers see the value in becoming a member, or it could involve asking existing members to tell their friends about Racket. It could be helpful to segment the newsletter into two audiences: existing members and non-paying subscribers. Racket already sends a separate email to paying

subscribers to receive an early look at new stories. Racket could also segment paying from non-paying subscribers by sending each group a different call-to-action. For example, non-paying subscribers “on the fence” may need to receive a specialized email from Racket asking them to become a member. Similarly, Racket members could receive a specialized email where they are asked to gift or donate a Racket membership. The Implementation & Evaluation Report will examine these ideas in more detail.

### **Out-of-Home Advertising**

Racket is entirely online, yet its Minnesota roots run deep. Between its focus on local journalism and its City Pages connection, there is an opportunity for Racket to establish a physical presence in the Twin Cities. Because Racket was started during a global pandemic, its in-person presence has thus far been limited. A downtown or urban ad on a small billboard with striking visuals could help Minneapolis residents associate Racket with City Pages, which has high name recognition among residents. This ad would especially appeal to those Twin Cities residents who are nostalgic for City Pages and would like to support Racket as a continuation of their endorsement of City Pages. A downtown ad display would also have a second benefit: An image of it could be reproduced digitally. Racket could proudly display artful photos of its downtown ad display on its social media channels and website for marketing purposes. Audiences of Racket—both new and returning—could benefit from a reminder that although Racket is distributed digitally, it still occupies, and represents, a physical place in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

### **Event Marketing**

The rationale for utilizing event marketing as a media channel is similar to the reasons for a downtown ad display. Racket readers need reminders that Racket is digital *and* physical. Its

writers and producers are members of the community, and the stories they tell are significant to their neighborhoods. However, where event marketing differs from an out-of-home ad is that this channel affords the opportunity for Racket to communicate directly with key stakeholders, person to person. Opportunities to establish a booth or table to promote Racket include the following: art fairs; music festivals; outdoor concerts; city centers; pop-ups outside coffee shops, restaurants, and participating small businesses; and other community events. The primary purpose of promoting Racket at these in-person events is to introduce Racket to new audiences.

Racket could also consider becoming a sponsor for small-scale events hosted by organizations that share Racket's values. A future goal could be for the organization to host a large-scale arts and entertainment event. Some examples of publications successfully hosting events that raise their profile locally and/or nationally include the Pitchfork Music Festival, Twin Cities Business Community Impact Awards, and the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books. Racket could begin to lay the groundwork for this long-term initiative, which would also support communications objectives. The first step would be to gather ideas and look for opportunities of events not offered in the Twin Cities that Racket could provide to the community.

### **Timing**

Racket's geographic coverage is Minnesota, and it's no surprise that the state's events calendar, and the level of outdoor activity, tends to condense in the warmer months of the year. For this reason, I recommend that Racket prioritize its out-of-home advertisement and event marketing initiatives during the late spring through early fall. Event calendars for July and August 2022 are provided as examples in Appendix C.

To balance out the year, Racket can increase its digital marketing efforts in late fall through early spring, with a promotion to "gift" a Racket subscription during the holiday season

(Thanksgiving through New Year's Day). A quarterly membership drive as well as the quarterly "Ask Racket" series will also drive interest in Racket and bring traffic to the website.

### **Budget Implications**

Racket's business goal is to reach an annual revenue total that, at a minimum, supports its four founders' salaries. Paid marketing efforts will be considered a cost, at least in the short term. Metrics to evaluate the success or efficacy of each tactic must be considered. Racket could consider temporarily increasing the space available for advertising and slowly work to reduce the space allotted for advertisements as subscriptions grow to offset some of the marketing costs.

Because budget is an important consideration, free tactics should be prioritized in the media mix. These include increasing content marketing and SEO on Racket's site, optimizing Racket's social networks to encourage discovery and engagement, and increasing email marketing. Low-cost options also include out-of-home efforts such as posting on coffee shop bulletin boards, lamp posts, and passing out stickers or flyers where permitted and appropriate.

I propose a preliminary marketing budget of \$500-\$1,000/month May through October, and \$0-\$500/month November through April, with the understanding that the marketing budget in May through October will involve event marketing and out-of-home advertising. The maximum marketing budget comes to \$9,000. During the November through April months, "free" tactics will be prioritized. Racket could choose to turn on social media ads only during its quarterly member drives.

Estimated costs for event marketing range from \$0 to \$500 per event. Some initial setup costs may apply, such as the purchase of a tent, booth/table, posters, banners, stickers, business cards, flyers, additional merchandise for purchase, and other items.

The estimated price for an 11' x 5' small billboard, also known as a “junior poster,” is \$800/month. Smaller posters strategically placed in key neighborhoods at a lower cost may also be an option. Because of the high-traffic areas these posters are placed in, they have the potential to create hundreds of thousands of impressions. Junior posters can also make for attractive photos, ideal for recycling online and distributing as part of marketing materials. Figure 15 provides an example of the cadence and mix of paid and free marketing initiatives across a calendar year.

<b>January</b> Quarterly Membership Drive	<b>February</b> Ask Racket	<b>March</b> Guest Contributor Drive
<b>April</b> Quarterly Membership Drive	<b>May</b> Ask Racket Event Marketing	<b>June</b> Event Marketing Guest Contributor Drive
<b>July</b> Quarterly Membership Drive Event Marketing Out-of-Home Advertising	<b>August</b> Ask Racket Event Marketing Out-of-Home Advertising	<b>September</b> Event Marketing Guest Contributor Drive
<b>October</b> Quarterly Membership Drive	<b>November</b> Gift A Membership Ask Racket	<b>December</b> Gift A Membership Guest Contributor Drive

Figure 16: Timing of Implementation, where tactics in **red** are paid initiatives

### Proposed Staff

As addressed previously, Racket’s size is both a strength and at times a constraint. All of the tactics presented in this report can be carried out by Racket’s current staff members, but there are some considerations to keep in mind. The time available to devote to these efforts is a constraint. Through my phone interviews with Racket co-owners, I found that there is still a need to hire more writers. Thus, it would be difficult for Racket’s four existing staff to be able to



devote significant amounts of time to duties unrelated to journalism, considering that the reporting and writing workload is already heavy.

As a solution, Racket can work toward hiring a full-time communications manager starting January 2023. This person would be accountable to Racket co-owners and would be responsible for managing Racket's social media presence, planning event marketing opportunities and coordinating sponsorships, building and leveraging community relations, designing and implementing advertising campaigns, and handling some of the backend duties of the website as well as customer service. Having a Racket staff member handle Racket's advertising could make an impact for the organization. Due to the line of separation that is needed between advertising and editorial departments in news organizations, Racket is currently outsourcing filling its advertising space to a third party. While this maintains a degree of separation, a third party agency will not have the same level of in-depth knowledge about Racket's needs, and its audience, as a Racket staff member would have. Bringing advertising in-house could help fill those gaps.

## Evaluation

### Forming/Shaping Attitudes and Opinions

To evaluate the forming and shaping of attitudes and opinions, I propose that Racket utilize interviews, surveys, and other qualitative research methods. There are several ways that Racket can begin to gather this type of information. First, Racket's already-established "Ask Racket" series is an excellent way to gauge what types of content readers are interested in or may want more of. Racket could make "Ask Racket" a recurring series that happens four times a year in order to consistently audit what readers are interested in.

Another benefit of having a Racket Communications Manager would be to oversee public relations. Racket may be a media organization, but the media apparatus is still an important stakeholder to Racket, and it is in Racket's interest to maintain these relationships. Groups that frequently operate within the media apparatus include influential opinion leaders in the Twin Cities media landscape; business owners, activists and group leaders; government officials; and public relations coordinators for large organizations with interests in the Twin Cities. Richardson, et al. describes media relations as a "multi-lane highway" with one direction of traffic flowing from journalists to public relations practitioners for help in their reporting, another direction flowing from practitioners to journalists where practitioners submit press releases and story ideas to journalists in hopes of publication, and a multitude of short-cuts intervening this flow with the advent of digital and social media (Richardson, 2015, p. 81). When a person is considering going on the record to discuss something of news value or when breaking news occurs, Racket should be included in the mix of media options for public relations practitioners and public figures to turn to. We'll know we have achieved this goal if Racket's inbox sees an increase in the number of press releases, interview opportunities, story ideas, and

exclusive offers. While it's ultimately an editorial decision whether or not any of these opportunities are deemed fit to pursue and potentially report on, one way to measure Racket's growing profile in the community is the level of inbound queries and requests it receives.

### **Changing Behavior**

Digital metrics form the basis of measuring changing behavior. To measure the communications objective of increasing awareness, I would recommend Racket tracks email subscription rates. This will give the organization the most clear indication that its introduction to new audiences is resonating as they sign up to receive the email newsletter. Racket's goal of increasing awareness must bring new audiences into the membership funnel, and email subscription rates play an important role in that process. Another metric related to evaluating behavior change is the email subscriber-to-membership ratio. This metric will capture how many email subscribers are persuaded to convert to becoming paying members.

Racket can also track the number of new followers on its social media pages to measure awareness. To ensure that social media views are leading to new email subscribers, Racket should frequently promote its landing page to sign up for the newsletter on its social channels. Thus, the communications manager should have knowledge and enthusiasm surrounding promoting a business channel on social media. The manager would utilize social media listening tools and content performance dashboards to monitor performance on social media.

Racket's "Ask Racket" web series also offers opportunities to increase engagement. I propose establishing a quarterly "Ask Racket" series, which is proven to drive comments. This can also cut across channels: Racket can ask readers to write in their questions to Racket on social media, as a prompt at the bottom of each article for the week leading up to the series, and even create a separate landing page on the website for readers to submit their questions

any time of the year that Racket can then mine for its quarterly series. A small, but meaningful, behavior change would be if a regular Racket reader left a question for Racket when they have not previously interacted with Racket. Thus, the number of comments associated with the “Ask Racket” series compared to regular periods is another metric to measure engagement. The communications manager can also spearhead new, multimedia ways for people to interact with Racket, such as through the moderation of an interactive, live-streamed Q&A.

### Measuring KPIs

A central focus of the communications manager will be to oversee KPIs and data-driven marketing measurement. Key messages, along with their corresponding metrics for success, are provided below.

Objective	Key Messages	Channels / Location	Key Performance Indicators
To increase awareness and introduce Racket to a new audience of readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Do you miss City Pages? Then you MUST read Racket.”</li> <li>- “Punchy, pertinent Twin Cities news”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Website: Newsletter signup landing page</li> <li>- Social media (paid and owned)</li> <li>- Out-of-home ads</li> <li>- Events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organic search visibility</li> <li>- The number of unique viewers to site</li> </ul>
Metrics	Reporting Method	Cadence	Benchmarks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organic sessions</li> <li>- Branded keyword searches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Google Analytics</li> <li>- CRM (e.g. HubSpot)</li> <li>- Content performance (e.g. BuzzSumo)</li> </ul>	Year-round reporting offers unlimited opportunities for new reach. Audit quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Site reaches backlink ranking of 60-100</li> <li>- Articles consistently reach a goal number of page views</li> </ul>

Figure 17: Summary of KPIs for increasing awareness

Objective	Key Messages	Channels / Location	Key Performance Indicators
To increase engagement and deepen brand affinity among existing Racket readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Tell your Minnesota story”</li> <li>- “Voice your support”</li> <li>- “Ask Racket”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Email newsletter</li> <li>- Social media (owned)</li> <li>- Website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social engagement levels</li> </ul>
Metrics	Reporting Method	Cadence	Benchmarks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comments</li> <li>- Shares</li> <li>- Submissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social media insights tools</li> <li>- Website insights tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quarterly “Ask Racket” series</li> <li>- Monthly submissions requests</li> <li>- Twice annual “Gift” a Racket membership campaign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gifted membership sales</li> <li>- Amplification of Racket stories</li> <li>- Number of new contributors</li> </ul>

Figure 18: Summary of KPIs for increasing engagement

### Takeaways for the Future

As the Media Funding Model outlines, the most precarious part of starting a new media organization is not the launch but rather the “getting over the hump” period, where staffing and capital constraints can hamper the organization’s ability to grow and scale. My proposed solution for Racket to overcome this hurdle, common in nearly all new media ventures, is to hire a full-time communications manager. Team expansion will open Racket to additional capabilities, leading to team growth through organizational maturity. The Strategic Management Model (Figure 18) provides a framework for ensuring Racket’s communications objectives are rooted in its strategic vision. In returning to the audience profiles, news curators want a different viewpoint on Twin Cities news and happenings. And those alt-weekly romantics? They want City Pages back, but a better version of it. And co-producers—the people who have stories of their own to tell about the city they live in—they want to join forces with Racket. A cohesive communications plan emphasizing long-term performance can reach them all.



Figure 19: Strategic Management Model (Wheelen, 2018)

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## Appendix A: Interview Transcripts

### Em Cassel, Racket Co-Founder

Q1: First can I hear a little bit about you, how did you get into journalism as a career?

In high school I had a solid idea of what I wanted to do or study/plan on doing. Things I was good at: reading and writing. Looking for a way to apply that to a career and English degree. On a whim, I went to Northeastern University and had friends in the journalism program. Freelanced a bit, worked at a bookstore. I would talk to people a lot. I started working at a Boston magazine that came out every other month— hyper-local journalism alternative media.

Q2: What set City Pages apart from other alt-weekly newspapers? How did its closing go down?

It felt as abrupt for us as it did for everyone else. Certainly we had some understanding that the pandemic that was a huge drain on our finances. As the editorial staff we don't really touch the financial part of it we knew. 90% of the advertisers were bars/venues/restaurants. All of the people whose income disappeared. It really dried up our revenue stream as a whole. Certainly we were aware things were not rosy. We kind of hunkered down we moved to zoom. We readjusted. We shifted our areas of coverage. We tried to find ways to write about our beats and still do that even though a lot was not happenin. I thought we pretty successfully shifted our coverage and proud of our resiliency. march- then that october of that year we were told quite suddenly in one of those surprise meetings that this is it. Part of the reason it felt so jarring is because no discussion of what it would look like if we moved online or stopped printing for a period of time. It seemed like there were options worth exploring but conversations never happened.

Q3: What were those first conversations about starting Racket like?

Very first conversation that we ever had what if – literally happened the day we were laid off. Ok what would it look like if we tried to start something else. What would do we think we could feasibly do. Does anyone have any interest in this. At that time it was still so fresh and still in shock we were saying and thinking so much i can't believe we lost our jobs twin cities lost this institution a lot going on mentally at the same time. Started to consider what would be possible right after the holiday season that year. Really thought about what i would want 2021 to look like. I reached out to all the former editors putting some feelers out there. We talked about this when we got this news does anyone really want to try to do it. I personally don't have anything to lose. I would be on board to revisit it. Still interested - jay jessica keith. Some people left journalism some went to star tribune. Let's start something new.

Q4: How do you divide up the tasks?

Having all been editors at CP before everyone kind of already had a beat. That's a pretty good place to start. We at least have these 4 areas of coverage figured out and we do really well and a little bit of a hole in the local journalism community that we can do really well in your own voice but we didn't want it to be a thing where everyone was pigeon holed. News feature, food feature kind of all over the place. What are you interested in covered. What stories do you feel are uncovered. It kind of worked pretty well. Jessica oversees best events of the week and freeloader friday. I do mostly do food stuff. Keith weekly music and news digest flyover. It started with here is what we do and we'll do it but also pretty.

Em- some of the obvious stuff – outreach sending emails to our subscribers and people who are not yet subscribers keep in touch with those people and maintain a friendly relationship with them. Something we didn't have at city pages bc we were all advertising based. It's a completely different business model. How much do we want to be reaching out and how much do they want to be reached out. Day to day business stuff which i am not a business person things like keeping track of our subscribers and the rates that they're subscribing at and making sure they're seeing what is resulting in page views and driving subscribers. Some of this stuff you can kind of do with data and google analytics and intangible. Why did we get 30 new subscribers. Stuff like- we do a deal if you subscribe accomplice level Jay sends. Jessica is doing alot of the budgeting stuff and making sure our freelance writers are getting paid every week and where things go in quickbooks. A lot of tools are time consuming and take a lot of effort. What about keith? Set up some meetings ashley ryan at first ave what it would look like marketing standpoint. Dakota jazz lounge ticket giveaways community building goodwill nurturing.

Q5: Why no physical copy?

Due to a couple factors. For one, it's really expensive to put out a print product. Its not getting cheaper cost of news print going up requires a lot of additional coordination and distribution who is driving it who is coordinating those pickups that is a two person job. There are only 4 of us. We definitely considered it. If we are going to try to carry the spiritual torch does it makes sense to get some startup funds to get a print product and the answer is just kind of no. sahan journal, mn reformer, eater twin cities– people are used to having news that they can trust that's only online and we're still in the middle of a pandemic. Did it make sense to try to be coordinating with 100 twin cities. It just seemed like lower overhead less coordinating.

Q6: What are the benefits to being writer-owned? What are the benefits to being reader-funded?

Core part of our brand identity. One thing we talked about a lot is this really unfortunate truth that we were a union shop. Cp and st were unionized newspaper guild. You would think would provide you with a certain amt of protection but in the end it didn't save us. You can have a lot

of warm feelings about unions but at the end of the day we didn't own city pages but it could be taken away from us. You don't have any say in what happens. We were having conversations would you sell us city pages, would you sell social media channels? Newsletter lists? NO! Really disheartening all of that work and time completely disappear and I think it was really important for us to drive home when you read Racket that is publication written and edited but also owned and operated by its writers. Crucial thing to drive home.

We definitely have your writer owned reader funded right there on Instagram. Four writers. 4300 total newsletter subscribers not terrible for 5 months but not anywhere near the numbers we had at city pages but in some ways it's a good thing – we saw a lot of hate clicks who logged on to talk shit do a little light hate speech. Good and bad things – one of the bad things is people know who you are and go out of their way to harass and complicate your work. What we have at Racket instead is a couple thousand really dedicated readers who seem really invested in the work we're doing slow growth – it will be nice to have all those eyeballs. We are building the audience we want to have. Some nice things about that. We get friendly emails every week from readers and such a polar opposite experience –

For now certainly our focus is being very local – for one, if we're going to convince people if this is a worthy thing then it needs to be really relevant to them. It would be awesome if nationwide people read it but at this point we're keeping it very local and very intentionally. Over time I could see that changing, our music criticism kind of transcends location and I could definitely see that happening again it won't

Q7: What is Racket's biggest goal right now?

Initial goal – what we wanted at the outset that it was enough that we would be financially sustained at least the four of us could do full time in addition to paying our freelancers and we would be we are not quite there. We need more subscribers to get us to that point. I do some writing for Vice and Success Magazine and between the two I can work 40 hours a week at Racket and sneak in some freelance work. The first goal for I'm not really all that stressed out about it yet and ideally over time it will become something where that is the case where we get more subscribers every month and I'm hopeful and pretty confident that we will reach that point at some point. Racket is running at a reliable rhythm for the four of us – is that bringing on new staff member, investing in new areas of coverage. First hurdle – making this a full time position.

**Jay Boller, Racket Co-Founder**

Q1: How did you get into this line of work?

Hubbard School of Journalism Twin Cities, then the daily arts and entertainment desk post-college. I freelanced a bit and was hired to work at VitaMN. Then, Star Tribune acquired City Pages and I was the music editor there for 2 years, web editor 3 years.

Q2: What stories do you like to report on and write about?

I'm a Swiss army knife – anything that's interesting, I will report on. Two things I've honed in on:  
1. Frivolous real estate housing 2. Labor union activity

Q3: I'm wondering if you could sort of walk me through a typical day.

- Social media duties 25/25/25/25 we each one day or 1 ½ days
- Workhorse reporter type guy and quickly churning them out – i have the most bylines
- Jessica and Keith really gifted editors massaging pitches. Jessica defaulted to her roles as event calendar, things to do, and write about. Keith is the music guy and the writer of the flyover - aggregation roundup. Em is the food editor.
- My days are as point person, lawyer, and developer. I'm the emailer – the guy who speaks on behalf of the other three when it came to backend business things. I spearheaded all of those. I like the behind-the-scenes stuff; pay the invoices. Jessica has taken on the role as bookkeeper and paying freelancers.

Q4: Do you do any marketing?

Very minimal; we need to ramp up marketing efforts. It didn't occur to us to do a launch party. We had big nylon signs printed with our name and website and sold a lot of merch. I reached out to a company for a giant billboard: \$1200 for a fair amount of billboard time. We've paid to boost a few Facebook posts but not had great success at that. Largely social media and word of mouth.

Q5: Roughly what proportion of your funding is subscribers?

We worked with Alley Interactive in NY – they're the guys that helped launch Defector. They built our website and designed our logo. We check in every month or so and see how things are going with their tech team. In exchange they get 10% adv. and 10% sub. 3-year.

Their whole thing is to boost our numbers which we boost as well. They help us determine how to acquire people. Initially we started with way too many free page views. The main guy was on paternity leave and an engineer guy filled in. I think a lot of stuff didn't get communicated. We now have two free views then email then four thereafter each month. We made the switch in October.

The goal is four decent paying jobs and **4,000 subscribers** by August. By month since our launch we've added 905, 184, 132, 109, 205, 81 members. Adding about 200 customers a month. Our MRR (monthly recurring revenue) is about ~6600 a month.

Q6: When do you hope to reach 4,000 benchmark?

As quickly as possible. We were afraid of hitting a wall – we're in the 10th biggest media market.

Q7: I'm curious if we were to segment Racket's audience... how would you segment it? Key demographic qualities, behaviors etc?

I wish we knew more about that. The journalism/twitter environment in the Twin Cities—we've definitely reached everyone in that small bubble. That's good because it's not insignificant.

In brief email exchanges, I look at the signature and see what fields they work in: academia, people who work in restaurants.

Google analytics page up most of us: audience and overview is 37% male 62% female 35-44. We're not an ideological project but the online left finds us.

Q8: What does Racket want to achieve and by when? What do you need?

Immediate turn: we don't want to go get real jobs. Four sustainable careers at a minimum. We'd like to add a staff member with a news-oriented focus. None of us came from hard news. We'd like to up our freelance budget. Great if something became a local standby institution. Everything is a big scramble to make the thing function. Pretty bogged down - more time to think and breathe would be needed.

Q9: What is the biggest challenge you face?

Totally honest: bank balance. To be paying ourselves 30,000 salaries, we've taken a dramatic pay cut but looking to increase it.

Product is good – but nobody knows about it – we need more brand recognition and awareness – that would translate. Getting the word out in a way that isn't cost-prohibitive and being really smart about it. Strategies – get the word out. We all have sizable social media followings—retweeting and sharing, leveraging and sharing combined can help.

Q10: What does Racket's social media activity look like?

We have Tiktok, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. We average 4-5 stories a day, comment and link per story. We spend about 5 minutes per post or 30 minutes a day. More time consuming—repost twitter through a service called Buffer. Everything gets tweeted twice per day. Sunday schedule.

Q11: What is Racket's position on advertising at present?

We're in a frustrating spot. Our ad firm is not especially competent and the market for ads is not great for now. It can be lucrative. But, if racket could be saved overnight, all of those spots we could effectively pay our salaries and they're overwhelmingly not filled out. Also, the reader-funded model: we're asking people to pay to use the website and not making the experience suffer.

Don't have a ton of confidence in the firm, but we're not having these discussions to keep us on the editorial side. If and when someone contacts us, "here's our contact at our ad firm," which is great to have that degree of separation.

### **Keith Harris, Racket Co-Founder**

Q1: how did you get into this line of work?

Backed into it – published first in my late 20s. Didn't set out to do journalism; english major and took a couple years to sort things through. All during that time, I was interested in writing about music. A big fan of reading alt weeklys like the Village Voice, City Pages shaped what I wanted to do. Grew up in New Jersey, moved to Minneapolis in 1997. In a year, writing music reviews for City Pages as it kind of expanded in a stylistically free way.

Q2: What stories do you like to report on and write about?

Definitely my core— because we're so small we kind of do whatever is in front of us. We're not divided up into different verticals that way. I was a music editor, so every day I had to have music stories. The thing is, there are some days nothing really pressing, but something needs to be done somewhere else. Bring an arts criticism voice over to the Flyover newsletter. – news stuff every day. It's fun for me.

Q3: Is the goal for Racket to be similar or different from City Pages?

What's good about that as the foundation is that people paid attention to us when we started. We had people subscribing before we published which would have been a lot harder if people didn't know where we were coming from. Not just subscriptions but coverage. Because of the way city pages ended we had good will behind us too. It was still fresh enough in people's minds that they felt like – city pages bad mouthed it all the time when it was around but then how are

we gonna live without city pages. We had that sort of sympathy vote. There also was the sense that there was some sort of gap that was left. People kind of knew what they were getting.

Q4: Is there a downside?

At first, I was concerned that there might be a sense of people's expectations being too high for a staff of four people. "We thought we were getting CP but we're getting this." We don't have the capacity to do everything. I was concerned that that might be a letdown to some people but it hasn't seemed to be. If anything it's been pretty much a net positive.

I think it's a point now where we don't really have to cultivate it. To the extent that we're getting word of mouth coverage when we're describing them. It's not a problem. It gives people a way to orient themselves and figure out what we are. The only thing i could see down the road if it gets to a point where we're compared negatively to CP then that's bad. But until then, it's not the whole of our identity but a significant formative aspect of it. It doesn't hurt us, it puts us in a tradition that is informative to people.

Q5: Is there anything that Racket does differently from City Pages?

Just in terms of resources, yeah we weren't able to do everything. I think there were— like any sort of pub that's been around forever, it was a million different things. There were times where certain editors or writers there would be really clickbaity for years and that really hurt the brand — just kind of click-for-click's-sake sleaziness. And that was something by the end we had purged at CP. We had turned the ship around but that was definitely something that haunts us. "Sleazy CP years" — this is something we realized we would not do with Racket. But bring in good numbers, like a concert announcement— there wasn't as much need for us to do— traffic numbers were good but not live or die. The filler stories that kind of stand out on the site — we're the ones that would put the pressure there. It doesn't seem necessary to have those fillers. Goes back to having people own their verticals.

Q6: Is the focus Minnesota readers or Twin Cities readers as your audience?

Well, obviously, it's nice to have everybody read you. There are only so many people here. Probably Minnesota, but someone living in the twin cities would be especially interested in. We're not hyperlocal in a neighborhood focused way. We are metro-wide at the very least. Our readership is Twin Cities metropolitan area. To the extent that they're interested in stuff that happens state-wide, we're broad enough. I think we still have room to grow in the metro, in terms of membership.

Q7: Are there people who are following Racket but not subscribing?

We have people reading who are not subscribing. People who are subscribed to newsletters but not subscribing. That's not unusual - oh yeah. The one thing we did was we tightened our pay wall. When we started we were giving like 10 free stories a month which made sense bc we were new but we've tightened it down to 3 a month. Really obvious move for us to make. In terms of growing beyond that it gets tricky. Right now we are at a stage where our growth is constant. Don't know exact numbers and that feels nice. Obviously it would be great if we had a huge leap but we're kind of growing at a pace that feels healthy. Another thing that's nice is we have a readership that likes us – we had the nice process of starting with a core audience that's really on board. As we're growing I guess eventually you'd get to a point where the audience likes most of what you're doing. We're growing but we're not swamped with a mass audience.

We did a sale. We did \$.99 for the first month – don't know who stuck around but we got a good response. But if a quarter of those stuck around, that's good. Promotions have been staggered.

Q8: How do you divide up the workload?

We all do it together. Jay takes the lead in implementing. Something we all discuss together. We're not business people. This is really our first attempt at doing this. We're kind of going a lot on instinct.

We're a four-person team. Kind of how we worked before. If you're gonna start a business taking four people who worked together well and transferring them to a different environment is a great way to do it. The business is new, but daily operations are not that different. There are fewer of us. We don't have anyone to answer to. In terms of process, it's really very similar. G-chat driven. Something about working in chat that's different than coming to a consensus in person. It feels much less guarded.

Q9: Em mentioned that you spearhead some of the community-building efforts. Could you talk about that?

On the music side, it's obviously weird time. We are looking to do sponsorship stuff to get our name out there. One of the things I do is a show listings page – a weekly roundup of local music news. Here's where it's like – here's a resource for you – so please know that we exist – give us the information – in terms of community-building, we want to be useful to you.

I'd like to be better at replying to emails – I'm inundated with here's my band, here's this. At a place like CP I was hit with emails and I don't have time to talk to everybody. I think we're at a stage now we need to be more attentive. "Well we can't do this right now and thank you for acknowledging that we're here." But right now we don't. It's not really a part of the job you can delegate it – emails just take time.



In terms of our growth, we're at this point where we are still concerned about growing the product itself. So, we have outsourced some of our ad work to an outside person. But to bring someone on to do that, I don't know, I mean at some point we might have to say "is this worth doing." One thing we are starting from is we all have complete control over what we're doing.

Q10: Who or what are some of Racket's influences?

The main influence for us in terms of style – Defector is at the forefront of this. This writer-driven journalism. Ideas? We keep our eyes out in some ways we're more influenced by what's not out there. Here's how – "Strib covered something but they left this out" – that's kind of where we step in, fill in the cracks by how things are not being covered. Basic journalism thing of what's missing here. There's always going to be something missing. Find it and articulate it in a way that's interesting to you.

Q11: What about your influences as a writer?

I come from a tradition of alt-weekly music writers and the Village Voice. Those are the writers that I started reading and writing like. In that sense, that's the world that made me. In terms of writing otherwise, I'm drawn to a kind of excess. I'm not a made journalist. Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol. I like words and I like them doing stuff. My impulse is to add to in a way where journalism takes from. To be plainspoken. The nice balance is I started writing for print and you only had so many words to fit. That balance of wanting to really play and not have a word to spare is kind of what gave my writing shape.

Today, the highest compliment one Racket staffer can get from another is "That's a real Racket story"—in other words, something you're not gonna see in another publication around here. Whenever a Strib article or TV news segment leaves you feeling like something's been left out, we want to be the ones to fill in the blanks.

**Jessica Armbruster, Racket Co-Founder**

Q1: How did you get into this line of work?

Always something in my mind. Macalester college english major/comm major. A lot of different options. Editorial administrator. Kind of able to watch what was going on in the office. Dip a toe into writing. That really works well with journalism. Kind of felt like a good fit.

Q2: What stories do you like to report on and write about?

I'm a pretty open person – dating myself 22 years into my career – but I stick to visual art as my beat; graffiti art, protest art. Literature, dance, theater. Arts & culture. Food and drink writing.

Q3: I'm wondering if you could walk me through a typical day.

It varies—a lot of hanging out on a laptop. Wake up in the morning and copy-edit what people handed in overnight. Chat on Gchat. What is on my plate this week - writing/interviewing, meeting people for coffee. Sitting on laptop, checking news, checking email. Promoting stuff on social media.

Some things that are split between us depending on the day. Bigger story on Wednesday can change from week to week. Some things stay the same – Em, food. Jay, social media. Me, arts. Keith, music. I do a lot of the money handling, such as “this freelancer needs to get paid.” I used to do that at City Pages.

Q4: What have some of your friends or family members said about Racket?

I think they're excited; it's genuinely touching. I think there are a lot of really good supporters, smaller news orgs trying to do good work and from a different perspective from the dailies. I didn't know what to expect but I was surprised.

Q5: What does Racket do differently from City Pages?

City Pages was around for so long that we had some really great editors and writers. We luckily haven't made any missteps yet—we're also not as big. Forty years of putting out a newspaper—there's different generations that CP meant diff things to them. Tone/aging out/the direction that it took. It did go through a bunch of ownership changes. Time can create hostility and animosity when so many people work for CP at different points. They had some missteps in articles.

Q6: What are some of the common characteristics among your core audience?

I think there's a lot of people in the twin cities who are very well-read and very open to reading from a lot of different sources. There tends to be pretty good support among people who are doing something different. The dailies are really important, but people are interested in other perspectives and sources as well. They might look for something a little more digestible. We tend to look at things a little differently from a daily. I think a lot of smaller publications do that. There's a time and place.

There probably are people who read both Axios and Racket. Other people who curate news feed—Axios is considered a chain. Corporate emails and all kinds of wild stuff. SOUTHWEST VOICES is another. It's kind of nice that you have the opportunity to find tone and type of approach. The Twin Cities has always been like that. When I first started working there was The

Pulse, The Onion, the Strib's VitaMN— it kind of ebbs and flows depending on the industries. I think a lot of times it's finding a feasible business model. For me personally, I feel like we're going through another smaller era of independent media. Everyone is very excited and supportive of other people's projects. I want more competition and a strong industry.

Q7: How do you think subscribers are reading Racket?

Newsletter pretty high open rate and pretty decent clickthrough rate. The Analytics page shows us how things are doing – a lot of it is coming from social media as well which is reassuring. You kind of feel like you're throwing things into a void. At CP we had thousands and thousands of people reading so it's been reassuring to see that we're consistently building. I know we have a lot of people who are reading us on mobile phones and iPads, sitting on a bus/bar.

We're such a baby organization. As someone who, at CP I helped organize when we were first starting our blogs. Zero blog readers for art and food – it often takes a while building stories getting the coverage is going to look like. Finding those stories that readers want to read. It was kind of hard to sell it at first but the more we're part of the local discourse you start adding more and more people because they think "I know this product." You can only rely on CP nostalgia so much. Part of it's gotta be look at the product building up over the time.

Q8: I also talked to Jay and he said another area to look at would be to convert some newsletter subscribers to becoming members. What do members get that subscribers don't?

We're figuring out the ropes and this year has been really educational for me. This thing that I've learned — this sounds kind of ridiculous, but part of the exciting thing is the four of us are the bosses. We've had the biggest learning experiences. Mostly that and getting a feel for our voice. We have that but it's got to grow and mature over time and as a baby organization, build the next levels of content.

Q9: Anything you've identified you'd like Racket to get better at addressing?

I think that right now we're kind of getting a feel for tone and content and place and otherwise we're working on appealing to advertisers and ways to bring in new readers. We've kind of gotten the base group of people enthusiastic and now we've got to find ways to reach out to new people. We've talked about adding down the line, maybe more staffers, an actual calendar, bandwidth. We've got to consider how we can expand and grow.

## Appendix B: Racket Audience Survey Responses

Imagine you're talking to someone who had never heard of Racket. How would you describe Racket to them?
Better than Star Tribune
Former City Pages editors entirely reader-funded and writer-owned.
It's a multi-faceted news source, they cover everything.
Similar to former city pages
Open, real, informative, humorous
Modern city pages, village voice
Great alternative news and commentary outlet
City Pages meets early Gawker meets early Gothamist, only without the comment section
"The new City Pages" - it just makes the most sense to most people!
Better City Pages
City Pages but better
Like City Pages, but online only.
Better and funnier than the Star Tribune
Another point of view that is willing to say and cover things bigger publications won't. Good local insight.
Like City Pages freed from corporate
City Pages
Like an alternative weekly, except online
The successor to city pages, except without the star tribune ownership to worry about.
It is a progressive Twin Cities based news outlet, and the successor to City Pages.
local entertainment news
The new version of city pages
A quirky, truthful telling of the Twin Cities story
The old City Pages
CityPages without the ads
remember city pages?
The Breakfast Club of City Pages.
Independent news
Ex-City Pages staffers go independent
its the new city pages but more fun and an even better pulse on whats interesting to me
Rag tag group of journalists that talk about all the Mpls shit you love and hate
kinda like city pages but not quite
City pages 2.0
It's like the local paper, but written by the funniest drunk guy at the bar.

Online alt daily
It's an online only, crowd sourced, local "alt-weekly" but with curated stories and short commentaries updated daily.
It rose from the ashes of City Pages, so it has an alt-weekly feel.
Minneapolis alt news site
Alt weekly but online
Old city pages writers but way funnier and better now
Fun alt weekly plus good journalism
It's an alt weekly but online
Digital version of an old-school alt weekly
The new City Pages
Cool and fun and funny information about Minneapolis
Citypages
Local, honest, independent news and commentary about shit that matters... and some that doesn't still needs attention!
Unshackled alt weekly news.
Local Minneapolis news outlet that does a lot of interesting pieces on local events/issues
It's like City Pages used to be
If City Pages and Rolling Stone had a love child
The city pages you miss, but leaner and scrappier
Alternative news
Alternative newspaper founded by folks from city Pages.
City Pages updated.
Reliable independent source of important Minnesota news.
Alternative
An alt weekly but now online!
A small, scrappy e-publication that fills a niche in the Twin Cities not much covered by other media.
Sort of where mainstream news, arts news, under the radar news meet with a irreverent alt take on it.
Local news and commentary, but not uptight about it
an alt-weekly with a broken printer
City Pages replacement that's online only.
It's like the City Pages is back.
"remember how cool the tC Reader was? This is it,now!"
CityPages but better
Local indie journalism that goes in depth when necessary and has a fun voice.
A hyper local internet alt weekly who hates shitty bosses as much as we do
New City Pages, with the old writers

The easy way first: "Remember City Pages? Way better." Otherwise, "local reporting by journalists who've been here doing it for years; but rather than stay restricted by corporate overlords and billionaire interests, created their own small company to do it."
Similar focus as City Pages as far as original content on art/culture/food, while writing on local news and also keeping one in the loop by sourcing other locals like Sahan Journal, etc
Alternative news source focused on people and worker-centric stories
City pages but actually independent
local alt-weekly replacement, created by staff before alt-weekly closed down by The Man
CityPages but better
I say that it's the successor to city pages - if they don't know what that is, I say that its an alt newspaper.
Like an alt-weekly but also like a blog.
If they were familiar with the former City Pages, I would tell them that it is "the best of the former City Pages" If there weren't familiar with it, I would tell them it is "a great source of information and news that you need to start a conversation with any stranger". (That probably reveals more about me than I should share!)
It was founded by ex City Pages staffers as a place to keep publishing quirky stories about the Twin Cities, alongside some hard-hitting news/commentary
The successor to the City Pages. But you have to pay for it. Which you should.
It's the best part of City Pages distilled and scaled up. Its signature is a consistent level of quality, which means you don't have to filter your decisions on whether to read an article based on your interest in the headline. It's a manageable volume of content so you can stay all the way caught up without much effort.
A digital/newsletter continuation of City Pages
City Pages, but without the Star Tribune overlords.
Twin Cities news source about local news and curated events that is fun to read
Interesting and irreverent news/stories about people/places/things in the Twin Cities
Snarky honest reporting, full of humor, and very opinionated.
I would say: "Remember the City Pages?" It is like that but in a tighter format that feels more urgent, direct, and poignant.
Independent journalism about the Twin Cities with an alt-weekly bent. Take Defector, scale it to just focus on Minnesota news/arts/alt scene, there you go. It doesn't have the resources of a more established newsroom but it's targeted to the Twin Cities and provides a voice that's less tied down / formal / corporate than traditional newspaper publishing.
The local alt weekly
City Pages, but before the Star Tribune bought it and ruined it
Snarky hip.
You get to be aware of the local zeitgeist without having to sift through Twitter
It's like city pages with a better attitude and less content
Left-leaning local news and culture
Opinionated folks who pay more attention to sounding clever with their voice than saying anything substantive with clarity
Remember City Pages? It's just like that but online.

The best parts of city pages but more often, more self-aware, a little wiser, and without the sex ads
it's local news that isn't entirely bootlicking business owner driven bullshit
Local oldster perspective
A new place to find smart writing on local arts and culture--a publication that deserves readers because it has sharp, thoughtful, funny commentary, but also because it's creating a way to do so sustainably.
The news source that picked up where City Pages left off
A fun, very local paper with a good mix of silly and serious content.
An online alt weekly for the Twin Cities
Irreverent takes on Twin Cities day/nightlife, and signs of a willingness to do robust public-interest reporting even though it may rankle powerful institutions.
A looser, more hipster city-pages.
It is a local news outlet written by people that feel like friends, neighbors, or the regulars you see at all your favorite spots that you may never talk to, but you know you would get along with them if you did. They care so deeply about the area and what happens in it, and that passion comes through immediately in every article they write. The site is essential and hilarious and so important to our community.
The alternative weekly on my phone
It's the best parts of city pages, bro
Racket is an online magazine about the twin cities
Irreverent local journalism that doesn't bleep out swear words.
The rebirth of city pages founded by the people who made it after the srib pulled the plug on them unexpectedly, grassroots, hyperlocal, alternative news
It's like the city pages, but no print version
Like City Pages but better
I'd tell them it's an online version of the independent newspapers that -- like City Pages -- use to be a part of every major metro city. It has a lot of stories on things to do and a tabloid-like approach to its news coverage. (Tabloid-like in attitude, but I trust their journalism.)
It's good reporting but also has a bit of a Mad Magazine wise-ass vibe to it
An independent news site that writes about interesting things they want to write about.
"Remember City Pages? When that ended those reporters created Racket and do the same thing. Now I pay to read it."
Like the City Pages, but smaller and more independent.
the good parts of City Pages
New City Pages/Reader
Racket tells the stories that you want to hear. And Racket tells the story to you like you are their friend - real language and no sugar coating.
Local alt website
City Pages Edgy little sister
It's a fun news source for Minneapolis with creative and diverse stories.
Like the city pages but edgier

Honest, local, independent news
If they're a Twin Cities person, I'd describe it as "the new City Pages, but better because they're no longer under the thumb of the Star Tribune." If they're not local, I'd call it the Twin Cities newsletter.
A cool Minneapolis news outlet with fun stuff but also more hard-hitting stuff.
Punchy and pertinent.
new/online incarnation of a local alt circular
The people from city pages made their own local newspaper after being laid off. They do dining reviews and talk about events
"Former alt-weekly editors making good use (and good content) of their freedom"
Hyper local journalism, alternative media
The alt-weekly that covers important local angles while also being an antagonist & community gossip.
A writer-owned, reader-funded website with local news features and events founded by former City Pages staff.
A glib independent local news outlet
Remember and miss CityPages? Then you MUST read Racket.
A reimagined alt weekly that's worth your time.
Local blog/newsletter/news service that does interesting stories focused on people, away from mainstream media, and connected to and with a lot of the folks I like. Stories about music, food, people, culture, and other things that give a good feel and vibe of the city. If the folks have been in Minneapolis a while, I also share that it's from the CityPages folks, which explains a lot.
Hyper local news, great editorial voice, lots of focus on arts and entertainment. (I rarely read City Pages back in the day, except for Dan savage, but I'd probably describe it as the spiritual successor, if I thought that would make sense to the other person.)
A wry alt-weekly that covers music, art, and politics in the Twin Cities. (RIP City Pages)
Basically like a smaller, weirder, better City Pages. Hyper local news you can't find anywhere else.
Random stories about mn and events going on nearby
Local journalism with edgy takes and sharp humor
Local, irreverent news (or, nouveau City Pages, if they know what that is)
City pages writers banded together.
Good journalism for greater Minneapolis-St. Paul news and events. No BS.
hyperlocal online newspaper covering the more interesting, odd topics, and events
Local independent newspaper rising from the ashes of CityPages



## Appendix C: Event Marketing Calendars

**JUL 2022**

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					01	02
03	04	05	06	07	08	09
10 Open Streets Franklin	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19 Minneapolis Aquatennial	20 Twin Cities Summer Jam Minneapolis Aquatennial	21 Twin Cities Summer Jam Minneapolis Aquatennial	22 Twin Cities Summer Jam Minneapolis Aquatennial	23 Twin Cities Summer Jam Minneapolis Aquatennial
24	25	26	27	28	29 Loring Park Art Festival	30
31 Loring Park Art Festival						

# AUG 2022

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	01	02	03	04	05	06
				Fringe Festival	Fringe Festival Uptown Art Fair	Fringe Festival Uptown Art Fair Powderhorn Art Fair
07	08	09	10	11	12	13
Fringe Festival Uptown Art Fair Powderhorn Art Fair	Fringe Festival	Fringe Festival	Fringe Festival	Fringe Festival	Fringe Festival	Fringe Festival Open Streets East Lake Nershfest
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Fringe Festival						Renaissance Festival
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Renaissance Festival			MN State Fair	MN State Fair	MN State Fair	MN State Fair Renaissance Festival
28	29	30	31			
MN State Fair Renaissance Festival	MN State Fair	MN State Fair	MN State Fair			