



About those business daily websites

October 16, 2020

Good afternoon,

Back the summer, this column took of a growing number of websites that package themselves as local, even though the content is generated elsewhere. At the time, a story from [NiemanLab](#) identified a multitude of such websites.

I had a more than passing interest in the Neiman story when I discovered that among a mysterious conglomeration of websites was one carrying the name Delaware Business Daily.

It's one of a group of business journal sites from a Chicago company that carries the name Franklin/Archer (not to be confused with the Wilmington marketing firm Archer Group).

The company snapped up web addresses in all 50 states and used the Business Daily name. The strategy aims to project an image of reliability that can come from the use of the name.

Some might remember that *Delaware Business Daily* was our website's original name until our rebranding under the Delaware Business Now name. As a result, their web address was tweaked since we still own the URL, DelawareBusinessDaily.com.

Franklin Archer is also associated with an entity known as Metric Media. While his name is not mentioned, these enterprises are linked to Chicagoan Brian Timpone.

A former TV reporter, Timpone, started and sold a venture that tried to employ computer technology to replace reporters.

He has since been at work building a network of websites using technology that aggregates public records and other information to build content.

Timpone's activities have drawn the attention and deep reporting resources of *The New York Times* (subscription).

The Times investigation portrayed a "pay to play network" that allows conservative political operatives, PR firms, or business people to pay for content. It is alleged that freelancers get instructions on the focus and persons to interview.

The story went on to cite examples that included posts criticizing the opponent of Maine U.S. Sen. Susan.

Similar sites with a leftward tilt exist but are relatively rare when compared to Timpone's 1,300 sites.

Of late, Timpone's Metric Media has been buying up small-town newspapers. Once purchased, costs are slashed, and reporters from remote locations file stories, the Times alleged. The print platform allows "pay to pay" content to reach a wider audience.

None of this should be confused with sponsored content, which clearly identifies that an organization has paid for the post.

Since July, nothing has changed as far as the half a dozen Delaware sites in the Metric/Franklin Archer orbit.

The bulk of the stories have to do with random campaign contributions, industry trends, and in one case, Democratic Gov. John Carney's earning a C grade from the right-leaning Cato Institute. Getting the same grade was his moderate Republican counterpart in Maryland, Larry Hogan.

Bylines that have popped up on the Delaware sites appear (based on LinkedIn profiles) to come from reporters based in South Carolina and Montana.

Remote work is nothing new. For example, composition (page assembly) work at the *News Journal* is done outside of Delaware. I have not heard back from Franklin/Archer regarding a response to the Times piece.