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5 Answers with Karri Peifer, Richmond Dish

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) October 1, 2018

Karri Peifer can recommend restaurants like a fortune-teller reading a palm – all she needs is a single one-on-one interaction to make the best recommendation. “And I do. And literally no one has ever acted on it,” she says. Karri is a Deputy Editor at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and in charge of Richmond Dish. We caught up with her to talk about the newsletter and food journalism in this edition of Alliance 5 Answers.



Why did you start Richmond Dish?

Richmond Dish is actually more than a newsletter – it’s kind of an all-encompassing brand around a big digital push for dining news, which we were already doing, but we wanted to do with a more intentional effort and in a bigger way. [The newsletter](#), which we launched in May, is the biggest and most visible part of it.

The idea came out of Table Stakes, the Knight-Lenfest Newsroom Initiative that launched last year and in which the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* is participating this year. The program is designed to help legacy news organizations become more digitally savvy. We decided to begin with dining news, which already played well in the digital space, but on which we knew we could build. The idea is to keep the effort rolling to other parts of our coverage areas.

But more than anything, we started it to help focus our attention on using analytics – all analytics (page views, newsletter subscribers, click-throughs, open rates, engagement time, digital subscriptions numbers, video views, etc.) – as a barometer for reader interest and engagement, something critically important for newsrooms, especially legacy ones.

The response has been incredible – and not from just my mother, who keeps hitting the reply button on the Do Not Reply email address to share her praise. We’ve consistently grown opt-ins for the newsletter every week and I’m getting triple the tips and information queries as pre-launch, always a great indication of reader interest and engagement.

What is included in the newsletter?

It's all original content, with an intro graph, nearly always with a fresh dining news scoop, and then a quick summary of the news of the past week, plus links to our related coverage throughout the week. I do put some national news in there when I think it's of interest to enough people.

What are your goals for Richmond Dish in its first year?

The goals are to grow audience, specifically within our metro area, as those readers are the most likely to become subscribers; to grow digital subscriptions; and to grow revenue around dining news content (the newsletter and video advertisers).

What advice do you have to those wanting to launch a newsletter?

I'd say, be realistic about how much time you can dedicate to it. A newsletter is one piece of content and one delivery method – and for most news organizations, it's far from the only one. When we launched Richmond Dish, I was basically trying to write five new stories a week to feed into the newsletter in a different voice and style than reporting. It was taking me a full day – and for very little impact on click-throughs. So I reduced it down to one longer intro over five vignettes. Also, I think it's important to develop a voice for the newsletter, and to give readers a reason to read it and subscribe. And use analytics to see what's working or not – whether it's the headline, the topic the position. In digital, your audience is always talking to you. All you have to do is listen.

What is the hardest part about food journalism?

The hardest part is the lack of understanding that it's journalism. I'm not a blogger; I'm not a reviewer; I'm not some chick with an Instagram account sharing pictures of her food and trading fan tweets for a free side of Brussels sprouts. When I report something – when we, the RTD, reports something – it's factual, it's confirmed, it's real and it's relevant.



Kirsten Ballard



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