

Protect Public Notices in Local Newspapers

An American Tradition

Public Notice *Resource Center*

www.pnrc.net

What is a Public Notice?

A public notice is information informing citizens of government or government-related activities that may affect the citizens' everyday lives. Public notices have traditionally been published in local newspapers, the trusted source for community information.

Public Notices in Local Newspapers are more accessible to the public than only on the internet

- ✓ Only 64% of Americans 18 and over use the internet[^]
- ✓ Only 30% of African-Americans do not use the internet #
- ✓ Only 36% of Hispanic-Americans do not use the internet #
- ✓ Only 62% of Americans over the age of 65 do not use the internet#

But using the Internet and visiting government websites are not the same. That's like saying the more than 98% of American households with a television set all watch the nightly news. In fact, most Americans do NOT visit government websites!

- ✓ Only 10% of Americans visit a government website on an average day*
- ✓ More than 40% of Americans have NEVER visited a government website*

[^] Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2007. Released June 2009.

* Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, November 19-December 20, 2008 Tracking Survey.

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, December 2009

Local Newspapers offer citizens a single, convenient location to find Public Notices, as opposed to government entities publishing notices on their respective websites, which would create a myriad of different locations.

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Local Newspapers are a more effective medium through which to reach the public

- The vast majority of public notices now arrive at citizens' homes or businesses regularly in their Local Newspaper, which has become the traditional medium for public notices. This is exactly where the public expects to find them. With an online format, guaranteeing or measuring readership is difficult. Newspapers are required to demonstrate readership by providing records of paid subscribers.

Public Notices in Newspapers are vital to the function of democratic government

- Allowing government officials to post legal ads takes away third-party neutral interest and removes any independent proof of publication.

A public notice typically possesses four major characteristics:

- ✓ **A public notice is published in a forum independent of the government, such as a local newspaper.**
- ✓ **A public notice is capable of being archived in a secure and publicly available format.**
- ✓ **A public notice is capable of being accessed by all segments of society.**
- ✓ **The public and the source of the notice must be able to verify that the notice was published, and its information disseminated to the public.**

The Internet is highly unreliable as the only source for valuable information

- The stability of Local Newspapers as a medium for public notices is unquestionable. Government agencies cannot ensure that information located on a server is secure
- Local Newspapers serve as an authentic record of publication, and provide sworn affidavits that ads were published along with physical proof. The Internet does not provide a reliable archival history of public notices.