

Investigative Reporting = Working With Ad Partners to Monetize the Audience

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Global Research, December 12, 2014

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Cincinnati Enquirer's Carolyn Washburn

In the Quaint Notions About Journalism Department: Many would think there was something wrong with an investigative reporter who consults directly with an advertiser to think of ways for them to profit from the news. But, here we are.

Media blogger Jim Romenesko [reported on](#) an ad placed by the Cincinnati Enquirer for an investigative reporter-but not just any reporter: Candidates needed to know that 50 percent of their "focus" would be readers aged 25 to 45-you'd have to feel "comfortable sharing some personal information" to "create a personal connection" to that target group-and that they would be "working" with an "advertising partner to grow and monetize the 25-to-45 audience."

Hard to see when you'd have time to investigate.

Romenesko asked Enquirer editor Carolyn Washburn to explain how that whole "monetizing" thing would work. Her response was not reassuring: That "expectation" was part of all beat job descriptions, she said. Sales reps and reporters can "share insights," and "make introductions for each other...that may be helpful."

But wait-aren't some of those advertisers potential sources? Why yes! "Many of those organizations are both advertisers and sources. And many of those organizations are trying to grow their reach among 25-45-year-olds in the community just as we are."

By the time Washburn says reporters' profit-driven collaboration with advertisers who are also sources doesn't "hurt the newsroom or readers at all," you may be wondering if she's ever heard of conflict of interest. But, she assures, she can fathom circumstances in which they'd say no to a sponsor request, and reporters are told to "raise questions if they are ever uncomfortable or uncertain."

It's not their ability to ask questions that troubles; it's what the answers seem likely to be.

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