

Crikey! The Terrier springs forth as the paper giants fold



A screenshot from today's edition of Crikey following the announcement that News Ltd will cut hundreds of jobs from regional newsrooms.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

[The [following piece first appeared in Crikey](#) (www.crikey.com.au) on 28 May 2020. If you are not already a subscriber to Crikey, please give its 21-day free trial a go. Crikey is 20 years young and still a trailblazer in quality, online journalism.]

If the arrival of the internet left regional newspapers staggering and dazed, it will be the fallout from COVID-19 that could finally kill them – after what has already been a long, slow death by a thousand cuts.

And yet there is hope for maintaining a media voice in our country towns and I am proof of that hope.

I returned to my home town of Warrnambool, in south-west Victoria, and started what has since morphed into *The Terrier*, a wholly online, extremely nimble, one-person operation that I run from the front room of my house.

I use a website and social media to reach my readers, who have grown from a few hundred to more than 4500 followers in a city of 35,000 people, and seen *The Terrier* move from the periphery to become an influential voice in the community.

The secret to the growing success of *The Terrier* has been to keep my overheads extremely low and my connection with the readers extremely high.

In so doing, I have had to throw out a lot of my old concepts of what journalism must be and adapt to what the reader now wants it to be, which is to not only tell them what is happening, but why and what – if necessary – we can do about it.

This doesn't mean throwing out all of the essential skills of journalism – fact gathering, research, interviews, composing well-written pieces without spelling mistakes. What it does mean is no longer being afraid to advocate, or take a side, or express a point of view.

I found this uncomfortable at first, but I have since come to learn that my readers don't want me to simply repeat what their friends have already "reported" to them on social media about a car accident in the main street; they want me to dig deeper into the power structures of their home town and to be their eyes and ears. To be, in other words, their terrier.

At the same time, I invite the reader in to be part of the chase.

They report to me on what they have found, read, heard and investigated themselves, so that I have not one terrier on the case, but many, with me the ultimate fact checker. We are doing a great job.

In fact two of the biggest stories to come out of Warrnambool in the past 12 months were both products of *The Terrier*, with one now the subject of an ombudsman's investigation.

But how do you make any money, I hear you ask? I rely on contributions from readers through my tip jar which has also been gathering strength, but I know such a model needs more than tips to be viable in the longer term.

To me, a combination of dramatically reducing overheads, reader support, government support, tax deductibility and philanthropy holds the key to financial viability.

Resource sharing and collaborations are another critical step that we are yet to take, with old journalistic rivalries given priority over the needs of the readers we purport to serve.

What I have found most interesting through the whole journey of *The Terrier*, is that the reader doesn't want more bells and whistles from me in what is already a noisy world.

I don't use video, I am pondering a podcast, and I don't even have a regular publishing schedule beyond a loose "two or three times a week".

The key is that I keep it simple and it works.

This is where regional journalism can go and indeed must go if it's to survive, and I am loving being a part of it.

Carol Altmann is a journalist and the publisher of The Terrier.