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Workshop Report

By

Achal Mehra
CAF-AMIC-NPI Workshop on
MANAGEMENT OF SMALL NEWSPAPERS
Kathmandu, 13-18 September 1987

WORKSHOP REPORT

by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre for the
Communication Assistance Foundation

Report prepared by
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Workshop Director

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MANAGEMENT OF SMALL NEWSPAPERS
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WORKSHOP REPORT

Introduction

The Workshop on Management of Small Newspapers is the second in a series of four workshops that AMIC is organising in Nepal in cooperation with the Nepal Press Institute with financial support from the Communication Assistance Foundation (CAF). The objective of these workshops is to provide basic management skills to managers of small newspapers in the country.

With 472 registered newspapers in 1986, Nepal has a thriving print industry. Most of the newspapers however, have circulations ranging from a few hundred to a couple of thousand. Very few of them are financially viable enterprises and are principally published for social status, political clout, government privileges and other considerations.

The workshops aim to convince the owners/editors/managers of these newspapers that they can in fact run them as economically viable enterprises through proper management. This requires skills in management, marketing, market analysis, newspaper economics, advertising, etc. -- most of which are
alien to the newspaper publishers and which the workshop sought to provide.

Participants

In all, 18 owners, editors and publishers of newspapers, including five from outside Kathmandu participated in the workshop. The newspapers represented included both dailies and weeklies as well as magazines. A complete list of the participants and their affiliations is attached as Appendix 1.

Workshop Faculty

AMIC's Senior Programme Specialist Dr. Achal Mehra served as Workshop Director and resource person. Mr. Sukanta Dey, Chief Executive, International Research Park Laboratories, New Delhi, Mr. Ton van der Kolk, Graphic Technician, Graphic Media Development Center, Netherlands, Mr. Bharat Koirala, Director NPI, and Mr. Gopal Das Shrestha, Chairman, NPI, served as resource persons. Mr. D.H. Adhikari, Executive Secretary, NPI, served as local workshop coordinator.

Programme

The workshop was held at Hotel Yak and Yeti from September 13-18,
1987. A detailed programme is attached as Appendix 2.

At the opening session, Dr. Mehra explained the workshop programme to the participants, emphasising that the workshop was aimed at real problems and hoped to yield tangible results. The workshop sought to discuss not the theory, but the practice of newspaper management, he said.

This was followed by a presentation on small newspapers in Nepal and the importance of newspaper management by Mr. Gopal Das Shrestha, NPI Chairman and chief editor of the English daily Commoner, and NPI Director Mr. Bharat Koirala. Mr. Shrestha said that "We have been practicing management without knowing it." But the time has now come, he said, to exploit new management theories. Management plays a central role in the industry, he said, and could not be ignored. Dr. Achal Mehra discussed examples of small newspapers in other Asian countries and introduced successful community newspapers in Asia. All participants were given an AMIC book titled Five Successful Community Newspapers in Asia. One common characteristic of these newspapers, Dr. Mehra said, was that they had a loyal readership. To get such a readership, he said, a newspaper must convince readers that it is offering a product they need and cannot find elsewhere. Later that day, participants took part in a discussion that sought to identify the problems they face in managing their newspapers.

The following day, Mr. Sukanta Dey explained the principles and practices of sound management, corporate planning, financial management, and marketing
with special emphasis on their application to small newspapers. Efficient management, he said, is the proper utilisation of money, material, labour and time. When marketing his newspaper, he said, a newspaper manager must answer the central marketing question, "Why Should a Reader Buy My Newspaper." He also discussed with them a case study of the *Illustrated Weekly* magazine in India to illustrate newspaper marketing techniques. He also explained revenue earning strategies and newspaper economics, including such terms as fixed and variable costs.

Participants worked on an exercise on newspaper economics, identifying their fixed and variable costs and revenue sources from sales, ads, government subsidies and other jobs. With assistance from Mr. Dey, participants made computations on how the cost was related to their circulation to determine cost-effective circulation levels, optimisation, etc.

On October 13, Mr. Dey discussed with the participants ways to organise their newspapers for better management. Participants were asked to list all the tasks they had to perform at their newspaper and the amount of time they devoted to them. Mr. Dey then discussed ways they could reorder their priorities for efficient management.

Dr. Mehra then discussed ways to identify a newspaper's target audience. Participants worked on an exercise on demographics to identify their readership profile and prepared an ad defining their newspaper's "identity." Dr. Mehra then
spoke on ways to generate story ideas and to write appealing stories. He said good reporting techniques, creative editorial policies and solid research combine to strengthen the editorial product. A newspaper must carve out its readership niche and serve that market, otherwise it is shooting in the dark, he said. He also discussed story structure to demonstrate how writing can be visualised and improved through proper organisation, development of the lead, paragraph and story construction, transitions, human interest, use of quotations and proper language usage. Finally, he discussed the role of market segmentation for boosting circulation and advertisements.

The following day was devoted to newspaper circulation and advertising. Mr. Dey told participants that just as they must ask themselves why a reader should buy their newspaper, they must also ask themselves why an advertiser should advertise in their paper. He also spoke on circulation v. advertising as a source of revenue. Dr. Mehra discussed classified ads and display, feature and special supplement advertising using illustrations drawn from both the Nepali and foreign media. Participants worked on an exercise in which they planned out their advertising strategies with Dr. Mehra. They prepared a list of potential classified advertisers, as well as potential non-government advertisers that they would pursue for advertising at the end of the workshop. They also drew up a list of possible special supplements that the newspaper could run with potential target advertisers. In developing the lists, the participants were instructed to keep in mind their readership profile and the character of the economy of their region.
On September 17, Mr. Ton van der Kolk discussed reproduction processes and presses and new technologies for small publications, principally desk-top publishing. On the following day, he dealt with newspaper design and layout using audio-visuals to explain design and layout concepts. He also explained techniques for making simple illustrations. This was followed by an exercise in newspaper layout and design at which the participants redesigned their newspapers using a grid system and the concepts discussed at the workshop. Several participants said that they were surprised how a little manipulation of the layout improved their newspaper's appearance.

At the concluding session, Dr. Mehra summed up the week's activities and emphasised that all elements of a newspaper must mesh for a successful operation. He exhorted participants to experiment with the ideas they had been exposed to at the workshop. He asked them to begin by developing their readership profile, then identify their newspaper's editorial policy, beef up their product using ideas that had been discussed, identify potential classified and corporate advertisers, and develop a proper distribution network for marketing their newspapers. He also urged them to employ the concepts introduced to them on newspaper planning, budgeting and marketing to streamline their management operations.

He concluded by discussing the success of the monthly magazine Kamana whose editor was among the participants. In two years, the magazine has become the largest circulated magazine in Nepal. Kamana's success, Dr. Mehra said, is not an accident, but the result of relentless effort of a handful of people. He identified
10 factors behind Kamana’s success. These included active newsgathering, innovative management, creative techniques to boost advertising, self-promotion and marketing strategy, reader involvement, human interest, meeting reader needs, pursuit of new ideas, cost-cutting techniques, and the use of market research. He discussed at some length how each of these factors had contributed to Kamana’s success.

The former Director of the Radio Broadcasting Service Development Committee and member of the NPI Board of Directors Mr. Bhogya Prasad Shah distributed certificates to the participants at the closing ceremony, which was attended by other members of the NPI Board.

Evaluation

The workshop received very high marks from the participants. Several of them said they had acquired ideas they planned to pursue at their newspapers. All the participants found the workshop very effective and several expressed interest in a follow-up workshop.

The practical exercises on demographics, boosting advertising, developing story ideas, figuring out their economics and budgets, and redesigning their newspapers scored especially high with participants as they dealt with matters they could utilise at their publications.
So many participants indicated that they would implement ideas they had learned at the workshop that some suggested that a meeting be organised next year at which their experiences in implementing the workshop ideas could be discussed.

In all areas of programme design, presentations by resource persons, workshop facilities, course materials and workshop coordination, participants spoke highly of the workshop. All the participants also rated the relevance of the workshop to their work very high. The only criticism some participants had was that they would have desired more materials to take home at the conclusion of the workshop.

Recommendations

1. The resource persons relied principally on audio visuals and over head projectors (OHP) slides in their presentations. As such, materials handed out to the participants were limited, although some of the more important materials were made available to them, including a book on community newspapers. As participants in the region are still not very familiar with audio visual presentations and are used to lecture notes, it might be desirable at future workshops to make more of the visual materials available to the participants as handouts as well. The strong desire for such materials is a reflection of the success of the workshop in that the participants felt the need for so much of the
material. The use of audio visual materials was highly appreciated by the participants and they should continue to form the training strategy particularly as the level of English of all the participants is not so high.

2. A follow-up meeting of participants to the September workshop should be convened during the next workshop to discuss the experiences of the participants in implementing ideas they acquired at this workshop. This was recommended by several participants. Their experiences would also be useful to participants at the next workshop and one session could be devoted at that workshop to discuss their experiences.

3. Workshops of this nature should be held in other cities in Nepal. Nearly half the newspapers in Nepal are published outside the Kathmandu valley. Although several participants from outside Kathmandu attended this workshop, it would be desirable to take future workshops to other regions of the country.

4. The first workshop in this series relied heavily on lecture materials with the intent of introducing as many new ideas to the participants as possible. By contrast, this workshop focused on practical exercises. This should continue to form the central training strategy as the ultimate objective of these workshops is to persuade participants to actually implement the ideas. It is suggested that sessions on the new technologies be scaled back as most of the publications are so small and their presses so antiquated that most new technologies are outside their means. At the next workshop, perhaps only desk-top publishing and technologies
within the reach of small publishers should be discussed.

5. These workshops are particularly effective as they involve participants at the decision-making level who have the clout to implement new ideas. The workshops thus have the potential to make a strong impact and should be considered for other Asian countries as well.