

Opinion

Time for Progressive publications to shun the word 'Alternative' **How politics and business destroy journalism**

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Now that the giants of sin and vice are bankrolling the “progressive,” “alternative” newspapers in this country, it’s time for the independent, nonaligned, non-corporate publications with a moral compass to find a new adjective to define themselves.



Typical Shepherd Express sex ad

Somewhere along the way the concept of “alternative” press came to mean “weekly tabloid,” and publishers of the tobacco-, prostitution- and booze-subsidized publications have become what their products were created to oppose – narrowly focused, politically motivated, bottom-line oriented advocates of powerful interests less moved by social justice and hunger for reform than influence for its own sake. These publications even have their own trade group – the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, or AAN.

Consider the sale last year of Lexington, Kentucky’s *Ace Weekly*, as reported by the AAN on its web site. The article reported that Village Voice Media (VVM) “bucked the consolidation trend” by selling its smallest publication, *Ace Weekly*, to the paper’s editor and publisher.

“VVM Executive Vice President Albie Del Favero described the transaction as a strategic sale that will allow the company to focus on larger markets. VVM bought *Ace* last year from former owner and publisher Susan Saylor Yeary, who left the paper to spend more time with her son,” the article says.

“Our strategy is [focused on] major markets,” Del Favero said Thursday. “It didn’t make economic sense for us to be running a half-million dollar paper when we have a \$100 million company.”

In addition to *The Village Voice*, VVM owns newsweeklies in Los Angeles, Seattle, Minneapolis, Nashville, Cleveland and Orange County, Calif. The combined weekly circulation of the papers is more than 900,000.

It is hard to see what is progressive about many of the 121 members of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies. They are, for one thing, among the last publications that have not banned cigarette advertising. Anyone who has seen *The Insider* would understand that tobacco ads are meant to hook people on an addictive product that will likely kill them, and the corporations that produce them are the antithesis of progressive.

There's no doubt that anyone with any point of view is entitled to have a voice in this country; in fact, it is a responsibility of citizenship to speak out on important matters of social consequence.

But what happens when the alternative publications born out of opposition to the Vietnam War and political or economic oppression are taken over by business savvy, political operatives with agendas unrelated to social justice.

Louis Fortis, for example, is an economics PhD and former Smith College teacher who served as a member of the Wisconsin legislature until his seat was lost in redistricting.



Louis Fortis

A few years ago Fortis, who lives in Madison and is not trained as a journalist, bought the floundering *Shepherd Express*, a Milwaukee paper started in the 1980s by a bunch of journalism junkies from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Using money borrowed from such Democrat operatives as U.S. District Judge Lynn Adelman, Fortis resuscitated the weekly.

Once Fortis got the advertising revenue where he wanted it, he hired an assistant publisher so he would have more time to “play on the editorial side,” and began endorsing his friends for political office – most of whom are part of the state Democrat establishment.

This, of course, is what freedom of the press is for – to let people like Fortis give their views. But is it alternative or progressive?

But Fortis aside, does party-aligned political propaganda masquerading as “Progressive” deceive the readers by asserting that the product is independent and investigative? And what must the voters think of the candidates such a publication would endorse?



Ads lure the lonely for phone sex

If you were a decent person running for office, would you want the endorsement of a booze-, tobacco-, prostitution-supported “progressive, alternative” newspaper?