

# Surprising and Delighting Audiences with Data-driven Content Decisions

## A Q&A about Content Analytics with GateHouse Media

### ABOUT

#### GateHouse Media

GateHouse Media is the preeminent provider of local content and advertising in the small and midsize markets it serves. Its portfolio of products, which includes 404 community publications and more than 350 related websites and six yellow page directories, serves over 128,000 business advertising accounts and reaches approximately 10 million people on a weekly basis.

#### GATEHOUSE MEDIA SITES USING PARSE.LY

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#### NOTABLE METRICS AFTER INTEGRATING PARSE.LY

- Positive growth in page views
- Experienced three-figure percentage increases in social media referral traffic in 2015



#### Parse.ly

*Why did GateHouse Media want to make a switch to a new analytics system?*



#### David Arkin, Senior Vice President of Content and Product at GateHouse Media:

We knew we wanted something that showed more data in real time so editors could start making decisions about what they were going to cover, and how, based on real data. We knew we needed a more dynamic tool than just Google Analytics.

Parse.ly offered several things in the analytics space that stood out: Automated reporting, author data, and a better display of social referrals.



#### *How does Parse.ly fit into decision-making (editorially and otherwise)?*



Editors who have the tool are expected to review their metrics regularly in newsroom meetings. Senior Director of Content Jean Hodges travels to each newsroom and does an in-depth training on analytics and reporting. Director of Digital Content Partnerships Penny Riordan also works closely with sites on the training and implementation side of Parse.ly.

Editors are trained and encouraged to ask things like: “What is popular with our readers that we can do a follow-up on? What is performing better on social than others? Can we adjust the content we post on social to deliver content in that way?” Through reports, reporters and editors can review their own posts to change the way they cover their beats or to see who is sharing their content. The tool is meant to be the key driver in determining what our coverage plans look like on a given day. With that being said, news judgment has to continue to play a role — and it does. While the tool is incredibly important it can’t be the only factor we take into consideration when deciding coverage. It’s a balance for us. Analytics helps to inform our decisions.

## Real-World Examples of How GateHouse Media Properties are Using Parse.ly

**rrstar.com**

*Rockford Register Star (Rockford, IL)* did a feature on a man who collects hats. Surprisingly, it took off on Facebook, so they decided to shoot video of him the next day. They added the video and kept the story alive. Readers loved hearing about this local hat collector.

*Rockford Register Star* noticed that a letter to the editor thanking a local hospital was a hit on social media. They didn't even have the letter on the homepage initially, so they elevated it on their website, and the letter generated thousands of page views. They ended up doing a feature after seeing all of the interest in this NICU unit at the hospital. The feature was shared more than 2,000 times on Facebook, which is a huge number for feature content for this site.

**Ocala  
StarBanner**

Editors at *The Ocala Star Banner (Ocala, FL)* saw some stories over a weekend that were gaining a lot of social referrals, so they moved them back onto the homepage, despite them being older stories. One story reached its peak page views per minute at 9 p.m. on a Sunday night:

**Recordnet.com**  
News worth sharing *online*

In *Stockton, CA*, editors of *The Record* noticed an obituary was garnering more page views than an average obit, and at first they didn't recognize the name as anyone famous in town. Then it dawned on them that it was a man who was at every baseball game — even church softball games — in the city. The obit had 1,000 page views when they figured out who he was, and the audience kept growing. The newsroom asked people to send their memories of “Harvey,” and the editor wrote a touching column. Without Parse.ly, they probably wouldn't have noticed the story at all, let alone as quickly as they did.

**The Ledger**

Editors of *The Ledger (Lakeland, FL)* scoured social media (Facebook, Twitter, and YikYak) after a college student was hit by a car and killed. The young man was lying in the road when he was struck. The story had a lot of page views, so they looked for leads on social media and found a witness to the crash. The follow-up story garnered thousands more in page views.

**How does GateHouse Media use Parse.ly on a daily basis?**

Editors are reviewing metrics in newsroom budget meetings, both in the morning and at the end of the day. Penny Riordan sends out an email to all editors and digital editors listing the top 20 posts sorted by page views across the GateHouse network every day. We also share best practices in that email of sites who are making decisions based on that data. And we send out a monthly top posts email. Newsrooms have monitors with the Parse.ly dashboard on display, showing the top posts. Many newsrooms have also set up daily and weekly reports that go to editors and reporters, and those are discussed in the daily meetings.

**What practices/protocol are different now that you're using Parse.ly?**

Decisions are made on newsroom coverage with more data, and our editors have a better understanding of what readers want to read. From a structure perspective, we ensured that editors with digital DNA were helping drive the coverage from a story assignment view. They had to own the numbers and make coverage decisions based on what they were seeing in the numbers. That structural change makes sure the data is actually getting used.

*There was plenty we learned about ourselves just in the tracking of the data alone ... Seeing it in black and white was fairly startling – and it made us do better.*

**LYNNE SULLIVAN**, Editor  
*Fall River Herald News*

**How has using data influenced content at GateHouse Media in terms of its topic, structure, frequency of posts, or other metrics?**

A couple of our newsrooms took a deep dive into numbers with a goal of growing audience. One of their observations was that the number of posts correlated

directly with increased page views. This may seem obvious, but they were tracking numbers daily, and the differences were stark. Weekends had traditionally been low, but with mobile's growth, they are looking at staffing differently. We did a recent webinar about data and audience growth for dozens of GateHouse newsrooms in which the editors shared their observations.

*We use Parse.ly daily as a tool to monitor how well things are doing online, and move them up or down in the carousel or on the website as traffic dictates. It's been VERY successful. It's an awesome tool for a busy web editor, who may not have time to observe the top five list on the website at all times. With Parse.ly, all the information we need is at a glance, and we can get the story in front of more eyes than before.*

**LAURA DAVIS**

Social Media Editor, *Lakeland Ledger*

**What feedback have you gotten from the staff about having access to the analytics they receive now?**

They have found the tool to be a useful addition to the day-to-day newsroom workflow. We constantly hear that the data has provided the newsroom some momentum with digital, which is great.

## Parse.ly's Network Rollup Feature

Parse.ly's **Network Rollup** feature makes it possible to roll up data from multiple sites into a single "network view."



*What do you see as the biggest value in taking a "bird's-eye" view of how all your posts, authors, sections, tags, and traffic sources are performing across your entire network of sites?*



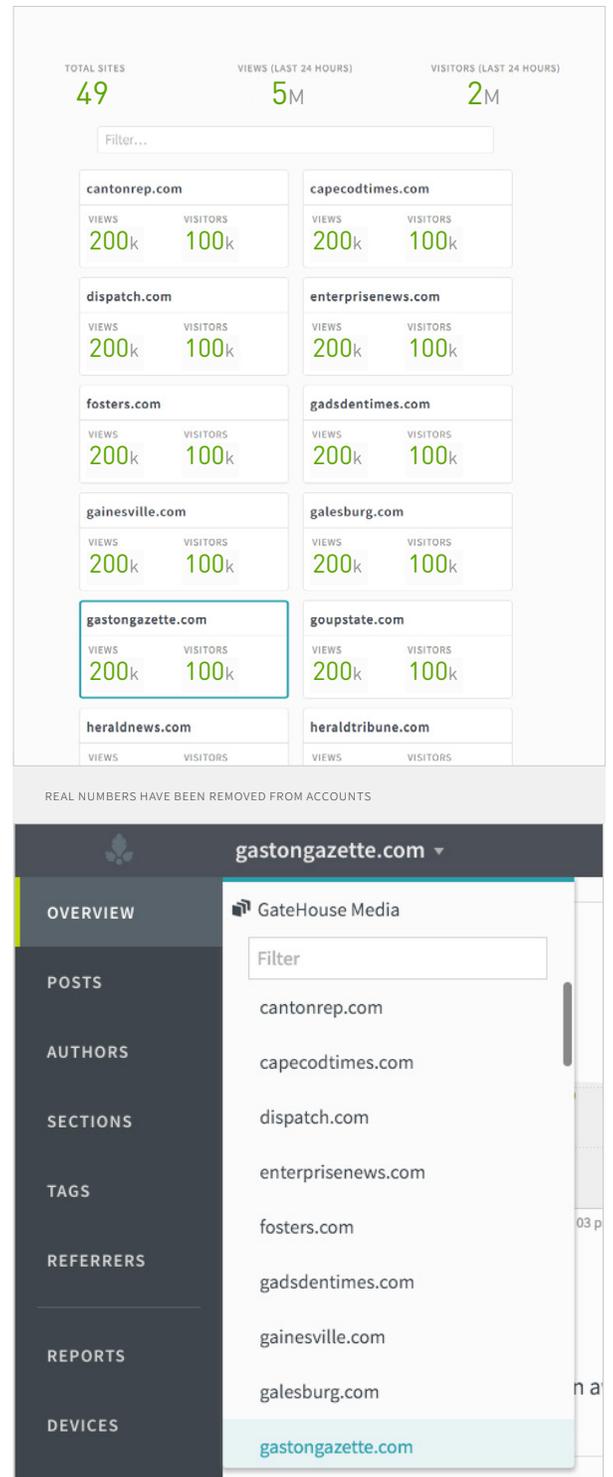
Seeing how stories compare across all sites is a useful tool for editors, as well creating a little friendly competition between sites. Editors want to know how they compare or what their numbers should be, and Parse.ly data allows us and the editors to look at newsrooms of a similar size to see how they are doing. Seeing what is trending across the network on social is huge as well. It's a good way to see patterns on types of content for other sites to duplicate. Also from a corporate perspective, it allows us to see if it's worth sharing certain stories in a region more or even nationally, across our network.



*How do trends uncovered in one local newsroom translate into actionable insights across the entire GateHouse Media network?*



They are shared through our daily emails, trainings, editor calls, and in-person meetings in regions where we have lots of sites close together.



## GateHouse Media in the Context of the Wider Media Industry



*What are the biggest challenges facing GateHouse Media from the industry?*



From a digital content perspective, the biggest challenge for GateHouse Media is ensuring that our coverage goes from reacting to content to being proactive about our content and giving our audience something they didn't expect. Every day. That means putting management in place that can help digest digital data and react to it and press hard to bring digital tools into our reporting. Doing this on a daily basis, not just for Sunday, is where we have to be. This requires reporters to use all of the tools they have available and to think about content not just in narrative format but in presenting it and using tools that best help the reader understand what they are covering.

As our audience comes in through more nontraditional avenues (i.e. not the homepage), we must ensure that the story experience is quality and deep. We want this to be a reporter-driven approach and not just something that a digital editor slaps on at the end of the story process. That's the only way to achieve the transformation we're seeking.



*What are the biggest opportunities for GateHouse Media?*



From a content perspective, the biggest opportunities rest in our ability to define our future. The tools are there. Parse.ly is a great example of that kind of tool.

Before Parse.ly, we really didn't have smart data that could help lead our coverage decisions. Now that we do, we have been able to better control our future by putting strategies and structure in place that can help us create content that is more in line with what readers actually want. Parse.ly doesn't just tell us what we already knew. It helps define — with each story — how readers engaged and didn't.

There are certain things we know about our traffic and the sort of content that does well, but what we didn't know was how users were coming to find that content, how much time they spent with the content, and what platforms they engaged with it on. We may get a page view from a police story, but we may discover that we are getting a deeper level of engagement, like time on a story, in a more niche-based category. That is all helping define our future, and there are dozens more examples that will help us achieve that in different ways. It's a challenging but exciting time.

At Parse.ly, we're committed to evolving alongside our partners and helping them to become more powerful through data analytics.

Learn more at [www.parse.ly](http://www.parse.ly) or contact us at [hello@parse.ly](mailto:hello@parse.ly).