

Be the Answer

Using interactive databases to provide answers and generate revenue



INTRODUCTION

CONTENTS

- I. Start by understanding the job you're doing
 - A. What to call it?
 - B. Where to put it?
 - C. Answerbases for mega-jobs
 - D. Build a business, not just content
- II. Doing mega-jobs for businesses and consumers.....
 - A. Moving into transactions
 - B. Niches
 - C. Protecting the verticals.....
 - 1. Doing jobs for drivers
 - 2. Doing jobs for home owners
- III. Lots of questions, lots of opportunities
 - A. Answer Center index page
 - B. Politics
 - C. Government
 - D. Crime
 - E. Entertainment, activities
 - F. Eating out.....
 - G. Education.....
 - H. Sports
 - I. Recreation.....
 - J. Newspaper archives.....
 - K. Seasonal information
 - L. Weddings
 - M. Travel
 - N. News
 - O. The big story
 - P. Community information
 - Q. Answers on a variety of topics.....
 - R. Relocation
- IV. Operating your answer center
 - A. How to start, how far go to
 - B. Programming solutions.....
 - C. How do you develop database skills?
 - D. Answerbases generate traffic
 - E. Promotion and widgets build traffic
- Build milestone answerbases
- Conclusion.....
- About the author
- Sources

Databases help us grow the best of traditional journalism and directory advertising into the best of interactive community connection. Traditional newspapers always included databases of sorts where people found answers to a host of questions. Readers searched through columns of agate type, looking for movie times, calendar listings, stock prices, box scores, police reports, lawmakers' votes, service businesses and more.

Through technological innovation, interactive databases can make your company the answer source for your community in a more efficient, useful, timely way than daily agate lists ever could. These are an essential tool in your transformation from a newspaper company to a local information and connection utility, the vision spelled out in API's report *Newspaper Next 2.0: Making the Leap Beyond "Newspaper Companies."*

Databases are also one of the most resounding successes of the first wave of Newspaper Next innovation. Databases fit all four areas of the N2 Game Plan: They maximize core products, build audience by doing new jobs, and generate revenue in new ways; and companies are restructuring to build the capacity to develop databases. Databases help your company amass useful, interactive community content with lasting value. While news stories lose much of their value after a day, many databases can be useful again and again. Instead of simply "feeding the beast daily," database work builds lasting value and searchable content, much of it easily updated after the initial development.

This report will mention and link to notable work from more than 200 examples developed by more than 60 sites representing large and small newspaper groups and independent newspapers. However, this represents only a small percentage of newspapers; most newspaper sites make scant use, if any, of interactive databases beyond a calendar or a story enhancement, and many are not even taking those first steps.

This is a study of how newspapers are using and could use databases to provide answers for their communities. We include recommendations for how you can do more if you've already started with databases, or how you can get started. Perhaps most important, we discuss how you can use databases more effectively to generate new revenue streams.

However, if you read this report and consider all the possibilities suggested here, you will quickly be overwhelmed. You can't do all this at once. What you need to do is start thinking about the needs of your community and the abilities of your organization. In the final section, we will discuss the important task of setting priorities and getting to work.

I. START BY UNDERSTANDING THE JOB YOU'RE DOING

As with the N2 projects in the Casebook of the *Newspaper Next 2.0* report, database projects studied for this report tend to be imperfect but good enough. This is consistent with the N2 principle of keeping costs low by starting with good-enough products that get the job done and offer new solutions not available in the market. Then you improve as you gain experience and receive feedback from the marketplace.

However, one frequent break from the N2 approach is that even the databases that were designed effectively to do important jobs generally didn't start with jobs-to-be-done research. More often a database started with a reporter's interest in data that would illuminate a particular story or an editor's hunch that the public would find a database useful. Even one of the most-promising projects described in the Casebook, *DeliveringQC*, bypassed JTBD research, launching instead from an executive's intuitive perception of a job that needed to be done. Similarly, many databases that bypassed that research stage are succeeding because they were designed to do important jobs (or trivial jobs that matter a lot to some people):

- Help me figure out how much my property taxes will increase.
- Help me decide whether this politician is telling the truth.
- Help me find out how good the schools and how bad the crime are in a neighborhood where I am considering buying a home.
- Help me find a good barbecue joint.
- Help me find a contractor I can actually trust.
- Help me find out how much that dolt who was rude to me at the DMV today is being overpaid with my tax dollars.
- Tell me every possible detail about my favorite quarterback.

So, while we can learn from efforts that focused intuitively on important jobs, we should not rely solely on intuition. Start your development of databases by doing jobs-to-be-done research with potential users of your new offering, as detailed in the initial N2 report, *Newspaper Next: Blueprint for Transformation*, released in 2006. Even if you are intuitively on the right track, hearing from potential users will help you design more helpful products and prioritize the features or content you want to offer first. Jobs-to-be-done research also may turn your attention in new directions. Many journalists will be inclined to focus their efforts on public-records databases following the civic orientation of newspaper beats. While you can use those databases to do important jobs, many people's everyday needs and interests fall more in the consumer realm of life where newsrooms are less likely to look. Identify urgent jobs where your community is frustrated with current solutions and often you will find databases are a helpful tool in doing those jobs.

A. What to call it?

Databases can feel forbidding to users who don't know what they are. It's kind of like marketing a car by trying to force the term internal combustion into the brand name. Therefore, we recommend not presenting your data products to the public as "data." Users generally don't think of themselves as looking for data but as looking for answers or information. Dozens of efforts to present answers online are branded with some twist on the word data: *DataUniverse*, *Data Center*, *Database Central*, *Data Central*, *Data Connection*, *Database Warehouse*, *Data Bay*, *Databank*, *DataSphere*, *Data Leader*, *Data-Leader*, *DataMine*, *Data Mississippi*. At least one other name is built around the word documents, shortened to *docs*. Data and documents are words focused on what we use to do the job, not on the job itself.



Consider labeling data that you present online not as a place to find data, but a place to find answers. Build your name around a job-focused term: Ourtown Search, Answerbase, Answer Source, Yourtown-opedia, InfoCenter. Several sites are on the right track: *Fact Finder*, *South Dakota Info*, *FYI*.



I. START BY UNDERSTANDING THE JOB YOU'RE DOING

To help underscore this need for a user-focused outlook, this report will use the term *answerbase* when referring to the product your users see. *Database* will be used only to discuss the internal handling of the data to develop the answerbase. This isn't to suggest that the whole industry should shift suddenly to using *answerbase*, a term that already has enough use that it gets nearly 50,000 Google hits, including some company and product names. Rather, it's to underscore the importance of thinking about your product as answers or solutions to important jobs that need to be done, not just as data, and choosing the right answer-oriented name for your answerbase, possibly incorporating the community or region name.

Sometimes a news site's home page will include an invitation to "search our databases," a link that takes you to its data center. Many people who use online databases don't think of themselves as searching databases. Some potential users may think they don't know how to search a database or why they would want to. They think of themselves as searching for information or answers: What's going on this weekend? Is this candidate telling the truth? Where can I find a reliable plumber? If you're already using a data-oriented name that is gaining some brand recognition, perhaps you can enhance that with a home-page invitation or data-page subhead that's more user-focused.

"Personally I try not to even think of most of these products strictly as databases, because your users won't either," said Michael Corey, digital projects editor at the Des Moines Register and DesMoinesRegister.com. "They're just looking for good information or something fun to play with, and they're not very tolerant of roadblocks and aren't familiar with some tools that database users are very familiar with." The title for the database collection at DesMoinesRegister.com and the invitation from the home page both reflect this user focus: [Search Your Community](#).

B. Where to put it?

All in one place: In a recent [blog entry](#), Matt Waite, developer of the *St. Petersburg Times'* [PolitiFact](#) site, referred to these database collections as the Data Ghetto, "that one mishmash page where all of that site's databases are lumped together." The observation had some merit and he made some excellent suggestions for improving databases. But once you focus on your job of providing answers, it makes great sense to put an endless variety of answers about your community in one place – not a ghetto, but a downtown, where people might come for work, shopping, entertainment or sports events. Or let's move the analogies from the community to the digital world: a local equivalent of Google, where all kinds of people search for quick and easy answers to all kinds of questions.

All over the place: A jobs-focused presentation of answers also means that you should help people find the answers when and where they might be asking the questions. For instance, a calendar is a database, but most sites with answerbase directories understand that they need to place the calendar link on a home page and/or an entertainment page. While presenting all the answerbases in one directory with a job-focused name will help people develop the habit of coming there for answers to

any question, you also want to guide them to answerbases from other places where they might look. During football season IndyStar.com features prominently on its [Data Central](#) index page the [Manning Meter](#), breaking down every pass Peyton Manning has ever thrown in every way that any fan might have a question. But Colts fans (and certainly NFL fans in other communities) seeking to analyze Manning's performance may not even know of Data Central's existence, so during the season the Manning Meter also is featured prominently on the [sports page](#) of IndyStar.com and it's easy to find on search engines if you just heard about it from another sports fan. Some answerbases need to be featured with a news story or on the home page when they're timely and then just in the answer directory when they're less timely. Others should reside permanently in an entertainment or business section or a real estate or autos vertical or a health-care directory as well as in the answerbase directory. Think of the answerbase as a room with multiple doors to help users enter from different directions, depending on their interests and needs.

C. Answerbases for mega-jobs

In the *Newspaper Next 2.0* report, API introduced the concept of "mega-jobs" that serve virtually every consumer or every business in a community. Answerbases help perform each of these mega-jobs for consumers and many of the mega-jobs for businesses. The business mega-jobs are addressed in the next section. We'll elaborate on all these jobs throughout this report, but want to remind you here of the consumer mega-jobs and mention briefly how answerbases can help do those jobs:

- **"Help me make good spending decisions."** Community business directories and specialized directories such as restaurant guides provide a wealth of answers to help with this mega-job, from menus, coupons and videos provided by the businesses to user reviews and ratings from the community.
- **"Help me connect, talk and share with others."** Answerbases can become a place where your community shares its collective wisdom and experience, whether through user reviews of products and events or user stories, photos and videos entered into a database such as a calendar or map.
- **"Help me find/choose things to do."** Calendars and entertainment or tourism guides designed to do this mega-job are the kinds of answerbases in widest use by community news and sharing sites.
- **"Help me get answers about my community."** This is the sweet spot of the answerbase. The *Newspaper Next 2.0* report suggested developing a local encyclopedia of community-contributed knowledge along the lines of Wikipedia. You probably will want to structure the encyclopedia as a database. Combine the wisdom you can gather wiki-style from the community with the data you can assemble from public records, your own archives and other sources and you can answer an endless array of questions. You will become the place people turn first, whatever the question.

I. START BY UNDERSTANDING THE JOB YOU'RE DOING

■ **“Give me a one-stop answer place.”** The online community portal approach suggested in *Newspaper Next 2.0* will include answerbases in virtually every option: Your shopping option will include business directories; visitors who click on things to do will go into your calendar; users seeking community information will be presented with a wide array of answerbases; when they click on the news option, you will use answerbases to help them personalize the story or dig deeper.

D. Build a business, not just content

Companies that want to prosper in the digital marketplace need to focus on these opportunities immediately. As the research from Borrell Associates in *Newspaper Next 2.0* showed, the growth opportunities in online revenue are not in the areas where newspaper sites get most of their online revenue now – banners and classified listings. Instead, Borrell projects dramatic growth and opportunities in video advertising, email advertising and search. Databases can be key vehicles for developing all three of these opportunities.

Borrell also stresses the importance of developing solutions for business customers who don't traditionally advertise in newspapers. Again, answerbases are an ideal solution for many of the jobs of these businesses, so you aren't just shifting your print customers online but developing new revenue streams from new business customers.

Seizing these opportunities will require a significant shift in how most companies think, operate and communicate internally. As with other efforts described in the *Newspaper Next 2.0* Casebook, newspaper companies have used answerbases more effectively to develop content and build audience than to generate innovative revenue streams. A notable exception is the use of business directory databases such as [Kudzu](#), [PalmettoBizBuzz](#) or [HudsonValley](#), which were developed as business revenue vehicles. (More about those later in this report.)



In most cases, the time-honored segregation of news from advertising seems to rule in the world of database answers, too. A nearly impenetrable wall seems to keep the people who develop content providing answers to the public from any collaboration with the people whose job it is to connect businesses with customers. By contrast, Google has made billions by connecting the job of searching for content with the job of reaching people who express particular interests by the search terms they use. If newspaper companies (and the local information and connection utilities that they must transform into) are going to survive and thrive in a world that's increasingly search-oriented, we need to break down silo walls and work together to master the interconnected business of search: more data, more users, more searches, more revenue opportunities.

Journalists can protect their integrity and still collaborate with colleagues who generate and collect revenue from the content journalists develop. And they have to. The cutbacks in too many news organizations have harmed the quality of journalism in hundreds of communities. Protecting quality journalism now *requires* collaboration on development of revenue. Journalists can still maintain a proper distance by staying out of the *who* of new revenue sources but working closely with sales colleagues on questions of *how* to generate revenue.

“The sky is the limit when it comes to ways to sell advertising with dynamic, data-driven content as long as it has value and is as relevant as the content,” said Scott DeNoon, online operations manager for *The Observer-Dispatch* and uticaOD.com in Utica, N.Y.

In telephone and email interviews with more than two dozen people developing databases, only a few mentioned any collaboration with commercial staff. Jacob Kaplan-Moss included a mention of the [Marketplace](#) directory in discussing development of several products for the *Lawrence Journal-World* and LJWorld.com.

James Wilkerson, data editor at the *Des Moines Register* and DesMoinesRegister.com, said he always considers “the advertising potential of Web sites we build,” and he touches base to alert the advertising department to possible custom selling opportunities. More editors need to take this basic step. Advertising response has never influenced whether the information center proceeded with a data project, Wilkerson said.

Brian Butts, director of data and technology for the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and Cincinnati.com, said a data integration team from the news, advertising and circulation departments collaborates on database development. So when the developers acquired databases of new businesses and property sales, the advertising and circulation staffs began using them for lead generation. And Cincinnati.com sells display advertising targeted to the likely audience of a particular channel of answerbases, such as real estate or crime.

These few cases were exceptional, though. Several developers who could provide great detail about how their answerbases were developed and presented had little idea whether and how those products were generating money. One answered that

I. START BY UNDERSTANDING THE JOB YOU'RE DOING

he got a big raise last year, so they must be doing well. To the extent that the news-side developers did know about commercial success, they indicated the advertising is pretty much the traditional banners and buttons that dominate newspaper sites. Since answerbases drive lots of traffic, they bring eyeballs to the banners and buttons and have been successful in that sense.

"The main objective with these has been to build large amounts of audience," said Danny Sanchez, senior producer for the *Orlando Sentinel* and *OrlandoSentinel.com*. "We do sell our entertainment-related databases such as restaurant and event listings."

[DataUniverse](#) at *Asbury Park Press* and *APP.com* "has been a huge revenue hit. We run ads at the top of the page," Paul D'Ambrosio said. At *IndyStar.com*, some specialized answerbases such as [Indy911Calls](#) and [Manning Meter](#) have sponsors. *Jacksonville.com* is seeking a sponsor for [Databank](#).

Indy 911 Calls



If you're developing an answerbase, part of your consideration needs to be which businesses would want to reach people when they're looking for that information. An important question to ask businesses is, "When do you want to get your message in front of a potential buyer?"

Answerbases provide opportunities for targeted revenue opportunities that our industry must explore immediately and aggressively. The very jobs that bring people to these sites seeking answers, such as searching a restaurant guide for a place to eat, make them ideal targets for certain types of advertising. Restaurants want to reach exactly the people who are looking for a place to dine, and can offer coupons, purchase an expanded listing, or link to an online reservation system

such as *OpenTable*. It's possible to maintain the integrity of the editorial content as effectively in an online restaurant guide as in a print entertainment section that runs movie ads along with movie reviews. A recipe answerbase could connect with a food shopping answerbase, providing prices at a grocery store for the ingredients listed in a recipe or offering an opportunity to order the ingredients for home delivery or for pick-up at the store on your way home from work, already bagged and paid for. Or a shop selling gourmet cooking equipment could advertise alongside the recipes.

David Milliron of *Caspio* expects a great increase in targeted revenue linked to data searches. Think about the jobs that bring users to an answerbase, then think about businesses who can help those customers do those jobs. It's a natural match.

Several of the "mega-jobs" for businesses described in *Newspaper Next 2.0* can be performed effectively using answerbases:

- **"Help me reach exactly the type of customer I need to reach."** A niche site focusing on moms or brides can include a database of businesses hoping to reach that target audience, such as child-care providers and recreation opportunities for the moms site or florists and caterers for the brides. You provide the basic directory information – business type, name, contact information, map – at no charge to the business, with opportunities to pay for upgraded listings with videos, coupons and so forth. Answerbases on these niche sites also provide opportunities for email advertising. For instance, if a mom clicks on a children's theater offering in the calendar on a moms site, you could offer her an opportunity to receive emails from the theater, telling her about upcoming plays and offering the chance to buy tickets.
- **"Help me get considered when a customer is about to make a choice."** The business directories, which we've already mentioned and will discuss in depth later, are geared specifically to do this job. The landscaper who won't spend a nickel for a newspaper ad wants to provide lots of information to the user who clicks on "landscapers" in a business directory. We elaborate on these directories in the next section.
- **"Help me show people the quality of my product/service/user experience."** Again, the directories are a perfect vehicle for photos and infomercial-style videos, demonstrating a new product or taking a prospective customer right into the showroom or showing finished results of a service (such as landscaping).
- **"Help me build and maintain customer loyalty" and "Help me create one-to-one relationships with customers."** As directories connect businesses with consumers through your site, those email opportunities – which you can manage for the business customer – help the business cultivate the relationship through the use of coupons, updates and advice.
- **"Help me with the customer transaction."** Databases can be an effective tool to move beyond the traditional advertising model of simply delivering the sales pitch to customers; they can help close the sale and collect the money. A database of

I. START BY UNDERSTANDING THE JOB YOU'RE DOING

engagement announcements or local high school graduates can include gift registries, where you take the customer's credit card information for the local merchant, who will ship or deliver the gift. A calendar of events can sell tickets or registrations. Any of these answerbases can make reservations for local lodging and restaurants. A restaurant or business directory can include coupons, gift certificates or ways to make direct sales.

■ **“Help me use the Internet effectively to grow my business.”**

An effective business directory listing can become the *de facto* home page for a small business that has no site or a weak Web site. Just as much of the traffic to your news site comes in through search rather than through your front door, your directory listing can become the back door or even the front door through which many or most customers find a local business online.

Business customers aren't the only potential source of revenue from your answerbases. Some answers might have commercial value, too. If people might pay for certain answers, you could provide them as premium content, available either for subscription or paying per search. Given the history of selling content online, this is a risky approach, though. For instance, if you aren't getting notable revenue by selling access to your archives, which are a database, you could make them available and easily searchable at no cost and see whether you can make more money by connecting businesses with this larger audience, either through general advertising or by selling advertising based on searches for keywords, such as a local sports team.

You might find some revenue possibilities in licensing your answerbase to other businesses that would have use for that data, either on their own sites or for internal use. [PolitiFact](#) has started syndicating its content to other media outlets. You also might charge fees for helping to analyze the data you amass.

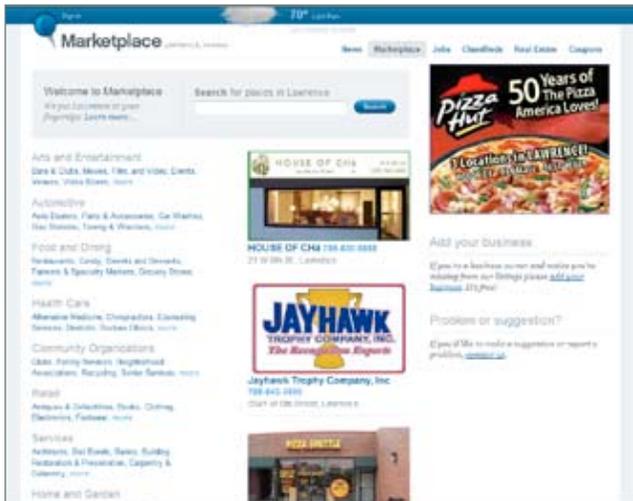
Answerbases are too versatile and useful a tool to settle for traditional forms of advertising. Companies operating answerbase sites already and those getting started need to bring their revenue departments in on the planning from the start and become as innovative in making money as they are in providing answers.

II. DOING MEGA-JOBS FOR BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

One of the best opportunities from databases matches up the mega-job for consumers, “Help me make good spending decisions,” with the mega-job for businesses, “Help me get considered when a customer is about to make a choice.”

Interactive business directories that go way beyond an online yellow pages provide a tremendous opportunity that newspapers are only beginning to pursue. Four of the best examples are Cox Search’s [Kudzu.com](#), Bakersfield.com’s [Inside Guide](#), LJWorld.com’s [Marketplace](#) and Evening Post Community Publications’ [PalmettoBizBuzz.com](#). [HudsonValley.com](#), launched by the *Times Herald-Record* in Middletown, N.Y., is not as far along the developmental path, but shows similar potential. Remember the triple play of online growth opportunities – search, video and email – identified in the Borrell Associates research in *Newspaper Next 2.0*? These directories become a key vehicle for local search, they provide excellent video advertising platforms and they give businesses a chance to identify customers willing to receive emails with special offers and sales.

Lawrence [Marketplace](#), which debuted April 3, 2007, grossed \$600,000 its first year, said General Manager Al Bonner. While he wouldn’t release exact profit figures, he said, “We’re having no trouble making money on it. We recouped our investment after the first six months.”



One thing to keep in mind in the “good enough” concept of Newspaper Next is that it’s not a general acceptance of lower standards. Yes, you do need to decide where you can accept good-enough performance to keep costs down, but you also need to decide where you need to invest what it takes to differentiate yourself from other solutions available to consumers.

Lawrence Marketplace did this by not just going online immediately with the basic business database that it bought from InfoUSA, but by investing enough to differentiate the product from other online directories and provide unique value. The Lawrence staff contacted each of the 3,200 businesses in the database, deleting outdated listings and confirming information

on good listings. Most important, these initial calls collected additional basic information from each business: hours, credit cards accepted and Web site, if any. This job took three temps about two months and the information gathered added immediate value to the directory for consumers at launch. “The hours of operation make it much more usable than any other source,” Bonner said. The Marketplace staff also shot photos of each business and generated automatic maps, so even for non-paying businesses, the consumer gets much more than just the name-address-phone number-category offering of a basic directory. “If it’s just another directory, it’s a dime a dozen.”

Marketplace also followed a critical tenet of Newspaper Next – focusing on non-customers. And it illustrates the wisdom of a key point of Newspaper Next 2.0 – using a separate sales staff instead of relying on upsells from the print sales reps. It started with one dedicated sales rep and now has four. “Their focus is business we don’t have,” Bonner said. He has heard of too many business-directory efforts by newspaper companies that disappoint. “If they just turn it over to their regular staff, they just call on their regular customers.” That approach has two critical drawbacks: You overlook lots of potential new revenue and much of the revenue you get will be diverted from the customer’s print advertising budget. “We tried to create a brand new revenue stream, a brand new vertical,” Bonner said. He estimates that 60 to 65 percent of Marketplace’s revenue is from new customers.

In addition, he said, you have to train differently to sell for the directory. “We have to deprogram them basically, especially if they’ve been in print.” The Marketplace approach is entirely different from newspaper advertising, which is heavily focused on generating immediate business, Bonner explained. The sales rep needs to guide the customer in building a Web presence that will gain value over time. “It’s not a direct-result medium.”

The basic upsell package for \$75 per month lets a business add four additional photos and gives the business (many customers are small enough that they don’t have Web sites) a promotable URL: [LawrenceMarketplace.com/businessname](#). The basic customer also can add a thumbnail profile and keywords that will help optimize its site for search engines.

The basic package is just a fallback, though. The primary package Marketplace reps sell is a multimedia package at \$200 per month, designed to make those customers’ Marketplace pages “a marketing hub for their business,” Bonner said. This package follows one of the key points of Newspaper Next 2.0, anticipating the growth of revenue from video advertising. The multimedia customer can post unlimited photos and videos on its Marketplace page. The *Journal-World* owns the local cable company, so commercials there can load easily to Marketplace. Reps also encourage customers to post how-to or helpful-hints videos from product manufacturers. Or Marketplace can produce videos for the customer for a fee.

While news and sports videos present important pre-roll and post-roll video advertising opportunities, a directory has advantages. Especially with pre-roll ads, video advertising with

II. DOING MEGA-JOBS FOR BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

a news or sports story is intrusive and annoying, so it has to be short. However, videos are welcome when a shopper is trying to make a choice. Depending on the nature of the business, a two-minute promotional video or a longer how-to infomercial can be of great value. While it may not get as many impressions as the ad with a news story, everyone who views is interested in this product or business and what it has to offer. Every viewer chose to watch and no one is annoyed. With this kind of audience, a creative business could develop a series of funny promotional videos that would keep users coming back and even generate viral marketing. Only about 10 percent of the Marketplace business customers post videos now, Bonner said. “We are beginning to shoot more video for customers and have plans to use our ad design department to provide this service.”

Tabs on each Marketplace page for products and coupons let the multimedia customer post a menu, product descriptions, brochures, coupons and the like. “You can essentially post anything you want there,” Bonner said. Ads from *Journal-World* print products post automatically to the Marketplace page. And a template lets the multimedia customers build their own ads.

A calendar feature lets these customers post sales or special events, for which users can sign up to receive notifications by email or text message. About 5 percent of customers are using the calendar and text service.

The video and email features “are under-used right now,” Bonner said, but “we expect both of these to grow as new capabilities of the Marketplace software are introduced.”

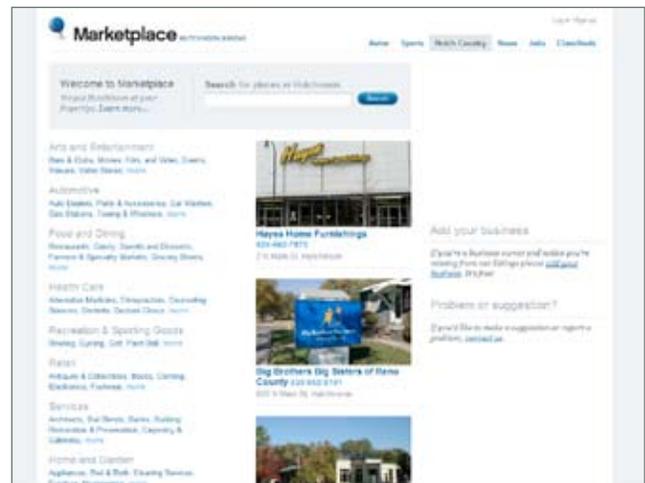
The goal, Bonner said, is to make the Marketplace listing so multi-functional that it becomes the de facto home page for the business, whether it has a Web site already or not. “If anybody has that kind of capability in their own Web site, they’re a rare bird,” he said. “We’ve run into a number of businesses that were planning to spend a bunch of money to do their own Web site and just decided to do this instead.”

In the first year, Marketplace has drawn 225 business customers, about 75 to 80 percent of them choosing the multimedia package. The site averages 175,000 to 200,000 page views a month, about 25 percent from return visitors.

Marketplace is not just passively hoping for customer satisfaction, either. A coordinator calls on business customers to show them how to use the site, tell their customers about it, use the right words for search-engine optimization and get the most value from the directory. “There’s a ton of businesses that need to be prompted and they need to market it or it won’t work,” Bonner said.

Pizza Hut, an important business for a university town, is using its Marketplace page so effectively – including the ability to order online – that it’s planning to stop its direct-mail advertising. Pizza places are the top category Marketplace sold first, with other entertainment and retail businesses also getting early attention.

Marketplace is delivering another revenue stream for the World Co. The company is selling Marketplace software and services



to newspapers in other communities. The *Hutchinson News* and *hutchnews.com* went live with [HutchMarketplace](#) April 1 and other newspapers are preparing to launch. Hutchinson Publisher John Montgomery said the site launched with 22 customers after a couple months spent building the database and training the staff. He expects the customer base to grow as promotion and marketing bring consumers and businesses to the site.

“We sell the exact same software we use to our commercial customers,” Bonner said. The Marketplace package includes sales training. “We believe the software and the design are very good but the key to making Marketplace a success in any market is the sales model. As we have talked to many newspapers, both private and part of a group, they all seem to have fallen short on the sales side with any directory product they are using or have used. Our model turns the current selling process on its head. ... We recommend having a separate, dedicated sales team that focuses on non-advertisers, especially the key print yellow-page categories like heating and air conditioning, insurance, medical, attorneys, lawn and garden, etc.” At most newspaper directories, Bonner said, “Sales efforts stay within the 15-20% of the businesses newspapers already have. Marketplace is an opportunity to open the door to the other 80% of the businesses you don’t have.”

As interactive as Marketplace is, it does not include one important feature of [Kudzu](#), [Inside Guide](#) and [PalmettoBizBuzz](#) – customer reviews. Bonner said the Lawrence directory steered clear of reviews after some negative feedback about comments elsewhere on the site. LJWorld does offer the option of reviews to other newspaper sites using its Marketplace services. Eventually Bonner plans to offer Lawrence businesses the option of allowing customer reviews.

Bakersfield’s [Inside Guide](#) has been stronger as a vehicle for reviews than for revenue in its first year. Only recently did Inside Guide hire a dedicated sales rep, said Logan Molen, vice president of interactive media at the *Bakersfield Californian*. “We expect to see traction soon,” he said. The site had 4,562 businesses listed in late April, with 496 of them purchasing

II. DOING MEGA-JOBS FOR BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

enhanced packages. Eventually the *Californian* hopes to list 15,000 businesses as it adds more categories. The site gets 60,000 to 70,000 page views per month.

Reviews are allowed throughout Kudzu and provide much of the content and drive much of the traffic, said Tom Bates, vice president of Cox Search and general manager of Kudzu. “We’re not creating a lot of the content. With the reviews, they get the good, the bad and the ugly.” The reviews have cost Kudzu some customers, even though businesses get an option to respond. But the reviews – some 200,000 and always growing – are part of the reason visitors view more pages per visit on Kudzu than on a yellow pages site. With reviews and profiles, rather than just listings, Bates said, “we’re being used more for research and considered decisions than for look-ups.”

And reviews are not necessarily a deterrent for businesses. “The smart guys have used the consumer reviews to their advantage,” Bates said. A business can link to positive reviews from its own Web site, quote positive reviews in other advertising or quote positive reviews in the store. And the opportunity to respond to negative reviews gives the vendor a chance to address an impression that is being spread by word of mouth anyway. Businesses also use reminders on their invoices and signs in their stores to encourage happy customers to post reviews (all of which promotes Kudzu). The result of all the traffic and promotion is lots of information to help potential customers make decisions. For instance, [Action Auto Glass](#) in Norcross, Ga., has 30 reviews and [The Painting Pros](#) in Atlanta has 48.



With Kudzu, as with PalmettoBizBuzz, reviews are offered using screen names, but a visitor can judge the credibility of a reviewer by clicking on the screen name and reading all that person’s reviews. [Inside Guide](#) allows users to tell whether reviews were helpful to them, which leads to a list of “most trusted reviewers” (people who have reviewed at least 10 businesses and received a thumbs-up from at least 10 different users). A user can join a business’s “fan club,” which means you



will receive special offers from the business and be listed on the business’s page as a fan. PalmettoBizBuzz and HudsonValley ask reviewers to give a rating to a business on a scale of one to five stars. Kudzu asks for an overall rating as well as ratings for service, quality and value.

Kudzu, which started in Atlanta in 2005, expanded to San Diego, Phoenix and Las Vegas, all markets where Cox has cable operations that provide good rates for promotional advertising as well as joint sales opportunities. This year the operation went nationwide. Half of its 2 million monthly unique visitors come from the four early markets. Kudzu is open to considering partnerships with local media companies, particularly in the top 30 markets, Bates said.

Kudzu has varying levels of businesses:

- Basic directory information (name, address, phone number, business type) for every business in the community (500,000 total in the four early cities, 13 million nationwide). Again, the starting point is a purchased database.
- Free self-serve business profile completed by the business online (100,000 total, including more than 40,000 in the four early cities).
- Paid profiles at varying service levels ranging from \$75 to \$5,000 per month, depending on market and services chosen. These packages offer uploading of videos, photos, and price lists; premium placement; marketing descriptions; and call tracking.

While the paid profiles are offered self-service online, most sales require interaction with the Kudzu sales staff, mostly by phone or computer. However, the self-serve model helps identify candidates for sales calls, Bates said. A business that has filled out the free profile is already familiar with Kudzu, may have heard some customer feedback already and might be open to the pitch for a higher profile.

II. DOING MEGA-JOBS FOR BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

Kudzu's business is primarily with home services, personal services and elective health services such as dentists or chiropractors. "These kinds of services are inherently local," Bates said. With some exceptions like Roto-Rooter, "they are not dominated by the national chains."

Other directories offering consumer reviews, such as Yelp and CitySearch, tend to focus on restaurants and entertainment. Angie's List focuses on home services and provides user reviews, but it charges a subscription fee to consumers, where Kudzu and the other examples cited here are free.

Bates said about half of the businesses advertising on Kudzu don't have their own Web sites and their Kudzu page becomes their online presence. For other businesses with Web sites, Bates said, "We're getting more traffic than your Web site probably is." The Kudzu page will get higher Google listings and more hits from search engines, he said.

Part of the invest-a-little-learn-a-lot phase for Kudzu was that one size did not fit all in business profiles. For the basic profile, they needed a different questionnaire for each category, because a chiropractor, a landscaper and a pediatrician can't all use the same questionnaire to full benefit.

Kudzu has "tried to figure out smart, efficient ways to give customer care" that people can't get from Google or yellow pages. Kudzu is looking into performance-based models, to make the service even more valuable to businesses. "We're going to have to do more things than just impression-based advertising." The businesses are closely watching the results of their ads. "They're counting the calls. They're counting the clicks."

We started this section mentioning two specific mega-jobs that a business-directory database can do effectively: helping consumers make good spending decisions and helping businesses get considered when a customer is about to make a buying choice. But as you can see, Lawrence Marketplace, Kudzu, Inside Guide and PalmettoBizBuzz are helping businesses with several more of the mega-jobs identified in Newspaper Next 2.0:

- **"Help me show people the quality of my product/service/user experience."** The video advertising opportunity in these directories is an excellent solution for this mega-job.
- **"Help me build and maintain customer loyalty."** The email and text opportunities at Marketplace help businesses stay in touch and give customers reasons to keep coming back.
- **"Help me create one-to-one relationships with customers."** Again, the email and text opportunities help here.
- **"Make advertising simple and cheap enough that I can actually do it."** The self-serve options and low rates make these directories attractive even to small businesses that rarely or never will buy a newspaper ad.
- **"Help me use the Internet effectively to grow my business."** One of the best features of these directories is how often they become the home page for a business with a weak Web presence or none at all.

The power of databases "will surface in new and interesting ways, not only from a readership perspective but also in ways of tapping niche revenue streams," Molen said. "It is the power of Chris Anderson's 'Long Tail.'"

A. Moving into transactions

The next step – and a potentially lucrative one – is for these directories to become the online sales platform for business customers to do the mega-job: "Help me with the customer transaction." An online business directory can become a place where a customer can place an order, buy a product directly, make a reservation or take other steps that move the customer closer to the transaction, such as scheduling an estimate for a remodeling project. If you can collect revenue for the business customer (keeping your cut, of course), you have moved to a model that's more beneficial for the business, and more lucrative for you, than mere advertising. Whether you are selling eyeballs or clicks, a looker isn't as important to the business as a sale, so you need to seek ways to move the customer toward or even through the transaction. Helping with the transaction fundamentally changes the relationship with business customers. Except in creative situations such as DeliveringQC.com, advertising is an expense item in a business budget, always subject to being lured away by another (usually less expensive) advertising medium or to being cut when times get tight. On the other hand, if you start delivering sales and generating revenue for a business customer, the business is going to look for ways to do more business with you.

B. Niches

While general business directories are a tremendous opportunity, specialized business directories present niche opportunities. Consider whether your community might present an opportunity for a restaurant directory, tourism directory, health-care directory or worship directory. Each of these has tremendous potential both for interactive content and for revenue. If you are already developing the full community directory, the specialized directory might become just a part of it. For instance, the Yourtown Marketplace directory would include a restaurants section that is the same as the Yourtown Dining Guide that is promoted separately on your home page, community site and/or entertainment site. Each is just a different entry point to the same detailed, interactive restaurant directory.

Health care in particular has great potential for development as a directory that you promote on its own as a new vertical (but that also can be found through the business directory and the answer center). In fact, our list of mega-jobs should include "help me stay healthy." This is an area with big potential for video advertising, as providers show off their facilities, demonstrate procedures and show before-and-after results. Consumers with health-care needs are highly motivated and you need to use multiple tools to become the best source in your community for answers about staying healthy and caring for health. And you can supplement the directory information with many answerbases relating to health: [medical licenses](#), [complaints](#)

II. DOING MEGA-JOBS FOR BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

against doctors, nursing home violations or quality, assisted-living facility inspections, community health centers, smoking complaints, heart care at hospitals.

Consider ways that your own archives and other business answerbases might further enhance a business directory. For instance, you could provide stories in your archive dealing with a business in either of these ways:

- Let the business search your archive for stories you have run about the business or its industry and post the ones that the owner feels would be helpful to visitors to the site, such as a feature about the business or a brief on the new manager or a news story on a new product. You need to decide the right way to protect editorial integrity in doing this, certainly with publication date, perhaps with display that differentiates from the advertising content, probably with a disclaimer that the news story was originally produced independently from the advertiser at no charge, and absolutely with no option for the advertiser to change the content.

- Let the user search the database for stories on the business.

The business directory could include links to other answerbases dealing with businesses, providing information on topics such as [development](#), [executive salaries](#), [salary comparisons](#), [business licenses](#), [professional licenses](#), [beauty salon inspections](#), [property insurance cancellations](#), [contractor violations](#), [bankruptcies](#). Depending on how you develop and present the answerbase, some would definitely fit with a business directory and, in fact, enhance individual listings. For instance, licenses and inspection records would link well to a directory database, with the restaurant or beauty salon inspection an automatic part of every restaurant or beauty salon listing. You also could present a place to browse the inspection reports, with links from a restaurant's or salon's report to its directory listing.

C. Protecting the verticals

Newspaper Next 2.0 discussed the importance of protecting the Big Three verticals of recruitment, real estate and autos while also diversifying your online revenue streams. "Determine if content will help draw people to the site," the report advised. Answerbases can be part of that formula. Newspaper sites have not done much yet with answerbases that might help attract traffic for a recruitment site. But we have seen lots of answerbases that could generate traffic for auto and real estate verticals.

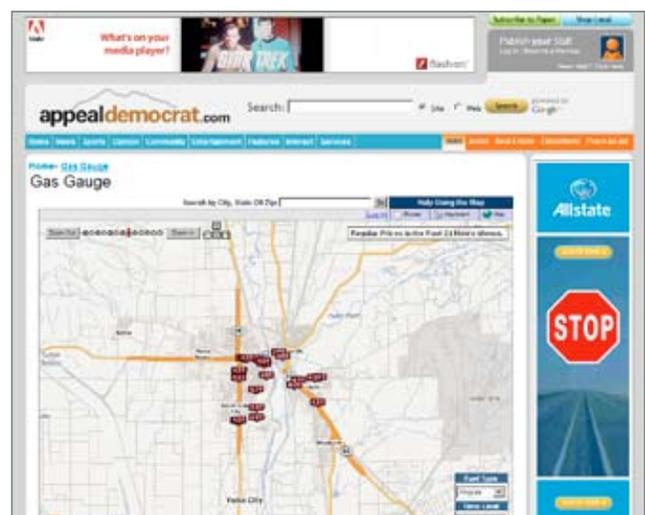
1. Doing jobs for drivers

If your autos vertical is just a place to buy and sell cars, people will only visit when they are trying to buy or sell a car. And you have to hope they will think of looking there instead of Auto-trader, Cars.com, craigslist, eBay and all the other places selling cars. Instead try developing a broader vertical – targeted at driving rather than auto sales. If you can develop a site drivers want to check before (or during) their daily commute and every time they fill up their gas tank, you are more likely to be the first place they look when they want to buy or sell a car.



Think of the jobs for drivers that fall within those mega-jobs of "help me get answers about my community" and "help me make good spending decisions." In metro areas with heavy commuter traffic, an important job to be done twice a day for commuters is "help me see how bad the traffic is on my way to work or home." [Washingtonpost.com](#), [Eastvalleytribune.com](#), [MercuryNews.com](#), [PalmBeachPost.com](#) and [Boston.com](#) do that job by providing real-time traffic maps, showing locations of accidents and construction projects, with options to turn on state traffic cameras and see what the traffic looks like right now. Because this information is most valuable when people are in their cars, be sure to make it easily accessible by cell phone or offer text alerts on traffic, as the [Pocono Record](#) does.

Another frequent driver question, especially with rising gasoline prices, is "Where can I get a good deal on gasoline?" [Jacksonville.com](#), [GazetteOnline.com](#) and [appeal-democrat.com](#) are providing those answers for their communities using mashups with GasBuddy.

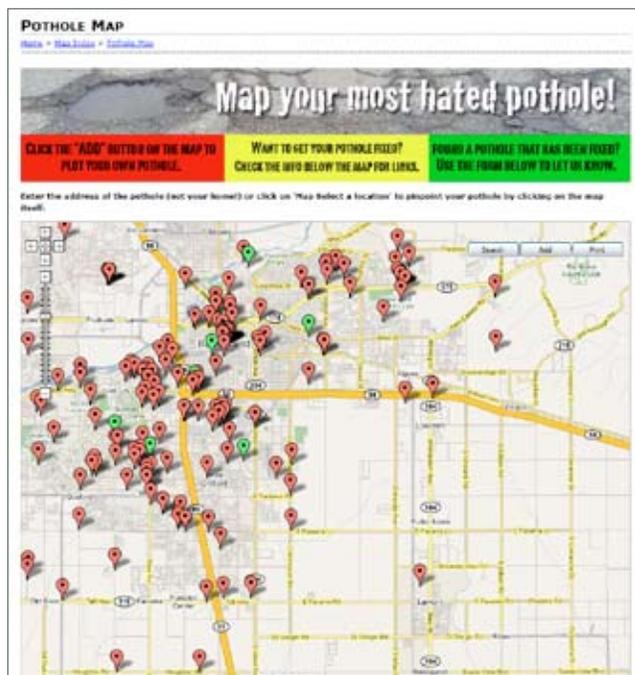


II. DOING MEGA-JOBS FOR BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

Your business directory will have listings (and, you hope, enhanced advertising) for auto-related businesses such as rental agencies, repair services, tire stores, towing and so on. Place a mini-directory with those categories on your driving vertical, too. Maybe you can develop an emergency-repair-services answerbase, where auto service centers who can squeeze you in today post their available slots, so a motorist who needs service right away can find a quick solution rather than calling all over town. Be sure to make this solution easily accessible by mobile devices, since many times the motorist who needs a quick repair is away from the home or office.

Other driving-related answerbases can fill out the site, establishing a one-stop place for all jobs related to owning or driving a car: [gas pump inspections](#), [bridge inspections](#), [parking of fenders](#), [vanity license plates](#), and [parking meter citations](#).

Of course, databases are only one of the tools for building audience. Help drivers connect at your driving vertical with discussion forums, sharing photos of souped-up cars, contests and advice. Invite drivers to swap stories on topics such as winter driving, first cars, teaching teens to drive and so on. If your community has bad winter weather and/or a poor road-maintenance department, you can develop a map where users enter locations of bad [potholes](#), both warning the public and automatically emailing the city. Or on a big snowstorm, you ask users to enter the time when plows reached their streets (something that would provide a good story for your news pages).



Driving is an area where you can call on the users to develop much of your content. Develop a map where they vote on the slowest or most dangerous intersections (you could start by mapping where accidents occur) or call attention to the roads most in need of repair and vent their complaints about them.

The point is that driving is mostly a local pursuit and it's a frustrating mega-job in many markets – much more than a once-every-few-years pursuit, as buying cars is for most people. This is a topic a local site can own. Once you start identifying the jobs and questions and providing solutions and answers, you will provide *the* place for drivers to turn every day. You will not only protect your revenue from auto classifieds, but you may have a chance to attract revenue (in particular from video, mobile and local search) from repair shops, insurance agencies and companies, tire stores and other businesses that may not advertise much in newspapers. (This site would be a great place for drivers to buy their insurance online after comparing rates from different companies.)

Some newspaper sites are using some of these tools. For instance, the [dallasnews.com autos vertical](#) has auto-related news, a car clubs directory, reader-submitted photos and discussion forums. It's developing a place for car enthusiasts to gather online. A good next step would be some answerbases delivering useful everyday information for drivers of varying levels of enthusiasm.

2. Doing jobs for home owners

As with cars, the principle here is to broaden the homes-related jobs that you already do. Most real-estate verticals do just two jobs: Help me find a home to buy (or rent) or help me sell a home (or find a renter). The competition for those jobs is fierce and real estate agents are finding that they can reach that audience directly. Consider using answerbases to expand your real-estate vertical and do more jobs relating to people's homes. If they turn to this site frequently for the jobs that come with being a home owner, this will be the first place they look (and thus the first place real estate agents will want to be seen) when they are ready to move to a larger or smaller home. (Admittedly, many home buyers are just moving to the community, but an effective site that people are using regularly will generate referrals from new co-workers. And if the same answerbases are part of a community answer center for newcomers, you connect with new people before they arrive, identifying yourself right away as the all-purpose answer source.)

As with driving, some of the best existing answerbases for home owners are typically found in the news site's data center rather than in the real-estate vertical. Think of all the home-related questions within those mega-jobs of "help me get answers about my community" and "help me make good spending decisions."

How much will my property taxes go up? [DesMoinesRegister.com](#) provides a [property tax calculator](#) to help you find the answer.

II. DOING MEGA-JOBS FOR BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

How much did that house up the block sell for? [Property records](#) are the most popular answerbase at DelawareOnline, public service editor Merritt Wallick says.

How good are the schools (or how bad is the crime) in this neighborhood? *The Washington Post's* [Local Explorer](#) and *The Cincinnati Enquirer's* [CinciNavigator](#) show how you can use one tool to search multiple databases, answering a wide range of questions at the neighborhood or block level about crime, schools, home sales, events, new businesses, recent news, restaurants and other nearby businesses and attractions. These tools are appropriately located on the home page or the data page of news sites, but need to be prominently featured in homes sites, too. They answer critical questions about neighborhoods prospective buyers are considering. Adrian Holovaty's [EveryBlock](#) project provides photos, news articles, data on building permits, liquor licenses and other information on neighborhoods by scraping all manner of geocoded information from the Internet. EveryBlock covers just San Francisco, Chicago and New York so far, but will be expanding.

Issues about dwellings raise lots of other questions you can answer using data: [property sales](#), [property assessments](#), [mortgage foreclosures](#), [tax delinquencies](#), [housing discrimination](#), and [contractor violations](#).

Again, follow the approach suggested for the driving vertical by engaging homeowners in community forums where they can tell stories, swap advice and share pictures of first homes, dream homes, remodeling projects, landscaping projects and so on.

A random search of more than a dozen newspaper real estate sites showed little use of databases or social-networking tools to make them places home owners would come regularly, beyond standard news and feature content and occasional use of an answerbase to search property transactions.



Where can I find a good roofer or landscaper? As with the driving vertical, enhance your homes vertical by cross-referencing appropriate categories from the business directory. This helps both products, providing another avenue into the business directory and giving continuing value to the homes vertical. As with driving, you could develop an emergency-services database, where contractors available on short notice that day might register their availability. Or you could make this email-driven: Instead of calling around for a plumber in an emergency, the home-owner enters an address and you send out emails to plumbers who have asked to be notified of jobs in that part of town. Those who are available and interested respond by an email that goes through your site. Businesses could pay either for the leads or the actual jobs or, in a two-tiered fee structure, they might pay a small fee for the email contact and a larger fee if they land the job.

III. LOTS OF QUESTIONS, LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES

If you're uncomfortable blazing your own trail, you have plenty of examples to follow in using data to provide answers online. We encourage being the first to use answerbases in a particular way, especially when it comes to innovative ways of generating revenue. But you also can copy and improve upon the successful efforts of other organizations.

Data desks were key parts of Gannett's reorganization into information centers. Rob Curley's teams have used databases effectively in his much-noted work at CJOnline.com, LJWorld.com, naplesnews.com and WashingtonPost.Newsweek Interactive and we'll no doubt see more database work from Curley's team in Las Vegas. Adrian Holovaty has received acclaim for his work on databases both with the Curley team and in his independently produced chicagocrime.org. He's currently working on open-source software for community databases in his EveryBlock project under a grant from the Knight Foundation. Other organizations are having success with databases, too. You can study those examples and copy them or – better yet – push them to the next level.

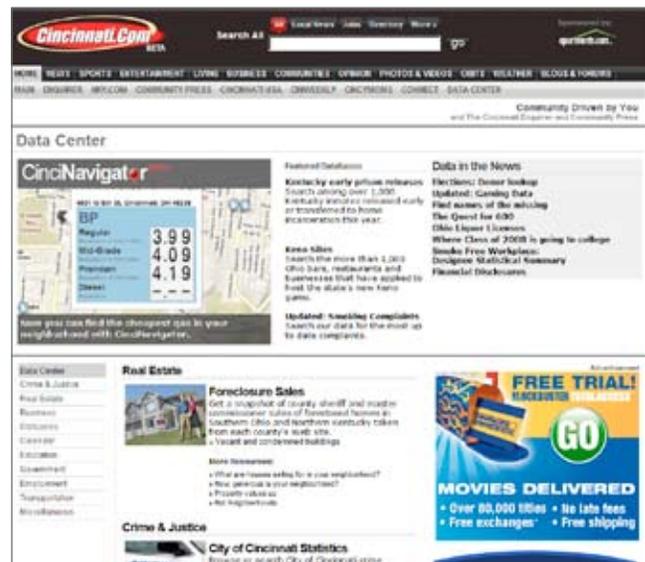
This report tries to help you envision what your answerbase collection can become. For organizations already operating data centers, we encourage consideration of some of these jobs-oriented ideas for presenting answers. For organizations that need to start turning data into answers, we offer this as a content road map. Where we know of answerbases similar to those we suggest, we provide links. In other cases, we encourage you to be the first with this approach and send API the links, so we can note them in the [N2 Blog](#) and future reports.

The list of answerbases presented here is a large collection of answerbases that a metro organization might develop. But community organizations should scale this to their staffs and their communities, identifying the jobs here that they can and should do. Whatever your size, develop answerbases that will have lasting value, so your collection of answers grows with each project. Then update them periodically so they hold their value.

Most important, get started *now*, if you haven't already. If you don't start providing answerbases, someone else in your community will beat you to the job. Gannett TV stations and some other TV stations are developing data centers similar to the data centers at Gannett newspaper sites. A Gannett station in one southern city has a [Data Center](#) that offers more answerbases than the local newspaper. The newspaper's Web site offers links to a few answerbases ([state and local salaries](#) and [presidential candidates' views on the issues](#)) but does not promote a general answer center. Community groups and Internet pure-plays, as well as TV stations, can beat the newspaper into this space in your community if you don't move swiftly.

A. Answer Center index page.

The index page should always feature one timely answerbase. It may be the freshest one or a standing answerbase that is timely because of the season, an annual event or something in the news. For instance, the standing answerbase on salaries of state or city workers might move to the featured spot when you run a story on labor negotiations. Or an answerbase you developed a few months ago on housing foreclosures might move to the featured position when Congress or the president takes some sort of action to provide relief for homeowners facing foreclosure. After a few days or weeks (however long it takes to produce a newer answerbase), the featured one moves off the prime spot but remains listed under a topical heading such as "answers for housing questions." Offer one to three secondary featured answerbases, as well as an organized directory of all your answerbases. Be sure to organize by the job that the answerbase does for the user, as we have below, not by agency or topic (most journalists' default setting). The [Cincinnati Data Center](#) and [RocDocs](#) offer attractive index pages that are easy to browse for the answers you're seeking.



Because the newspaper industry has not done well at developing revenue opportunities associated with databases, several examples in this section will include discussion of the revenue-generation possibilities. Given the heavy traffic that index pages are already driving, these should be strong advertising locations, either for rotating banners and buttons or for a particular business to sponsor the whole page. But keep in mind the projections in the *Newspaper Next 2.0* report from Borrell Associates that search, video and email advertising are going to grow dramatically in the next five years, while banner advertising will actually decline. Answerbases are excellent vehicles for these and other forms of revenue. So revenue development must be part of any answerbase project.

III. LOTS OF QUESTIONS, LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES

B. Politics

Job: Help me decide how to vote. This will be an important job this year. It's one news staffs have been handling in print for decades and more recently online. As already discussed in this report, [PolitiFact](#) is an excellent, job-focused answerbase, designed to help voters evaluate candidates' claims and attacks. [Washingtonpost.com's Fact Checker](#) does the same job.



Educating voters for local elections has always been an important job for newspapers. LoudounExtra, a hyperlocal project of the Washington Post, has developed an [election guide](#) that's loaded with helpful information. WashingtonPost.Newsweek Interactive Managing Editor Tim Richardson said: "One of the reasons we created it was to get content to readers more quickly than what the newspaper had planned to do in its voters guide. And we wanted to provide lots of content that would never make it into the printed voters guide." Newspapers have been doing Q&A's with candidates forever. In addition to being able to run them at full length in the digital version, rather than imposing word limits, Loudoun Extra turned the responses into an answerbase it calls the [Candidate Selector](#). Choose your positions on various issues and the tool tells you which candidates most closely agree with you. USAToday.com did the same thing with the presidential [Candidate Match Game](#). It adjusts results based on which issues matter most to the voter.

Many news sites, including [NYTimes.com](#) and [azcentral.com](#), are offering campaign contributions answerbases to answer voters' questions about which special interests support which candidates.

The Des Moines Register and [dmregister.com](#) mapped [candidates' visits across Iowa](#) before the caucuses there and *The New York Times* and [NYTimes.com](#) and [washingtonpost.com](#) are tracking [candidate visits across the country](#). *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and [ajc.com](#) combine data, stories, cartoons, photos and interactive opportunities in [Election Guide 2008](#), demonstrating how well data projects work with other

types of content and need to be integrated throughout a site. *The Dallas Morning News* and [dallasnews.com Voter Guide](#) lets you enter your address and it gives you a printable ballot for your exact jurisdiction, along with providing the guide information for the races you will face. [NewarkAdvocate.com](#), Web site for an Ohio newspaper of about 20,000 daily print circulation, provides a [Voter Guide](#) that shows how this can work at the community level.

Revenue possibilities: A longtime lament of newspapers has been that they don't get their share of political advertising. Election-oriented answerbases should be terrific venues for video advertising and other forms of advertising by candidates and interest groups, especially as more and more of campaign budgets are being directed online.

C. Government

Job: Help me see what I'm getting for my tax dollars. People in your community are interested in seeing the salaries of public employees at virtually any level ([federal](#), [state](#), [university](#), [county](#), [city](#), [school](#)). Salaries get the highest traffic at several data centers. Other accountability answerbases help users [check votes by local officials](#), [study federal pork projects](#), [city property](#), [lawmakers' or other officials' expense reports](#) or [voter registration problems](#).

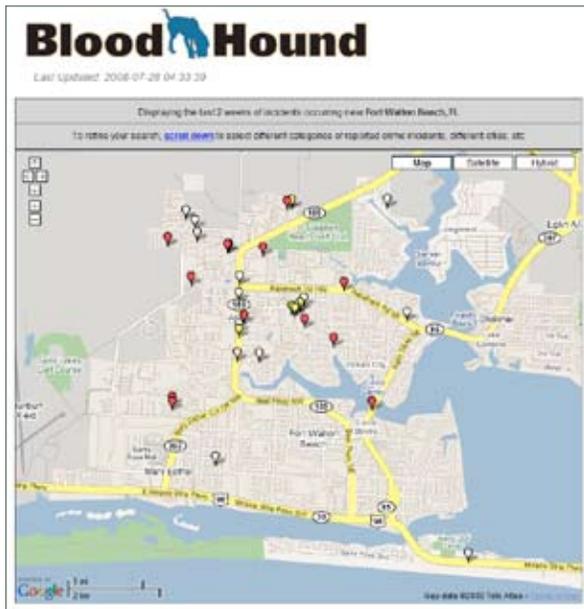
D. Crime

Job: Tell me how safe my neighborhood is. Lots of answerbases focus on public safety issues. [Holovaty's chicagocrime.org](#) showed the way and set the standard. Of course, this is an essential job in urban communities. The [Homicide Map](#) at [LATimes.com](#) shows how you can answer more specific public-safety questions.

Another important public-safety job, especially for parents of teen-age drivers, is "Tell me what that siren is about." [Indy-911Calls](#), already discussed in this report, provides answers in a real-time map, where users click on police, fire or ambulance icons to get basic information – address and nature of the call. [Springfield 911](#) provides a similar map for a smaller metro area in Missouri, with more details on the calls.

Public-safety answers are not just a job for metro papers, as the *Northwest Florida Daily News* demonstrates with its [Blood-Hound](#) map. Online Editor Isaac Sabetai and content developer Nathan Land developed the database and mapping system in 2007, using electronic reports from the sheriff's office, which the *News* was already receiving. A police reporter coordinated gathering of paper reports from other agencies, which the *News* staff keys into the database. "It takes a few hours, but I think it's worth it," Editor Pat Rice wrote. "BloodHound was an immediate hit and page views have been steady, about 15,000 page views a month." Rice told the story of when a *News* staff member's home was broken into. "When the police arrived, [the staff member's] boyfriend asked if similar incidents had occurred in the area recently. The officer said he didn't know, then instructed them to go to our Web site, [nwfddailynews.com](#), and

III. LOTS OF QUESTIONS, LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES



use BloodHound because, he said, it's the best way to track crime in a neighborhood." That's an example of becoming the answer source for your community.

If you think you're too small a community to try a crime map, check out the maps at newsleader.com in Staunton, Va., or at ShelbyStar.com in Shelby, N.C. Both towns are smaller than 25,000 population. In addition to a general crime map, ShelbyStar.com presents a [stolen-cars map](#) and an [unsolved-murders map](#) with a map on car break-ins coming soon.

Lots of other answerbases address public-safety questions, especially using maps: [sex offenders](#), [meth busts](#), [sexual assaults](#), [drunk driving](#), [FBI crime stats](#), [gun dealers](#), [gun owners](#), [concealed weapon permits](#), [motorcycle accidents](#), [teen drinking](#), [felony convictions](#), [bicycle accidents](#), [speed trap locations](#), [tsunami evacuation zones](#). Danny Sanchez, web producer at the *Orlando Sentinel* and OrlandoSentinel.com, posted a [directory of online crime maps](#) on his Journalistopia blog that you can check to see the range of possibilities. Note in his directory that in several communities, these maps have been developed by someone other than a news organization. We need to remain the place people turn for this core job that newspapers have performed for years.

Revenue possibilities: Home-security or insurance companies might be interested in target advertising possibilities for public-safety answerbases. Maybe if you develop an answerbase of 911 calls, you could offer users the chance to register for email or text-message alerts giving information about calls in their neighborhoods. The alerts would probably need to be free, but you might be able to sell sponsorships. Your crime-related answerbases should also be accompanied by links to the sections of your business directory with information and advertising from companies that sell home security, insurance or other related services.

E. Entertainment, activities

Mega-job: Help me find/choose things to do. As discussed in *Newspaper Next 2.0*, planning activities is an important mega-job. Community calendars are one of the most universal types of newspaper content, and they grow bigger and more useful online. Huge papers such as the [Washington Post](#), and community papers such as [The News Leader](#) in Staunton, Va., the [Sedalia Democrat](#) in Missouri or [The Telegraph](#) in Alton, Ill., offer searchable calendars that let users rate and review events, submit photos, add reminders to their Outlook calendars and map the route to the venue. Some calendars, such as [York Region POP \(Personal Online Planner\)](#), allow users to maintain their own calendars online.



Revenue possibilities: The targeted revenue possibilities with a calendar are plentiful, with ads keyed to the types of events a user is seeking. Some calendars show directory listings of restaurants and bars in the area of a venue. Advertisers could buy premium positioning or turn the listings into links providing menus, videos, coupons, gift certificates and so forth. (An option in the business directory could be to provide a link to your listing when it shows up near a venue in the calendar.) You also should try to develop direct-transaction possibilities from calendars, selling tickets to events or registration for classes. Events that might attract out-of-town audiences should offer opportunities to book hotel reservations near the venue. A calendar also presents email and text advertising opportunities. People inquiring about a particular type of entertainment, for instance, could get a prompt asking if they want notifications of future events with that genre of music, band or venue.

III. LOTS OF QUESTIONS, LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES

F. Eating out

Job: Help me find a place to eat tonight. Dining, entertainment and night life raise questions you can answer with restaurant guides such as those being offered by naplesnews.com, [LoudounExtra](http://LoudounExtra.com), [Maine Today](http://Maine Today.com), gazette.com and elpasotimes.com or with [restaurant inspection reports](#), [bar guides](#), [movie listings](#) or guides to local [music](#), [wineries](#) or [other attractions](#). These directories are searchable and many of them are interactive, giving users chances to read reviews from previous diners or write their own reviews. Be sure to provide a directory with easy location search for mobile use.

Revenue possibilities: As obvious as the targeted revenue possibilities here are, the companies offering directories have not fully developed them. Each restaurant's answerbase entry could include a link to an advertisement, offering menus, videos, coupons, gift certificates and opportunities to make reservations. Restaurant answerbases can also generate revenue by offering location-based search capabilities, allowing mobile users to enter a location and find eating establishments nearby.

G. Education

Job: Help me ensure my child will get a good education. Answerbases can answer lots of questions about education for parents, teachers and taxpayers: school dropout rates, [state school report cards](#), [state test scores](#), [teacher salaries](#), [abuse by teachers](#), [cheating on tests](#), [SAT test scores](#), [ACT test scores](#), [school crime](#), [campus violence](#), [school bus incidents](#), [school discipline](#), [college fund-raising](#), [scholarships](#), [graduation rates](#), [average class sizes](#) or whether [college dormitories](#) have [fire sprinklers](#).

Revenue possibilities: Parents might be willing to pay for email or text alerts when you have new data on their children's schools, when the location of the varsity soccer game changes at the last minute, or when schools are closed or dismissed early because of weather. Or you might offer those alerts free and sell sponsorships. You could develop databases of school-supply lists for each school and grade level that parents can print out and take to the store or, better yet, order online from local retailers via your site and have shipped to their homes. The revenue possibilities are not limited to school-related businesses. Any product that creates an audience of parents will be valuable to a wide range of businesses, appealing to the parents' interest on a variety of issues, such as health and entertainment, that aren't directly connected to school.

H. Sports

Job: Help me wallow or revel in information about my favorite player/team. Some of the best work in using data to provide answers is being done to feed the seemingly endless information appetites of sports fans: [Green Bay Packers](#), [Indianapolis Colts](#), [Phoenix Suns](#), [Kansas Jayhawks](#), [high school sports](#), [youth sports](#). Assistant sports editor Ted Green reported in [Gannett's News Watch](#) that the Manning Meter took 100 hours of data entry plus about a month of design and testing. It was an immediate hit, topping 70,000 page views the first week when it debuted, the opening week of the 2007 season, following the Colts' Super Bowl victory. Several developers mentioned Manning Meter when asked about their favorite answerbases. "That's pretty much nothing but automatic traffic," said Derek Willis of [The New York Times](#) and [nytimes.com](#). "You've got all this information but you could never do anything like that in the paper."



For some projects data entry can be a major expense. But your sports staff is entering and processing loads of data already for all those columns of agate you run in print. Databases can let you re-use that material efficiently on multiple platforms, as [Varsity845](#) does for high school sports in the Middletown, N.Y., area (profiled in detail on Page 76 of *Newspaper Next 2.0.*)

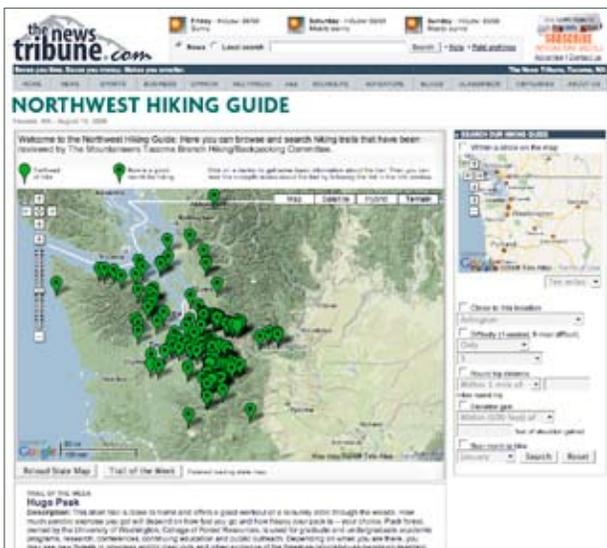
Revenue possibilities: Sports fans spend a ton of money and the revenue possibilities – and even direct transaction possibilities – are plentiful: tickets, team gear, booster clubs, equipment for players on youth or high school teams, travel arrangements for bowl, playoff and tournament games, hotel reservations for fans of visiting teams.

III. LOTS OF QUESTIONS, LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES

I. Recreation

Job: Help me find a good beach or hiking trail. Recreation raises lots of opportunities for answerbases on specialized topics such as [golf courses](#), [swimming pools](#), [biking](#), [beaches](#), [hiking trails](#), [hunting accidents](#), [summer camps](#), [eagle nests](#) or a [multi-faceted guide](#) to a national park or other popular recreation destination. Or you could answer questions from boaters, fishers and swimmers about [shark attacks](#), [beach pollution](#), [boating safety](#), [boat thefts](#) or [lake water quality](#).

Revenue opportunities: Sporting-goods stores, bike shops, outfitters, marinas and other businesses serving recreation provide opportunities for enhanced database listings, target advertising, video advertising, email and direct sales.



J. Newspaper archives

Job: Help me find answers in your back issues. Your archives are a valuable resource that will answer lots of questions and provide target advertising, either with general archive access or specialized databases such as [recipes](#), [obituaries](#), [weddings](#) or sports stories on the local team. Online editor Jean Dubail reported on Derek Willis' blog that the first four days that Cleveland.com offered [Plain Dealer stories about the Browns](#), users made 20,000 searches.

Revenue opportunities: You could offer grocery or specialty stores the opportunity to advertise their prices on the ingredients in a recipe delivered from your archives. This could include an option for ordering the ingredients online, to be either delivered or waiting bagged in a cooler for pickup on your way home from work. You can offer a general search of your archives or you can offer specialized searches in some of the areas that are already your most popular archive searches. For instance, if a local attraction generates lots of searches, you can set up a page just for searching for information and stories about that attraction (an ideal advertising site for the attraction itself as well as nearby hotels and resorts).

K. Seasonal information

Job: Help me find a pick-your-own berry patch or some Christmas light displays. The changing seasons provide opportunities to answer questions about [berry patches](#), [holiday lights](#), [haunted houses](#), [fall foliage](#), [tornadoes](#), [storms](#) or the likelihood of a [white Christmas](#). Many of these are answerbases where the users will provide much of the information. You might prime the pump for a holiday-lights answerbase by asking staff members to fill in lighting displays in their neighborhoods, but users will do most of the work here, posting their own photos and address information.

L. Weddings

Jobs and revenue opportunities: Help me plan my wedding or buy a wedding gift. Help me reach couples planning weddings and the families and friends who want to buy gifts. [Engagement announcements](#) are another bit of standard newspaper content that should become a searchable answerbase, with gift-registry links from the announcements. Make them part of a local weddings site that includes an answerbase of businesses that serve weddings, such as caterers, bakers, florists and jewelers. Give each couple their own site, with opportunities for friends and family to enter comments and out-of-town guests to make hotel reservations.

M. Travel

Job: Help me get quick answers when I travel. Newspaper sites aren't using databases very extensively or effectively to help travelers. These solutions need to be readily accessible by mobile devices. A quickly searchable airport directory, with user reviews and advertising opportunities, would be really helpful for travelers. Travelers would find answerbases on [flight delays](#), [airport security wait times](#) and [items stolen from luggage](#) quite helpful.



III. LOTS OF QUESTIONS, LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES

N. News

Job: Help me understand how this story or this issue affects me. When Newspaper Next urges using databases and other tools to build audiences beyond news, that doesn't mean we want to abandon that traditional job, just to expand our view of jobs. Answerbases are excellent tools for covering the news, too. They can help your audience keep up with and understand continuing stories ranging from [roaming black bears](#) to [war casualties in Iraq](#) and [Afghanistan](#). Data can help answer questions about the personal or neighborhood impact when you publish major projects on important issues such as [safety of child-care providers](#), [commuter train station safety](#) or [innocent prisoners freed using DNA evidence](#).

You can use answerbases to amplify a daily story. "For example, after a recent state audit of our city's finances, we requested [documents](#) and [data](#) that were addressed in the report," said Matt Wynn of the *Springfield News-Leader* and News-Leader.com in Springfield, Mo. "Our audience then had a chance to read the audit itself, look at some of the actual [data](#) that were reflected in the report, and take in our distillation of all of it in the form of traditional news stories." The databases from the audit saw "massive traffic when they accompanied the news of the day."

You don't have to analyze the data all yourself. *The News-Press* and news-press.com in Fort Myers, Fla., "crowd-sourced" by asking its audience to help it find the inconsistencies and fraud in data released by the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) on disaster payments for hurricane damage in Florida.

Revenue opportunity: Databases help generate more page views for a news story, giving you more opportunities from standard online advertising such as banners. Some particular answerbases relating to news stories might present target advertising opportunities.

O. The big story

When disaster struck this spring, two Iowa newspapers demonstrated ways to use databases to tell important stories and connect the community. After a May 25 tornado killed six people and destroyed hundreds of homes and businesses in Parkersburg, Iowa, the *Des Moines Register* and DesMoines-Register.com showed the damage in a [detailed interactive map](#). Click on a property and you can see the "before" photo from the county assessor's office and a Register photo of the leveled home. Some properties have text and videos telling the stories of the people who lived there. Michele McLellan reported in her [Newsroom Leadership 3.0 blog](#) that the map received 42,000 hits by the end of June.

As rivers rose the next month in Eastern Iowa, *The Gazette* and GazetteOnline in Cedar Rapids used [three different interactive maps](#) to show the developments on a regional basis and in the threatened communities of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. GazetteOnline also created Google maps of the flood plains in both Cedar Rapids and the Iowa City/Coralville area. The Cedar Rapids map had about 50,000 views.

Another [Google map](#) showed where the floodwater reached. Because this information was not readily available from the officials in the immediate hours approaching the crest, mobile journalist Jeff Raasch traveled the boundary of the flood waters in Cedar Rapids. GazetteOnline Information Center Manager Zach Kucharski traveled along the edge of the floodwater in Iowa City and then drew the detailed polygons on a [Google map](#). Each of these maps had about 15,000 page views in the first couple days online.

"While there are higher-tech ways to do these types of projects, we had to improvise because of the need to get accurate information out there as quickly as we could while dealing with limited power and other circumstances," explained Kucharski. The Gazette's building was on the edge of the downtown Cedar Rapids flood zone and operated for nearly a month on generator power after the electrical grid failed.

Kucharski also developed a [searchable list of contractors](#) certified by the city of Cedar Rapids to work on flood repair and recovery projects. With fly-by-night operations advertising their services on small roadside signs, this gives the community an easy way to check which contractors have been vetted by the city.

GazetteOnline also built a public-service answerbase called [Floodlist](#) that let people list or search for lost and found items and missing pets as well as an area where people could request help or offer services. Those answerbases collected only about 100 submissions. However, Floodlist also included a more successful answerbase in which relocated businesses can submit information about where they are operating, the extent of damage the company suffered and how customers can find them. The database collected information about more than 150 businesses and continues to grow. "We're working with the local chamber of commerce to populate the database, rather than waiting for businesses to populate it themselves," Kucharski said. "Working with the chamber allowed us to benefit from resources we wouldn't otherwise have. The chamber has staff working to go door-to-door, and is also collecting surveys every time someone calls or stops in at the office with a question. In addition to providing a free service to the businesses, we're also able to develop a fuller source list, contact information and story idea list which can be used in reporting."

Another GazetteOnline answerbase is collecting [user-submitted memories](#) and photos of the destroyed homes, which will be combined with photos shot by staff photographers of evacuated families outside their condemned homes.

(Disclosure: The author of this report started a new job as editor of *The Gazette* and GazetteOnline the week of the flood.)

III. LOTS OF QUESTIONS, LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES

P. Community information

Job: Help me find lots of answers about my neighborhood and my community. The Washington Post's [Local Explorer](#) and [Cincinnati Navigator](#), discussed in the section on strengthening the homes vertical, show how you can use one tool to search multiple databases, answering a wide range of questions at the neighborhood or block level about crime, schools, home sales, events, new businesses, recent news, restaurants and other nearby businesses and attractions. *The Virginian-Pilot* and HamptonRoads.com's [Local Attractions Guide](#) features directory information as well as user ratings and reviews of local attractions such as [farmers markets](#), [historical attractions](#) and [art galleries](#). Other community answerbases to consider include a [worship guide](#), [disaster preparedness information](#), [volunteer opportunities](#), [military information](#), [local history](#) or [census](#) information.

Emerson College journalism professor Paul Niwa developed [Boston Chinatown](#), telling stories of individuals in the community and their connections to each other, an avenue newspaper sites have not yet explored. Niwa described his site as a Web representation of the "civic mapping" that many news staffs have done, but "the data collected was privately kept in reporter notebooks." The site is having an impact in Chinatown, a neighborhood of about 40,000 residents: "A restaurant owner used the site to find a legal group to help him fight an illegal eviction. Political candidates used it to find influential members of the neighborhood. A real estate developer used it to find people to survey for an environmental impact study. Since the developer talked to ordinary folks, it got more negative responses that caused the company to lose a grant from the city," Niwa said. "The site has become an important facilitator of civic participation – a key function for journalists. However, I knew I hit the jackpot when users kept asking what they needed to do to get their profile placed closer to the center of the map."



Revenue possibilities: The general community answerbases have all the target advertising and direct-transaction possibilities of calendars and restaurant directories and more. Imagine what you could do by combining the functionality of a business directory like Kudzu or PalmettoBizBuzz with a community explorer answerbase.

Q. Answers on a variety of topics

Job: Help me find a multitude of answers. The people of your community have endless questions and you can provide answers about [animal nuisances](#), [pet names](#), [baby names](#), [births](#), [divorces](#), [deaths](#), [toy recalls](#), [WiFi](#), [philanthropy](#), [pollution](#), [local artists](#), [credit card payoffs](#), [finding people](#), [odds of winning at casinos](#), [quirky local landmarks](#) or almost anything.

Think of the answers to questions your community will be asking. Don't view this report as a one-size-fits-all guide that every organization should follow exactly. The [panther map](#) developed by the *News-Press* and news-press.com in Fort Myers, Fla., is not something that would make sense in most markets. But it answered pertinent questions in that market. Your community may not be interested in [theme park incidents](#), but they are important for the *Orlando Sentinel* and OrlandoSentinel.com. Think of the questions people are asking in your market and then develop answerbases.

R. Relocation

Job: Help me find answers to questions about another community where I am moving or traveling. While your answerbases should be focused on your community, you can add value by simply linking to answer centers in other communities. With just a little work, this underscores that you have the answers, whatever the question. It also identifies our industry in general as the place to look for community answers.

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER

A. How to start, how far go to

Newspaper companies are approaching answerbases along a wide spectrum of approaches to both getting their data and presenting it.

The original Newspaper Next report explained extensively about Clayton Christensen's research on disruptive innovation – how successful innovations start with low-cost “good enough” solutions, then improve along a rising green line in Christensen's accompanying graphic. Database development has followed this “good-enough” concept in lots of ways. While some organizations and individuals are already ascending the green line to some really sophisticated answerbase presentations, don't feel like you need to start at the top. You could look at some of the best databases and become so intimidated that you never start. Up and down the spectrum of answerbase projects, you can see lessons that will help you decide where to start and what goals to pursue:

At the very least, provide links to answers. The *Wausau Daily Herald* has not yet developed the data expertise of larger Gannett staffs, but wausaudailyherald.com still provides a host of links on its [DataMine](#) page. Click on the links and you go to state and federal databases, some of them easy to search, some more cumbersome. This is not a destination, but it's a start. Almost any paper of any size can have a reporter spend a few days assembling a collection of links that can be your start at presenting your site as the place to find answers. The *News & Observer* in Raleigh, N.C., presents mostly links to public agencies' databases and other outside resources in its [Fact Finder](#) answerbase. Even if you are developing your own answerbases, consider providing links to other answers. That establishes your site as the place to start when looking for answers. This helps do the job for users and may keep them coming back for future jobs. (However, each time they click to an external link, someone else gets those page views.)



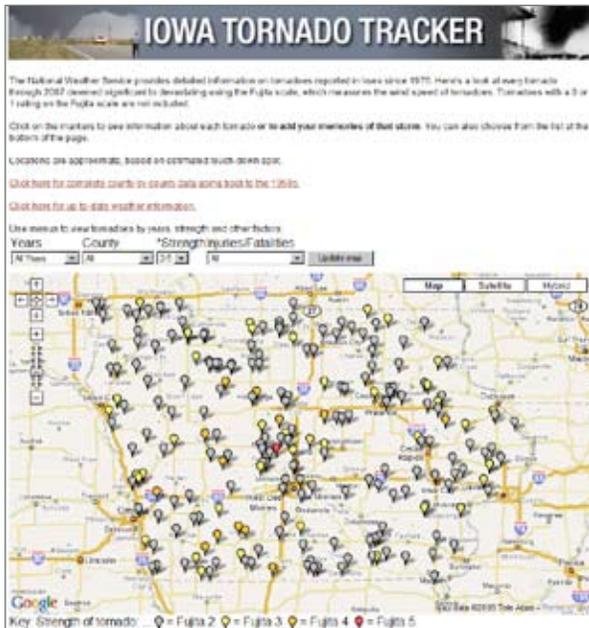
Acquire the data to present your own answerbase. To advance beyond the list of links, you need to start acquiring or assembling databases. This is a lot of work, but some of it is work that lots of journalists are already doing or learning how to do. Newspaper staffs have been assembling mountains of data for decades.

[Adrian Holovaty](#) has written that many newspaper staples are really structured sets of data. For instance, obituaries have names, dates, survivors and funeral homes; a college graduate has a name, college, hometown, home state, degree, and year; calendar entries have date, venue, name of event, type of event, sponsoring organization. And so on. So we already collect and assemble lots of information that we don't think of as data but could start assembling and storing that way without lots of extra work.

Your staff can acquire data a number of ways:

- Download data posted online by public agencies. Lots of agencies post their data online, but it's not easily searchable by the public to provide easy answers.
- Obtain data from public agencies under public record laws. Reporters and media company attorneys and lobbyists have been fighting these battles for years. Most public records laws now make data available to the public.
- Buy data from a vendor. This is how business directories generally start.
- Gather and enter the information yourself.
- Write programs so your computers will automatically “scrape” the data from sites where it is stored. This is how *The Washington Post's* [Congress Votes](#) answerbase works. “The only human intervention is when someone dies or leaves office,” said Derek Willis, newsroom developer for *The New York Times*, who previously worked on databases at the *Post*.
- Create mashups using other sources such as [Gas Buddy](#) or Google Maps (both of the examples in the next paragraph use Google Maps).
- Engage users in building and enhancing your collection of answers. The [Free WiFi in the South Sound](#) map at thenewstri-bune.com invites users to send in new locations in the Tacoma area. The *Des Moines Register's* [Iowa Tornado Tracker](#) presents basic data gathered by the news staff, such as date, location, force, deaths, injuries and damage, but invites the public to add stories. Hundreds of newspaper sites (but not enough) offer calendars that let event organizers enter their own information. The *Times-News* in Burlington, N.C., saw an increase in calendar entries when it added an invitation to enter calendar events to the email signatures of staff members.

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER



Simple presentation is good enough. Lots of databases have a simple search window or two where you can either type in or select from a drop-down menu one or a few pieces of information. [DataUniverse](#), clearly one of the most successful sites, started out with a simple, text-heavy home-page design that wasn't visually attractive at all. While the home page now features photographs and graphics, the search pages remain simple. If the search is for federal salaries, the site's most popular query, there are three basic ways to narrow the search: name, state and agency. While other sites have more flexible search, multimedia and interaction options, the DataUniverse success (detailed later in the traffic section) underscores that you don't have to master all the flourishes before you start. Also remember the importance of testing, the fourth step in the N2 Innovation Method. Test your search presentation with some prospective users and adjust if they find it difficult to use.

Make traditional content searchable. *The Observer-Dispatch* and *uticaOD.com* in Utica, N.Y., present standard newspaper lists such as obituaries, announcements, school closings and election results in databases. The site's obituaries, which generate about 300,000 page views a month, present a list of names to the left that you can scroll through. But at the right are search windows, which you can use to search by name, date or date range. "I have found that the key to generating traffic with data is all in the interface that you provide to the end-user," said Scott DeNoon, online operations manager. "If you give the visitors simple, effective ways to search and display the data, they search and search and search."

Flexibility adds fun and function. Matt Waite, who developed [PolitiFact](#), deplores the lack of creativity in presenting answerbases. "Can we offer no more creative way into the data than to make a user put stuff here and hit search?" he asked in his [blog](#). "What if someone doesn't know how to spell something or

doesn't know what they want, or all they want to do is explore the data their own way?" He shows some advanced possibilities in [PolitiFact](#), where you can browse the Truth-o-Meter findings by candidate or attacker, by subject, party, location or by how the Truth-o-Meter ruled on an attack or claim. You don't feel like you're in a database at all when you're browsing [PolitiFact](#). You're just reading about the candidates, getting answers to your questions about whether their claims and attacks are true. You're just reading, but not in the linear fashion of a news story. You search for answers as the questions occur to you and browse as possibilities catch your eye. The [Virtual House](#) at [Kudzu.com](#) is another excellent example of using creative presentation to help users search data. You roll your mouse across the house, externally or any of the rooms, and Kudzu offers you room-specific listings of services to help with the particular room you're in – decorators, plumbers, painters, roofers, appliance repair services and so on.



Graphics and analysis enhance packages. You can enhance packages without going into as much development as [PolitiFact](#) involved. [Azcentral.com](#) and [IndyStar.com](#) have state salary answerbases providing much the same information at the state level as [DataUniverse](#) does with federal salaries. They have enhanced the search pages, though, with graphics and analysis. [IndyStar](#) has added some options that [DataUniverse](#) doesn't have: It presents a graphic with stacks of coins showing the relative pay of the median state salary, the highest-paid elected official, the highest-paid woman and the highest-paid state employee. You can search by name, agency or job title and you can also set a salary range. [Azcentral.com](#) presents the photos of five members of the governor's cabinet, along with their salaries, at the top of the page. You can search by job or agency. You can select agency directors, elected officials or people making more than the governor. (But you can't search by name, so even with the graphic enhancements it doesn't do the job as well for some users as the simpler [DataUniverse](#) presentation.)

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER

Multimedia and storytelling enhance packages. Bear sightings are an interesting bit of news in many communities, and when you check them out on roanoke.com, the presentation doesn't look, feel or sound like a database. A map shows at least 17 bear sightings in southwestern Virginia. Click on the bear-paw icon and you read the exact location, the name of the person who saw the bear, a description of what happened and, in a couple of cases, photos. The map invites the public to report sightings and submit photos and videos.



Multimedia can work together with data as powerful storytelling tools, as *The New York Times* demonstrated with the [Casualties of War](#) answerbase at NYTimes.com.

Presentation can be as important as the answers you provide. "Organizations should spend at least as much time developing the interface from a user's perspective as is spent on acquiring the data and making it available," said Michael Corey, digital projects editor at the *Des Moines Register* and DesMoinesRegister.com. "I've seen several really potentially great databases lately – packed with great information – that I would never use because the interface isn't user-friendly."

B. Programming solutions

Developers turn data into online answers using a wide array of software products that will sound daunting to novices. Some organizations have programmers who can write their own code to make outstanding online answerbases, and some rely on outside vendors for software and hosting.

Holovaty [encourages journalism schools](#) to start educating journalist-programmers to fill a clear need for the future. In the meantime, journalists such as Paul D'Ambrosio, Matt Waite, Derek Willis and Joe Black are learning programming skills, with outstanding results.

Some with advanced skills are sharing their programs. Jennie Coughlin, data editor at the *News Leader* and newsleader.com in Staunton, Va., used open-source software developed by Matt Wynn at another Gannett paper, the *Springfield News Leader* and News-Leader.com in Missouri: "If you use the tools Wynn developed, it's pretty simple. Our online guy walked me through it in about 10 minutes, and I taught our data clerk to update databases in about the same amount of time. If you want something that's better looking or more integrated, it would take longer and require more skills."

Some organizations are hiring vendors to host their databases and/or provide software solutions. Lots of newspapers are using vendors such as [Zvents](#) or [Planet Discover](#) to host calendars. [Caspio](#), [Ruby on Rails](#) and [Django](#) all have those who support them as good solutions for news databases.

An online discussion about Caspio among bloggers who write about journalism databases – including [Willis](#), [Kaplan-Moss](#), KOMU-TV web editor [Jonathan Coffman](#) and [Matt Wynn](#) – would be helpful reading for anyone deciding what approach to take in developing databases. While the bloggers themselves are quite critical, you can understand both sides by reading the comments, which include responses from Caspio's director of media services, David Milliron, as well as some satisfied Caspio customers. A [recent discussion](#) on the [Wired Journalists](#) social network took a more favorable view of Caspio.

API does not endorse specific vendors, but encourages the swift and extensive development of answerbases. The best approach is probably to make a priority of building database expertise in-house, but not to wait until that expertise is fully developed to start offering answerbases. Whether that means starting with a vendor or starting with some simple, good-enough databases you produce yourself is a decision each organization needs to make based on your local situations, capabilities and priorities.

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER

Milliron agrees that newspapers need to hire and train their own Web developers, whether they use a vendor or not. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* and Cincinnati.com use staff developer Andy Crain to program sophisticated answerbases, such as [CinciNavigator](#), but reporter Gregory Korte uses Caspio for simpler projects, such as one on [school test scores](#).



Willis notes that it's not such a stretch to think of programmers as a standard position in almost any newsroom. "A lot of newsrooms didn't have a systems editor on hand when we were all on AteX," he said. Programmers tend to be young, he added, and "you can get them for the cheaper salaries that newspapers pay." In addition, he noted that the open-source software development community fosters a "deep public service attitude" that fits well in a newsroom.

Or maybe the programmers need to be on an IT staff or online staff, available to develop solutions for revenue generation as well as for content. "I think even the smallest newspaper should be able to afford a single on-staff programmer," Kaplan-Moss wrote on his [Jacobian blog](#), going into detail, comparing the average programmer's salary to some of the possible costs over time of using vendors.

The *News Tribune* in Tacoma, Wash., [hired an intern who was a programmer](#) with no journalism experience or education. Aaron Ritchey came to thenewstribune.com fresh out of the University of Washington with a bachelor of science in computing and software systems. "When others joke about going into journalism (or English) to avoid math, I could similarly remark that I went into software development to avoid writing book reports and research papers," Ritchey said. "I never expected to work at a newspaper, but it ended up being exactly what I wanted: to be able to use my talent and skills to help others and build things of value."

Ritchey's first project was the [WiFi map](#) discussed earlier. Pleased with what he was learning about journalism and what he offered as a programmer, the *News Tribune* hired him to a staff position and is using him to increase its database offerings. One of Ritchey's first database efforts, showing [infractions by Washington plumbers and contractors](#), was among thenewstribune.com's top five pages the weekend it was published in November 2007.



C. How do you develop database skills?

Developing your own interactive online databases requires learning to use software and programming languages unfamiliar to most journalists, *advertising sales reps* and most decision-makers in the media – PHP, MySQL, Python, LAMP, ASP and PERL.

The best efforts to master these skills are going on in small pockets of newsrooms. Your organization needs to look companywide to determine what skills you already have, what skills you need to learn and how you need to apply the skills across traditional department boundaries.

Learning to program online databases isn't easy and Willis says it will involve some "banging your head against the wall until the light comes on." But the job of learning is no harder than many jobs journalists have tackled. "It's sort of like tackling a brand new beat in a brand new city," he said. "You have to immerse yourself for a while."

Even if you're going to use a vendor, you need to learn (or hire people who have learned) two sets of skills: data analysis skills and Web publishing skills.

You may not have the skills on your staff to start out at the top of the answerbase heap, but you probably have the skills to get started. The [National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting](#) has been training thousands of journalists in data analysis skills for nearly 20 years. Others have learned data analysis skills in college or on their own (it's not that hard to learn some basics). For years reporters have been acquiring, assembling and analyzing data for stories. It took us a while to realize (and too many still haven't) the value of presenting that data online. A story about the highest-paid state workers has one-day value as a story, but the data the reporter analyzed for that story can have continuing value online as curious people check out the salaries of their children's teachers, their neighbors or their bosses. The work the reporter did to write the story is a lot of the work you need to do to share the data with your community.

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER

If you think you don't have any data-analysis expertise on your staff, try any or all of these measures:

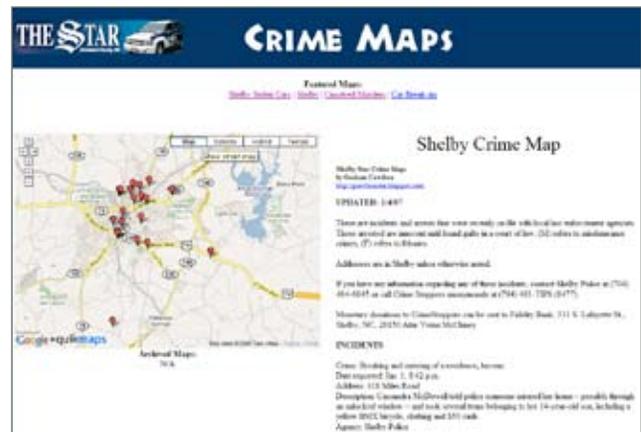
- Ask your staff. Chances are you have staff members who have learned how to use Excel or Access in college or are doing Google Maps mashups on personal Web sites. These are skills that you can use.
- If none of your journalists has any database skills, ask an administrative assistant on the staff to lead a few workshops in spreadsheet or database programs. Practically any competent office worker today has the basic skills you need to start working with data. Maybe you can work on teaching some journalism skills, principles and ethics to an administrative assistant.
- Reach beyond the silo walls. Development of databases often starts as a newsroom task and you may have limited or no data analysis skills on the news staff if you haven't been active in computer-assisted reporting. Data analysis skills are essential for marketing and accounting, so you may have someone in those areas who could work on development of databases or teach data analysis skills to other staff members.
- Send someone to a NICAR program. NICAR has made the leap beyond teaching data as a reporting skill to teaching Web presentation skills. In February 2008 and again in June, NICAR presented a Web Frameworks Advanced Boot Camp at its CAR Conference in Houston and its IRE Conference in Miami. The program focused on using Django to develop interactive databases online and the available seats filled swiftly. "There's a huge hunger for this," said Mark Horvit, executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors.

While the skills of computer-assisted reporting translate well to developing databases for the Web, the interests may not be an exact fit. Lots of reporters enjoy reporting and writing stories and are glad to learn data skills to help them write better stories. "To want to sit down and fiddle with programming for a display that probably will never have your byline on it, that's a different beast," said James Wilkerson, data editor at the *Des Moines Register* and DesMoinesRegister.com.

As for Web publishing skills, you have some of those already if you have a Web site. Your Web staff members may not know how to present databases online yet, but they already have learned lots of new skills and are learning more. In addition, you probably have some people who aren't on the Web staff who are using advanced Web skills off the job – running a Web site for a youth sports league, a church group or a spouse's business. One of these people might welcome a chance to use those skills to grow professionally.

The learning curve depends on the person's skill level, the software you're using and how much time the person can spend on projects. Data editors interviewed for this report estimated that a reporter with modest computer-assisted reporting skills could become proficient in developing online databases from scratch in three months to a year. Using software programs that do most of the work, a reporter who's comfortable in data analysis could be presenting usable online databases in a few hours or days.

Start with some easy projects to build skill and confidence. The [crime maps](#) at ShelbyStar.com took about half an hour to create using [quikmaps](#). Reporter Graham Cawthon described the work as "relatively easy and not nearly as time-consuming as it should be."



A helpful resource for those trying to develop databases themselves is [Reporters' Cookbook](#), a collaborative site where journalists share code and brainstorm problems related to computer-assisted reporting and Web applications. "It's a constant learning process. But the CAR community has a reputation for falling all over themselves to help out," said Matt Wynn of the *Springfield News Leader* and News-Leader.com.

Make the mastery of data analysis and database presentation skills a priority for someone, and build some incentives around it. Organize to gather, analyze and present data and you will start building capacity. No organization is using databases as widely or as effectively as Gannett, and a key reason is that Gannett made data a priority of its information centers. While the approach varies by location, each Gannett information center assigns responsibilities for data projects, often to a desk of several staff members.

Commitment is as essential as skills to get going. You may start with a person who becomes the answerbase champion, teaching the whole staff to think in terms of turning data into answers. Matt Chittum describes himself as "a one-man band as far as finding content" for roanoke.com's [DataSphere](#). "Thinking data isn't a deeply ingrained part of our newsroom culture," he said, so reporters and editors don't automatically suggest possible answerbases. "In one instance, a reporter was sitting on [really cool data on professional solicitors](#). No one had thought to put it online until I heard about it in a budget meeting." (So you have to make sure your data editor is sitting in on those meetings, just as certainly as you have a photo editor in the meetings to make sure that you're considering the visual angles to stories.)

In several cases, a data editor acquires specific databases that might answer important questions or casts a wide net with lots of public agencies, trying to assemble everything that's available.

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER



You want to reach the point where reporters and editors working on beats or stories routinely raise the possibility of using data, even if they don't understand how to get from the data to easy answers to users' questions. Lead developer Jacob Kaplan-Moss said LJWorld.com answerbases frequently "start when a reporter gets some interesting data and asks us to help them visualize it. ... Databases are an integral, vital part of what we do at the *Journal-World*, so we're always looking to how to better capture, filter, and visualize data."

Success in presenting data helps stimulate more ideas. After launching some effective answerbases, Wilkerson found himself "getting data from excited reporters and editors all over the newsroom." That kind of interest helps spread not only understanding but skills. At the *Arizona Republic* and *azcentral.com*, "We have a number of reporters throughout our information center who are skilled at negotiating for and acquiring data and then building their own database," said Cherrill Crosby, Data Center director.

PolitiFact grew from a reporter's question about the possibilities. Matt Waite explained that Bill Adair, the *St. Petersburg Times'* Washington bureau chief, "called me one day last May and said he had this idea on building a Web site around fact-checking the things the presidential candidates are saying. He thought databases might play a part, but he didn't know what or how. We talked for a while and then I set about trying to translate his vision into a Web application."

The *Indy911Calls* project shows the importance of thinking about answerbases and voicing your digital wishes and ambitions, even if you don't know how to make them happen. As reported by Rich Gordon in the Readership Institute's *Get Smart* blog, *Indianapolis Star* Editor Dennis Ryerson told his data team repeatedly: "Here's what I'd love to have. I'd love to have something where if I hear a siren in my neighborhood, I would like to go on *IndyStar.com* and find out why." Mike Jesse, manager of research and data resources, initially dismissed the suggestion as wishful thinking, but then remembered that the photo staff received an electronic feed from police and emergency services, giving the

date, time, address and nature of emergency calls. Chris Johnson, a graphic artist with software skills, went to work converting that cryptic data to a useful, jobs-based map.

D. Answerbases generate traffic

Answerbases are proven drivers of online traffic. Data editors and Web developers interviewed for this report were unanimously enthusiastic about the public response, though some could not share specific figures.

Traffic is important both because that means you are doing important jobs for the community and because traffic ties directly to revenue. "Advertisers are interested in those databases that have sustained activity," said David Milliron, director of media services at Caspio, a vendor that hosts databases for several hundred media sites. The quick-hit answerbases that generate lots of page views when they run with a news story are great, but "databases that keep on giving" have the most value, Milliron said.

Paul D'Ambrosio, investigations editor at the *Asbury Park Press* and *APP.com*, reported that *DataUniverse* gets 5 million to 9 million page views monthly. Launched Dec. 1, 2006, it topped 50 million page views its first year. (This is a good place to elaborate on the comments in the first section about naming your answerbases: If you're already building a strong brand with a name such as *DataUniverse*, you might be better off to continue that momentum, rather than renaming. If you're just getting started, though, don't try to come up with yet another twist on the data name.)



Data editors interviewed for this report said at least three other Gannett metro data centers average 1 million page views a month:

- **Data Central** at *IndyStar.com* gets nearly 1 million page views monthly.
- **Data Center** at *azcentral.com* runs well over 1 million page views a month, with two months in a row topping 1.7 million.

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER

- [Data Center](#) at Cincinnati.com runs between 1.7 million and 2.2 million monthly views.

The first day Cincinnati.com promoted the [Data Center](#) aggressively, it drew 67,751 page views, twice as much traffic as the site's most popular photo gallery, which had usually gotten the most page views up to that point. And these weren't hit-and-run visits. The average views per visit were 11.5. "We opened the doors and the eyeballs rushed in," said Tom Callinan, editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and Cincinnati.com.

When the *Sacramento Bee* and sacbee.com posted an [answerbase](#) of state salaries, people flocked with their questions, viewing more than 2 million pages the first three days and 4 million the first two weeks, public editor Armando Acuña reported in his [column](#). Acuña and Editor [Melanie Sill](#) fielded lots of complaints from outraged state workers, but the answerbase stayed online and continues to answer questions. Acuña reported in a later [column](#) that members of the public expressed appreciation and support for the salary database.

When local property taxes shot up 34 percent in Indianapolis, the county had outsourced its assessment database to a private company charging \$3 a pop for access, Indianapolis Star Editor Dennis Ryerson said. IndyStar.com's [Data Central](#) posted a property assessment database and got nearly a million page views in a week. This underscores that you can attract traffic even by offering public records that are already available online. Whether they charge for access or present information in formats that are difficult to search or browse, public records databases

often are difficult for the public to use, or people don't know they are available. You can become the place your community looks for answers by assembling lots of records in one place, even if many of them are already available elsewhere, scattered around the Internet.

The *Lawrence Journal-World* and LJWorld.com, pioneers in the use of databases, have developed a content management system that essentially makes the site one massive database. Lead developer Jacob Kaplan-Moss says that makes it difficult to count separately the traffic for content that the rest of the industry would regard as databases. He said, though, that the staff frequently presents database-oriented projects such as three recent ones – an analysis of the [cost per win among Big 12 football teams](#), [flight data for the University of Kansas' private jets](#) and [minor-in-possession-of-alcohol charges](#) – and that he estimates these are usually among the five busiest pages on the days they run, about 10 percent to 20 percent of daily traffic.

Waite could not provide specific figures on [PolitiFact](#), but said traffic is "exceeding expectation and it's growing." You can see that just from the mentions and links on other sites: Google "PolitiFact" and you get 255,000 hits.

E. Promotion and widgets build traffic

Be sure to devote the necessary resources to a promotion plan for your answerbases. Matt Chittum, data delivery editor at the *Roanoke Times* and roanoke.com, and Joe Black, news producer at the *Florida Times-Union* and Jacksonville.com, said promotion of a new database on the home page or from a related story in the paper boosts traffic. [DataSphere](#) debuted on roanoke.com in late October and Chittum noticed right away that when he plugs an answerbase in his [Datablog](#), traffic picks up.

The *Oklahoman* and NewsOK.com promoted their new calendar database, [Wimgo](#), with catchy television commercials having fun with (and introducing) the odd name, short for "where I'm going, why I'm going, when I'm going." Videos on the site offer testimonials from area residents, including the celebrity gymnast couple Nadia Comeneci and Bart Conner.

David Milliron of Caspio encourages use of widgets, such as those on the Jacksonville.com [Databank](#), offering visitors the opportunity to place search opportunities on their own sites. For instance, a restaurant (presumably one with good inspection reports) might offer visitors to its site the chance to "check our inspection report," by cutting and pasting code from the [Databank's restaurant inspections page](#) into the restaurant's site. The widget would bring new visitors to the [Databank](#). "You want to leverage every opportunity to bring people back to your site," Milliron said.

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The top five base salaries

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER



PolitiFact is using a [widget](#) that allows other sites to link to PolitiFact. “They get content, we get traffic (all the links on it go back to PolitiFact),” Matt Waite explained. PolitiFact is using a variety of promotion efforts:

- An [email newsletter](#) with more than 2,000 subscribers.
- A [Google Gadget](#) for personalized Google homepage users. More than 300 people found the gadget before PolitiFact began promoting it prominently. Since Waite added a prominent link, it has jumped to more than 800 users.
- A [Twitter feed](#). Waite is also working on a Facebook application.
- [PolitiFact T-shirts](#), the only promotion that isn't free.

“Since we started rolling out these tools ... we've seen a noticeable bump in traffic,” Waite said.

BUILD MILESTONE ANSWERBASES

Don't settle for just copying the good ideas shared here, already being demonstrated by other newspapers. Find new ways to use databases to do mega-jobs for your community. For instance, newspapers spend a fair amount of time and ink (and pixels) in our core print and Web products on graduation coverage, sending photographers and reporters to ceremonies and printing up special sections with names and photos of grads and stories and videos of commencement ceremonies. We can channel that energy into more valuable uses and put the users to work making graduation coverage deeper and richer.

That special section with lots of senior photos is really just a lot of data: name, school, photo. Try collecting that in January or February and posting an online answerbase of the Class of 2009, giving each senior his or her own page that you prepopulate with the basic information and set up with lots of opportunity for users to provide more. Through the newspaper, Web site, Facebook, special events and schools, invite the seniors to add college or career plans, school activities, parents' names, favorite teachers, high school highlights and their own photos and videos of their high school days. Make the page interactive, with a place for seniors, friends and families to add their reminiscences about and best wishes for the grad. This can be a tremendous audience-builder as proud parents send links out across the country, bringing grandparents, relatives and friends to your graduation pages.

Are there possibilities for mischief here? Of course. High school seniors and their friends are a mischievous lot. Some friends (or rivals) will want to add their true, wished-for, exaggerated or maliciously false stories of drunkenness, drug use and sexual exploits to the sentimental memories on the site. You can control this in at least a couple ways:

- Require registration before allowing comments or posting of photos or videos. Mischief is much more likely to happen anonymously. With registration, you not only deter the mischief, you can block the undeterred mischief makers from posting again. (And in the registration process, you harvest information about users that will be valuable in targeting ads or in generating leads for local businesses.)
- Enable visitors to the sites to flag and help you remove objectionable content.

Beyond the immediate audience-building value of making coverage of the Class of 2009 memorable and interactive, this approach gives you a chance to identify your Web site as the place for these graduates (many of whom are scattering but will always have an emotional connection to the community) to reconnect with their hometown.

Each senior's Web site will include a gift registry, from which area merchants can sell gifts directly to distant grandparents, aunts and uncles, with upsells such as gift wrapping. Your sales staff could contact university bookstores, restaurants and other merchants in college towns in the state (or other schools where many local seniors head off to college) and sell them targeted advertising on the pages of seniors heading to their schools. Or maybe you sell leads to the college-town merchants, emailing them a link (for a small fee) each time a senior lists their college as his or her destination. You can help relatives visiting for commencement book lodging and rental cars from local hotels and agencies. You can give families an incentive to build out their pages, funneling 10 percent (or whatever the appropriate cut is) of the revenue from a senior's graduation page to his or her college fund. For the graduates who aren't going to college, you invite them to fill in career plans, which prompt invitations to register for email or text alerts about postings in their field on your recruitment vertical.

You could also develop products to sell for further revenue (limiting costs by requiring advance orders and only producing as many as you need). Offer parents,

IV. OPERATING YOUR ANSWER CENTER

graduates and others an offer to buy a DVD or print version of the graduation video or photo gallery. Or maybe you offer families a personalized four-page newspaper about their graduate, using stories and photos they submit under your masthead.

Graduation is just one personal milestone. Consider similar ways you can develop personal content and generate revenue from family milestones, literally from cradle to grave: births, baptisms, confirmations, bar and bat mitzvahs, quinceañeras, engagements and weddings, military service, retirements and death itself.

Legacy.com beat newspapers to the online obituary space, but we can fall back on the slogan we used when broadcasters would beat us to the news back in the print-only days: If we can't be first, let's be best. Legacy.com offers obituaries and guest books. You can offer loved ones opportunities for interactive online biographies and memorials, complete with photos, videos, maps of the places the departed visited and lived during life, a quiz about his or her life and so on. Funeral homes would certainly want to advertise on these pages. You could offer a chance to send flowers or memorial contributions directly from the page. As with graduations, you could give incentives to build out the page, perhaps donating a percentage of the revenue to the memorial fund.

Even painful life events such as divorce or illness might provide some opportunities to build audience and generate revenue using databases and other tools such as social networking. Divorce is a big change in life when people have lots of jobs to be done and lots of new situations for which local businesses will want to connect with them. You can offer an answerbase (with opportunities for the business or organization to buy enhanced links) of counselors, lawyers, support groups, singles groups, churches, credit counselors and other services relating to divorce. The same site would offer discussion opportunities. Offer multiple layers, with general content and services for anyone going through divorce and specialized content by gender and circumstances (custodial, non-custodial and joint-custody parents, hostile or amicable divorces, first-timers and multiple divorces). In addition to the targeted advertising opportunities, this provides some lead-generation opportunities for the businesses listed above as well as real estate agents, landlords, car dealers and possibly other businesses who serve people who are starting anew. And, of course, this would link directly into your people-meeting-people advertising. This site might have some email opportunities – a template the divorcing person can use to send the news, along with new contact information, details and whatever, to family, friends and creditors, or email alerts when people ads are posted meeting your desired criteria.

When someone is hospitalized or at home recovering from an illness or homebound with an extended or terminal illness, you can give them a Web page (or a part of their existing page) that becomes an answerbase to keep people posted on how they're doing. While CaringBridge.com is a national site offering this service, a local service could do the job better. Patients could enter their hospital and the page would automatically post visiting hours. Friends and family members could enter updates after visiting. Distant friends and families (or those not close enough to visit) could enter well wishes. Friends and families could request email alerts of important developments. Families wanting to protect the privacy of the ailing family member could make their page password-protected, so they would be updating only their own circle of caring people (this might be a feature offered in lots of the personal-content areas, such as graduation). Of course, you would offer opportunities to order flowers, balloons, teddy bears, etc. from hospital gift shops, florists, etc. For those cases where people set up donation funds to help with health-care costs, you offer the opportunity to make online contributions. Hospitals and health-care providers might see this as a good place for targeted advertising, too.

Conclusion

Don't view this report as a to-do list for your organization, but as a starting point. The right solutions for your organization might not be in this report. But you may find them after using some of the advice here to launch your own answerbase efforts or redirect your current answerbases. And, despite this report's focus on databases as a tool, keep in mind that they must be used in concert with other tools such as staff creativity and interactive efforts to unlock the wisdom of your community.

The vast range of possibilities presented here may seem daunting, especially if you aren't personally experienced with databases or if your organization is not using them extensively yet. Don't be discouraged. Decide on the best priorities for your organization by doing some jobs-to-be-done research. Identify the mega-jobs that are most important and most frustrating in your community, where other solutions are inadequate. Get started with good-enough solutions and add and improve as you develop skills.

A newspaper is never finished. You can publish an outstanding edition today and you still have to gear up to do it again tomorrow. Answerbases have longer value than news content, but they also are never finished. As soon as you finish one answerbase, your community has more and more questions, more and more jobs and mega-jobs for you to do. Just as you developed a whole organization to do the jobs of a newspaper, you now need to transform that organization to take on the endless, meaningful and potentially lucrative mega-job of providing answers for your community.

About the author

This report was written by Steve Buttry, who was API's Director of Tailored Programs from 2005 to 2008 and recently became editor of The Gazette and GazetteOnline in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He has spent 33 years working in newsrooms. Buttry wrote his first story involving data analysis in 1995 and has studied newspapers' use of data and online interactivity since then. He was involved in the research and teaching of Newspaper Next for most of his time at API and spent more than a year studying the use of interactive databases by newspaper web sites. Elaine Clisham, API Director of Marketing, and Steve Gray, Managing Director of Newspaper Next, assisted in the editing and rewriting with valuable suggestions.

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This report includes information from the following, gathered in email exchanges, personal and telephone interviews and from blogs:

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Jennifer Carroll, vice president/new media content, Gannett

Graham Cawthon, reporter, The Star and ShelbyStar.com

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