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The Alamance News



SCHOOL OF MEDIA
AND JOURNALISM

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Executive Summary

The following research has been conducted for The Alamance News, by the UNC Emerging Technologies Lab with guidance from 500THZ. The goal of the research was to generate subscriptions and revenue for *The Alamance News*. Both secondary and primary research was conducted in order to gain an understanding of The Alamance News' current and potential subscribers.

The research resulted in the creation of five personas representing The Alamance News' target audiences: The Community Builder, The Quick Internet Searcher, The Alamance Family, The Outlier and The Current Subscriber. The research includes four recommendations for *The Alamance News* moving forward: the branding of Tom Boney, an email newsletter, a website and a Facebook Group. The recommendations are linked to three consumer-based insights pertaining to the target audience's news habits, their thoughts on *The Alamance News* and their personal lifestyle.

The process began with secondary research on The Alamance News, followed by a brand audit, which encompassed social media listening of all of The Alamance News' social media platforms. Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted. The following document will describe each step of the process in detail and provide cost estimates where necessary.

Objective:

- How to generate subscriptions and revenue for *The Alamance News*?

Research Methods

I. Secondary Research:

The Alamance News is a local, subscription-based, weekly newspaper that is offered in print and as an online edition. The Alamance News contains information about local politics, editorials and lighthearted pieces. The newspaper is specific to Alamance County. *The Alamance News* is ran by editor and writer, Tom Boney. Upon first impression, *The Alamance News*' website is simple. It offers the online edition of the newspaper to subscribers and includes a free demo. However, the free demo needs to be modernized. *The Alamance News* also has its own Facebook page where followers comment, share and like posts related to stories in the newspaper.

The Alamance News has several entities competing with it for people's attention. Its competitors include The Times-News and The Mebane Enterprise, as well as national news entities, such as CNN, FOX and NPR. Other competitors are Google, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram. Local events, restaurants, parks, shopping centers and museums are also considered to be competing for people's attention in Alamance County (See Appendix A).

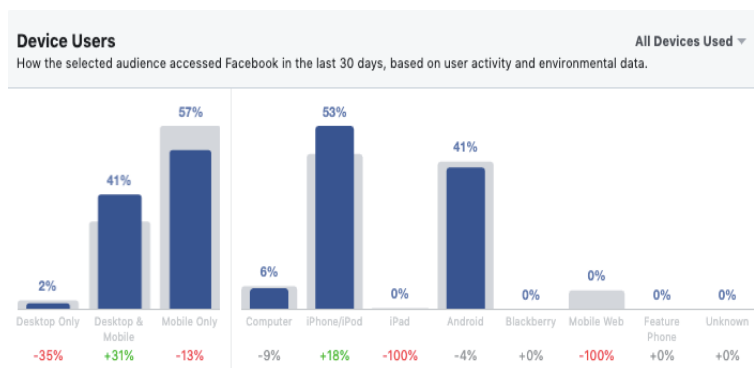
II. Brand Audit (Social Media Listening)

The brand audit consisted of social media listening through The Alamance News' Facebook page. Comments, posts, and page followers were analyzed, in part, using the Facebook Audience Insights tool. Information from Facebook's Insight tool is based on users who follow The Alamance News' Facebook Page and are connected to Alamance, Mebane, Graham and Burlington.

Findings based on Insights tool:

- *The Majority of The Alamance News' Facebook Followers are women on a mobile device who like content specific to their city.*

Seventy-three percent of followers are women, 27 percent are men. Sixty-nine percent of followers are married. Sixty-seven percent of followers are college educated. The Alamance News' audience is mobile-first. The majority of The Alamance News' Facebook followers access Facebook through a mobile device. Specifically, through an iPhone or iPod.



Page likes related to followers of The Alamance News were also analyzed. The Mebane Enterprise is the most likely relevant page to The Alamance News' audience. This page is followed by The City of Graham, Burlington Magazine, Harrison's Restaurant, Smokehouse at Steve's, Alamance County Local Govt., Mebane

Page Likes Facebook Pages that are likely to be relevant to your audience based on Facebook Page likes.				
Page	Relevance	Audience	Facebook	Affinity
Mebane Enterprise	1	626	1.8K	1301...
Graham, North Carolina	2	861	2.7K	1192...
Burlington Magazine	3	621	2.2K	1039...
Alamance County, NC Local Government	4	884	3.2K	1032...
Mebane Steakhouse BBQ & Seafood	5	452	1.6K	1028...
Harrison's Restaurant	6	589	2.2K	1017...
The Verdict on the square	7	507	1.9K	1002...
Times News Burlington NC Offers	8	819	3.2K	9667...
Smokehouse at Steve's	9	821	3.2K	9654...
Graham Recreation and Parks Department	10	1.1K	4.4K	9636...

Steakhouse BBQ & Seafood, The Verdict on the Square, Graham Recreation and Parks Department, Times News Burlington Offers.

While these users are connected to The Alamance News, which offers information on the county as a whole, they are also tailoring their content to specific cities in Alamance County.

Findings based on engagement:

- *Local developments are important to The Alamance News' Facebook Followers.*

Based on Facebook posts by *The Alamance News* from April 22 to May 14, 2019, the posts that received the most “reactions” were an obituary post, a post about the sweepstakes operations crackdown, a post about a county clerk certification, a post about the construction of a Chick-Fil-A, a post about a shopping center project, and lastly a post about a “dining dumpster” (See Appendix B). These posts received 100 or more reactions, with a comparable high number of comments and shares. This shows that followers of *The Alamance News* are interested in knowing about physical and governmental changes being made in their community.

The Current Subscriber:

The Current Subscriber persona was created based on an interview with a current subscriber, a visit to Alamance County and an analysis of Facebook users who frequently engage with *The Alamance News' Facebook* page.

Frequent engagers on *The Alamance News' Facebook* page are 35 and older. Most are interested in home improvement, this is consistent with the interview conducted with a current subscriber. All but a few users are also interested in real estate and politics.

III. 11 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were designed to take approximately 37 minutes each (See Appendix C). Out of 11 total interviews, 10 were conducted in Mebane or Graham North Carolina. The purpose of the interviews was to get a deeper understanding of the citizens who live in Alamance County and what could make them interested in The Alamance News.

The interviews were divided into three information sections. The first is focused on the individual's general news habits. The second is focused on their relationship with The Alamance News and local news. The third is focused on them as individuals and their interests.

The interviews were thoroughly analyzed and compared. Groups of personas that represent new target audiences for *The Alamance News* were created through the interviews and are detailed below.

Chad

The Community Builder

Age: 31

Location: Not originally from Alamance, NC

Occupation: Pastor

Status: Middle class, and married with a new baby



About Chad

- Religious
- Community oriented
- Loves sports
- Loves people
- Enjoys being able to make a difference in peoples lives
- Enjoys small town living because he's more connected

News Habits and Thoughts

Chad reads the news online multiple times a day. He mostly checks twitter to get sports news. Chad reads the news to keep up with his favorite sports teams, and to see what's happening around the area.

As a pastor, he is able to get his local news from those around him. He realizes the importance of local news, but doesn't feel the need to subscribe to any particular source because he can get news from multiple sources for free. He learned to trust local news reporters because as a kid he grew up knowing the anchors on local television.

How to Reach Him

- Community building activities
- Establishing trust
- Entertain him with sports news
- An online timeline style of news

Sarah

The Quick Internet Searcher



Age: 35

Occupation: Physician

Status: Middle class, married, no children, and college educated

Location: Lives in Orange County, works in Alamance County

About Sarah

- Passion for her profession
- She likes to be involved with the community for business
- She is motivated by her family
- She spends her free time outdoors or shopping

News Habits and Thoughts

Sarah doesn't read the news often, but if she does it's a quick google search on something she's curious about. She takes news from multiple sources and picks out what she thinks is truthful. She likes her news to be easily accessible, easy to read, and short but thorough.

Sarah thinks local news is objective. She thinks local news is important because it impacts the safety of her family and friends. Knowing what's going on in her community is important to her because it impacts her business. She is interested in local events where she can promote her pediatric office.

How to Reach Her

- Offer her the leads of news stories and give her the option to read more about it
- Make information available online
- Emphasize community events where she can promote her practice

The Smith's

The Alamance Family

Age:

Pam- 40

Beau- 45

Sean- 10

Hayley- 15

Occupation:

Pam- Nurse

Beau- Mechanic

Status: Middle class family, parents work to support their children

Location: Have lived in Alamance County their whole lives

About the Smiths

- Beau and Pam spend most of the week at work making sure they can provide for their children.
- Sean and Hayley are in the Alamance- Burlington School System.
- Family time is important
- They like taking small trips together when their schedules and finances allow it.

News Habits and Thoughts

Pam and Beau read or watch the news everyday, they check the news online multiple time a day. Sean and Hayley are not engaged with the news. Hayley will engage is she sees something she interested in on a social media platform. Pam and Beau prefer and trust news sources that align with their beliefs. The weather is something they look for in a news source because it helps them plan the day. The Smith's finances are what motivates them to subscribe to news sources.

They don't see a reason in subscribing when they believe that they can find everything online. They believe that local news is important to understanding what's going on in the community, such as events, but they also find value in national news.

How to Reach Them

- Offer coupons and discounts.
- Make information easily accessible online.
- Emphasize things to see and do in Alamance County



Beth

The Outlier



Age: 31

Occupation: Barista

Status: Married, no kids, middle class

Location: Has lived in Alamance County her whole life

About Beth

- Has a hardworking personality
- Likes being at the coffee shop and talking to customers
- Likes to save her money so she can treat herself
- In her free time she likes to socialize at the local bar
- She values money and time
- She enjoys reading

News Habits and Thoughts

Beth is disconnected from the internet and from television. To stay up to date, she reads her local newspaper once a week when it is delivered to the coffee shop. She also gets her local news from individuals, such as her customers. Beth prefers to read local news rather than national news, because she believes that it is more relevant to her life. She doesn't like how broad national news is.

She thinks local news is important because it helps her feel more connected. She likes to know about her community and breaking news in the area. She also likes to know about breaking news in the area. The trustworthiness of her sources is not an issue for her. She's not subscribed to any source, but wouldn't mind receiving a newspaper offline.

How To Reach Her

- Send physical copies through direct mail
- Provide breaking news
- Offer coupons and discounts
- Provide news about individuals in the community

Charles

The Current Subscriber

Age: 60

Occupation: Retired salesman

Status: Married, 2 adult children, lower middle class

Location: Has lived in Alamance County his whole life



About Charles

- Enjoys working in his garden
- Likes to spend time with his grandchildren
- He is practical, simple and set in his ways
- He likes to save money where he can
- Likes to watch American sports

News Habits and Thoughts

Charles reads or watches the news everyday. He aggregates news from several different sources including, Facebook, Google and specific publications. He reads most of his news online although he doesn't mind reading a physical copy of a publication. He prefers to read news online because it's more timely and consistent. He likes to voice his opinion on Facebook when there is news related to his community because he believes his community is important.

He believes that local news is important, but only if it's specific to the city he lives in. He trusts the news stories he reads if he has a direct or indirect connection to the writers of the publication. He is subscribed to The Alamance News mainly because he knows Tom Boney and trusts him as a person, therefore he believes in the stories published by The Alamance News. The Alamance News is where he looks for updates on local government and development.

How To Reach Him

- Online website
- Entertain him with information about gardening and baseball.
- Emphasize news that's specific to his city.
- Report on changes in local government
- Allow him to voice his opinion on certain topics.

IV. User Experience Testing

We asked interviewees to engage with The Alamance News' website and physical copy of the newspaper. We did this order to hear initial reactions to both products. First, the physical copy was handed to each interviewee. They were asked to explain their feelings towards the product. Second, the website was pulled up on a laptop and they were given permission to scroll, click on, and use the website.

Findings based on user experience testing:

- *The Alamance News' Newspaper and Website are informative, but outdated.*

The majority of interviewees said that the physical newspaper was standard in design and what they expected to see. A few said that the newspaper paper seemed outdated and that there were certain topics they were not interested in. The majority thought that the paper was informative, detailed and specific in regards to local Alamance County news. It is important to note that none of the interviewees, excluding the current subscriber, are subscribed to The Alamance News, nor do they follow The Alamance News on Facebook.

When asked to review the website, the majority of interviewees said that it is outdated and they would not get use out of it. They found the design of the website to be intimidating and unwelcoming.

Overall insights:

1. *People are not searching for specific news outlets, they choose to engage with familiar content that aligns with their values and interests.*
2. *There are several ways in which people can get their news, it's important for them to be able to access important local news efficiently.*
3. *There are people who are interested in The Alamance News, but they need more of an incentive to subscribe to a newspaper since they can get their local news elsewhere.*

Recommendations:

- *Recommendations align with and complement the overall insights and personas.*

1. The Branding of Tom Boney:

It was found that both current and potential subscribers use several sources they trust to gather news information, among them where other individuals that they trust. Citizens of Alamance County are community oriented and have formed relationships with each other. We recommend that Tom Boney be branded as a trusted neighbor. Someone that the community can go to as a source for all things Alamance County. To do so, Tom Boney should be involved with community events and festivals where he can engage with other individuals in Alamance County, form relationships with them and promote his product (See Appendix D).

2. Weekly Email Newsletter and Website

Since everyone interviewed specified that they only engage with content that they are interested in, it is important that they are provided with information that relates to them. Several interviewees also expressed their desire for a method of obtaining information quickly and succinctly. This is why we recommend creating a weekly email newsletter (see Appendix E). The email newsletter will provide short summaries of important local news, and events in Alamance County. The first email newsletter should be about the writer and the content that will be provided. Content suggestions are: changes in local government, breaking news, sports news, events in the county, places to go in the county and local developments. As time goes on, the email newsletter can become more personalized to each audience persona (people will be able to choose the content they want in their email newsletter).

Each email newsletter will be sponsored by a local business. Potential local businesses can be pulled from current The Alamance News advertisers. This will cover the cost of creating the email newsletter and allow the email newsletter to be free for subscribers. Email newsletters will be sent to subscribers via email, this eliminates the cost of printing. Emails will be generated through events that Tom Boney attends, word of mouth, online sign up, and/or a purchased email list (See Appendix F).

A website should be created in order to make full-length news articles available to readers. The website can be created through WordPress, a free website builder. Not only will this benefit readers by providing them with additional information, but it can also be a source of revenue. Using Google AdSense or a WordPress Advertising software, advertisements can be placed into the website.

3. Facebook Group:

Based on our brand audit we found that The Alamance News Facebook Page has several users who frequently comment on and like posts. Through the brand audit and interviews we found that online and mobile were the most popular way of searching for and accessing news. Because of these findings, we recommend creating a Facebook Group for those interested in the email newsletter. This will enhance the sense of community between subscribers. Group members can view leads of email newsletter topics and submit their email to subscribe to the email newsletter for more information. Additionally, Facebook post engagement tracking and the ability to directly interact with users will help determine which content is preferred.

Appendix

Appendix A

- Competitors
 - The Times-News
 - The Mebane Enterprise
 - Alamance County Twitter: @AlamanceNC
 - Google
 - Facebook
 - CNN
 - FOX
 - NPR
 - Elon University
 - Children's, Historical and Textile Museums
 - Wineries
 - Alamance Battleground
 - Burlington City Park Amusement Area
 - Tanger Outlets

Appendix B

Date	Attachments	Type	Reactions	Comments	Shares	Subscription info
5/14/19	Photo	Obituary	474	162	77	No
5/10/19	Photo	Construction	59	7	7	No
5/10/19	Photo	Building plans	40	11	19	Yes
5/10/19	Photo	City Council Hire	43	13	1	Yes
5/10/19	Photo	Property sale	30	7	5	Yes
5/9/19	Photo album	Grand Re-opening Graham Historical Museum	24	1	4	No
5/9/19	Video	Grand Re-opening Graham Historical Museum	12	0	2	No
5/9/19	Photo	Proposed changes for Judge J.B. Allen, Jr. Court House	1	1	1	Yes
5/8/19	Photo	Graham council rejects subdivision	43	12	6	Yes
5/6/19	Photo	Alamance sweepstakes cafes	24	7	3	No
5/6/19	Photo	Tax increase	97	43	17	No
5/3/19	No	Teacher Rally Op-ed	59	15	7	Yes
5/3/19	Photo	Subscription	1	0	0	Yes
5/3/19	Photo	Development in Graham, Burlington	3	2	0	Yes
5/3/19	Photo	Burlington Travel Lanes	89	70	19	Yes
5/3/19	Photo	Advertising	2	0	0	No
5/3/19	Photo	Paper locations	6	3	0	No
5/2/19	Photo	Animal shelter dispute	3	3	2	Yes
4/30/19	Photo from link	ABSS closed for teacher rally	34	42	15	No
4/26/19	Photo	Paper locations	27	1	2	No
4/25/19	Photo	Tax rate plan	26	10	10	No
4/25/19	Photo	Graham city council decision to sell land	14	15	2	Yes
4/25/19	Photo	Subdivision objection	17	11	6	No
4/23/19	Photo	Sweepstakes operations crack down	121	56	126	No
4/19/19	Photo	State advisory board appointment	19	2	4	No
4/19/19	Photo	Teacher protest	48	13	31	No
4/19/19	Photo	County clerk certification	151	22	5	No
4/19/19	Photo	Paper locations	20	0	0	No
4/19/19	Photos	Gas explosion	11	1	0	Yes
4/18/19	Photo	Dining dumpster moved	45	37	13	Yes
4/12/19	Photo	Chick-fil-a construction	293	67	154	No
4/11/19	Photos	Shopping center project	105	18	49	No
4/11/19	Photo	Armored car for sheriff	93	59	19	Yes
4/11/19	Photo	Dining dumpster	116	96	59	No
4/9/19	Photo	Gibsonville subdivision rezoning approved	5	0	6	No
4/7/19	Photo	Paper	0	0	0	Yes
4/6/19	Photo	Traffic & parking being studied by Graham's consultant	2	5	0	Yes
4/6/19	Photos	Mebane SECU expanding	40	0	21	Yes
4/5/19	Photos	Court Square/N Main St. Parking chage options	28	35	7	Yes
4/5/19	Photos	Marshall & Maple St. parking	11	10	3	Yes
4/5/19	Photos	Court Square Parking	11	5	4	Yes
4/3/19	Photo	Graham city council feather flags vote	32	11	1	No
4/2/19	Photo	Award for former Social Services director	52	8	3	No

Appendix C

The Alamance News // Discussion Guide

37- minute intercept interviews

Purpose

- To understand Alamance (Graham, Mebane) locals' perception of *The Alamance News*.
 - To find out how to attract a younger audience to *The Alamance News*.
-

Introduction 2-3 mins

- Hi my name is ____ and I am a student from UNC Chapel Hill working on a summer project for *The Alamance News*. Would it be okay if I asked you a few questions in exchange for a \$25 gift card to Target?
 - Before we start I just want to let you know that I would like to record your response, your answers will not be directly attributed to you so you can be 100% honest.
 - Let's get started.

Warm-Up 2-3 mins

- Where are you from?
 - How long have you lived here?

News 10 mins

- What are your top 1-2 places you go to for news? - platforms/news stations/papers
 - How often do you read/watch the news?
 - Why do place X and Y in your top 2?
- What news sources do you trust?
 - What about them is trustworthy?
- What does "local news" mean to you?
- How important is local news to you?
 - Why is it important?

Alamance News 15 mins

- Have you heard about *The Alamance News* / how would you describe it to a friend?
 - Show a sample paper.
 - How do you feel about *The Alamance News'* paper?
 - What are the top 3 words that come to mind when you hear "*The Alamance News*"?
 - Why or why aren't you subscribed to *The Alamance News*?
 - Do you follow *The Alamance News* on Facebook?
 - Why or why not?
- This is *The Alamance News'* website- pull up the website- voice record responses- have them use the website
 - What do you think about it?

Personal (extra questions) 5 mins

- We are pretty close to the end of the interview, would you mind answering a few questions about yourself- again, your answers will not be directly attributed to you.
 - What are your favorite things to do around the area?
 - What are your hobbies and interests?
 - What is your occupation?

Wrap-Up 1 min

- Thank you for speaking with me I really appreciate it. Here is your target gift card.

Appendix D

Example Events: These events hosted by Destination Downtown Mebane accept applications for handmade products - become a member

- Downtown Mebane Autumn Fest: Saturday, October 5, 2019
- Hometown Holiday Celebration: Saturday, November 23, 2019

Appendix E

- Titles
 - Boney's Weekly Bulletin
 - Tom Talks
 - Weekly Tom
 - Boney's weekly notes
 - Boney's Bulletin
 - Boney's Weekly Bulletin
 - Area happenings by Boney
 - Area Happenings
 - Jottings by Boney- spin off of jottings by jean
 - Alamance with Boney
 - Alamance with Tom
- Potential Sponsors- Already Advertising in The Alamance News
 - Bill Woodrome: My Dog Tess
 - JS Pressure Cleaning & Paint
 - Select Bank and Trust
 - King Tire Service of Mebane, Inc.

- Alamance Community College
- Cardinal Self Storage
- Home Instead: Senior Care
- Boston Sandwich Shop
- Content
 - Local government
 - High school sports statistics
 - College sports statistics
 - Local events
 - Crime updates
 - Sales/discounts at local stores
 - Weekly weather
 - Day trips in Alamance County
 - Weekend trips in Alamance County
 - Community developments
- Constant Contact- design and dissemination platform
 - Through Constant Contact, the email newsletter can be designed and disseminated.
 - This platform provides consumer/product analytics
 - Using an email contact list of 2,501-5,000 emails will cost \$65 per month.

Appendix F

-Exact Data

<https://www.exactdata.com/>

5000 contacts for 15 cents per contact (total cost: \$750)

-InfoUSA

<https://www.infousa.com/>

Minimum order of \$1000 for 3,500 emails.