

# As Local News Dies, a Pay-for-Play Network Rises in Its Place | The New York Times

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Maine Business Daily is part of a fast-growing network of nearly 1,300 websites that aim to fill a void left by vanishing local newspapers across the country. Yet the network, now in all 50 states, is built not on traditional journalism but on propaganda ordered up by dozens of conservative think tanks, political operatives, corporate executives and public-relations professionals, a Times investigation found.

The sites appear as ordinary local-news outlets, with names like Des Moines Sun, Ann Arbor Times and Empire State Today. They employ simple layouts and articles about local politics, community happenings and sometimes national issues, much like any local newspaper.

But behind the scenes, many of the stories are directed by political groups and corporate P.R. firms to promote a Republican candidate or a company, or to smear their rivals.

The Times uncovered details about the operation through interviews with more than 30 current and former employees and clients, as well as thousands of internal emails between reporters and editors spanning several years. Employees of the network shared emails and the editing history in the site's publishing software that revealed who requested dozens of articles and how.

[...]

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