

Case study: Wausau Pilot and Review

Wausau Pilot and Review, based in Central Wisconsin, set out to significantly increase monthly ad sales, sign up new newsletter subscribers and convert subscribers to donors.

The organization made dramatic gains on all fronts:

- **Ad sales:** The site started the program at \$4,500 in revenue a month. When it surpassed its goal and reached \$12,100 a month, it increased the goal to \$14,000. The participants found that an easy-to-understand media kit and clear ad packages resulted in growth and better relationships with advertisers.
- **Newsletter signups:** Starting at 6,800, the participants increased signups to 20,177, with a goal of 25,000 by the end of 2021. Efforts included signups at community events.
- **Donor conversions:** Participants convinced 158 new newsletter recipients to become donors for a total of \$11,084 in revenue. Regular prompts, including registration walls, were a key tool.

Unusual among nonprofits, the Pilot and Review reported no philanthropic funding this year, instead attracting enough locally sold advertising to account for 40% of total revenue with another 10% from programmatic. The other 50% comes from memberships and donations, primarily from small donors.

Siewert's other focus during the GNI Startups Lab was addressing the lack of news produced for and consumed by the large Hmong community in Wausau. With the help of Lab Coach Lizzy Hazeltine, Siewert developed an outreach strategy to help Wausau's journalists to connect with the local Hmong community. Wausau team members staffed in-person booths at Hmong community events and shared surveys in Hmong languages to understand what news these readers need.

“When a news organization wants to grow reach in a community that was previously under-covered, listening for their priorities and needs is a first step toward repairing trust and being useful. Measuring how an organization does in delivering on those needs is the non-negotiable next step.”

Wausau grew monthly non-English speaking readers using the website's article translation tool by 400 to nearly 1,900, primarily in local Hmong communities. They are continuing to refine their strategy to serve more Hmong readers with quality local information.

What's next? Siewert said the organization will continue to experiment with ways of growing readership and donors. At the same time, it must resolve tech issues. “Our biggest need right now is funding to help experiment with our tech stack, from SMS notifications to translation tools and apps, so we reach a more diverse audience,” Siewert said.

The Pilot and Review has also hired a Report for America journalist to focus on those communities of color. “We are shifting to ensure we better serve under-represented communities, particularly the Hmong people and immigrant community here.”